

# Tablet on understanding the cause of opposition to the Manifestations of God

(*Lawḥ-i 'irfān-i 'illat-i i'rāḍ*)

by Bahā'u'llāh

Translated by Keven Brown

Italics text in this translation represents Arabic phrases in the Persian text that are not quotations.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

This Wronged One wishes to impart to you, wholly for the sake of God, that which is the cause of eternal life and everlasting remembrance. There can be no doubt that the purpose of creation is the recognition of God, exalted be His glory. It is necessary for humankind, in order to achieve this purpose, to reflect sincerely on that which has been the cause of souls turning toward the Dawning Places of revelation and the Daysprings of inspiration during the ages and centuries and what has been the reason for turning away. If you attain to the understanding (*'irfān*) of this theme, you will have attained to all good and not be deprived of the waves of the ocean of the recognition of God. You will behold all besides God as non-existent and nothing.

When an individual reaches the stage of maturity, he should investigate things and, trusting in God and free from both love and hate, reflect on that to which the people adhere. With his own ears and eyes he should listen and see, because if he sees through the vision of another, he will never be able to witness the lights of the Luminary of divine knowledge.

Different parties exist in the world, and each considers itself to possess the truth, as indicated by the words “Each party rejoices in what it possesses.”<sup>1</sup> Consider the Seal of the Prophets (may all besides him be his sacrifice). When, through the will of God, that Light of reality dawned above the horizon of the Ḥijāz, various factions opposed him and rose up to shed his most pure blood. There then befell him what caused the eyes of the Concourse on High to weep and the hearts of the sincere and the near ones to burn with grief.

It is necessary to think about the cause and reason for this opposition. God, exalted be His glory, states: “No messenger comes to them but they have mocked and derided him.”<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that if the Exponents of divine commands and the Sources of heavenly laws appeared in a way that agreed with, and conformed to, the references, traditions and texts current among the people concerning the Manifestation, not a single soul would oppose them. Rather, all would attain to that for which they stepped from non-existence into the realm of being. Therefore, each soul should ponder and reflect with equity and fairness on the Cause of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'ān 30:32.

<sup>2</sup> Qur'ān 36:30.

The Shī'ah divines believe that when the promised Qā'im appears in the House of God [Mekka], he will utter a word that will cause even his chosen disciples to turn away from him and flee. This is a statement that the Shī'īs admit to and acknowledge. Now, reflect on the heedlessness of certain ones. They assert and attest to the opposition of the chosen disciples, who, according to their own doctrines, are the noblest people after the Imāms, yet it does not occur to them that their own opposition might be equally unworthy and incorrect.<sup>3</sup>

In short, hear the call of this Wronged One and listen to his words with the ear of fairness. *The truth will be made manifest to you and His straight path.* Would that they might consider for a moment that perhaps that which has become manifest [in this day] is the truth, and that this opposition and these denunciations may have arisen from ignorance and heedlessness!

We beseech God to aid you to see with the eye of justice and ponder with fairness. *He speaks the truth and leads the way. He is the Mighty, the Beneficent.*

Jesus, the son of Mary (upon him be the peace of God and his loving-kindness), appeared with clear signs and indisputable evidences, and his purpose was the salvation of humankind. Every just person will bear witness and every informed one will testify that that holy Being did not seek or desire anything for himself. His sole intention was to guide those who had gone astray to the straight path of God. Yet there befell that most sacred Beauty what caused the dwellers of paradise to wail. His plight became so grievous that God, exalted be His glory, by His transcendent will, caused him to ascend to the fourth heaven.

What could have caused such a thing to happen? By the life of God! The opposition came from the divines, for Annas and Caiaphas, who were Pharisees—that is, doctors of the Torah—together with the priests of the idolaters, rejected him and heaped abuse and curses on him. In like manner, consider the fate of Moses and the other prophets.

Perhaps that which has been recounted in this tablet will help you to attain the understanding (*irfān*) that was mentioned, and you will arise with the utmost endeavor to serve the Cause of God, in such a manner that the ascendancy of the oppressors will not disturb you, nor will the opposition of the learned change you from your path.

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<sup>3</sup> A Shī'ah and Shaykhī version of the tradition Bahā'u'llāh is referring to here can be found in Ibn Babuyah's *Kitāb al-Ghayba* and Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī's *Kitāb ar-Raj'ā* (p.106). This says that the Qā'im will ascend the pulpit of the Kufa mosque (in Bahā'u'llāh's account, this occurs in the House of God) and bring out a book. When he reads from it, all of his 313 disciples (*ashāb*) will flee except for one *wazīr* (helper) and 12 *nuqabā'* (chosen disciples). Those who flee will find no refuge and eventually return to him. The English phrase "his chosen disciples", used in the translation of the tablet, translates the Arabic word *nuqabā'*. This translation is based on the account given in the tradition, which makes it clear that those who flee the Qā'im will be from among his own disciples. In contrast to this, a dictionary definition of *nuqabā'* gives the more general meaning of 'leaders', 'chiefs' or 'nobles'. If *nuqabā'* was translated this way, it would suggest that the people who flee the Qā'im are religious leaders and rulers -- that is, those who would be expected to oppose the Qā'im. However, in Sufī, Shī'ah and Shaykhī literature, the word *nuqabā'* has a specific meaning. It refers to one of several ranks, such as *nujabā'*, *abwāb* and *abdāl*, in a spiritual hierarchy. The beings who occupy this very high spiritual rank, due to their gnosis or divine knowledge, are deputies of the Hidden Imām and 'chiefs' and 'leaders' in that sense. These *nuqabā'* are not known to other human beings and do not hold ecclesiastical or political power. Only upon the Qā'im's return will he, according to some ḥadīth accounts, give the *nuqabā'* power as actual leaders and rulers over men. Bahā'u'llāh's point in this paragraph is that, if it is possible even for the *nuqabā'* to wrongly reject the Qā'im -- and they are only one step below the Qā'im in spiritual rank -- then perhaps the reader could entertain the possibility that he himself is also wrong, just like the mullās of his age, and admit that the Qā'im has appeared, though in a way that differs from popular expectations, and it is wrong to oppose him. - Alison Marshall, based on information kindly provided by Dr Armin Eschraghi.

Hear the call of this Wronged One, and turn from the left hand of idle fancy to the right hand of certainty, and from the sunset of doubt and misgiving to the sunrise of assurance.

You have, no doubt, heard of some of the afflictions this Wronged One has suffered at the hands of his enemies since the early days of his life. Through the grace of God, exalted be His glory, we have proclaimed openly to all people, including the religious leaders and kings, that which is the cause of the salvation and tranquility of all humankind, and we have permitted nothing to deter or hinder us. Now, also, in the Most Great Prison, for the sake of God, we set forth for the fair-minded a clear book.

Consider and call to mind what the All-Merciful sent down in the Qur'ān (exalted be His utterance): "Leave them to entertain themselves with their caviling."<sup>4</sup> We hope that by the grace of God you will apprehend the wisdom of these words and act accordingly. Set aside all besides God—that is, those things that are the cause of deprivation and ignorance—and hold fast to whatever is the cause of maturity and development.

This Cause is mighty and its aim is great. This is the day whereof He says: "O my son! God will bring everything to light though it is but the weight of a grain of mustard seed, hidden under a rock, or in the heavens or in the earth, for God is perceptive and informed of all."<sup>5</sup> This is the day wherein whatever is concealed in the hearts and souls will be revealed and made manifest.

Consider those who have willingly given their lives and property in the path of the love of the Self-Subsisting, the Most Exalted. *He will guide you to His straight path and His great announcement.* Consider Noah, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ (may God's blessings rest upon them)—what was the purpose of those Dawning Places of His Cause, and what transpired afterwards?

This servant is not one of the learned, and he did not attend school. Outwardly, he was born into the house of one of the ministers of the state, to whom he is related. *Authority is in the hands of God, your Lord, the Lord of the throne on high and earth below, the Lord of this world and the world to come. "None can resist His decree or repel His judgment. He does what He desires and ordains what He pleases." He is the Mighty, the Powerful.*

Hear the call of this Wronged One. Purify your heart with the water of detachment, adorn your head with the crown of justice, and array your temple with the robe of virtue, then say:

O my God! O my God! I testify to your oneness and your singleness, and I acknowledge the truth of what your prophets and your messengers have spoken, and what has been sent down in your books, your scriptures, your scrolls, and your tablets.

O Lord! I am your servant and the son of your servant. I bear witness with both my inward and outward tongue that you are God. There is no God except you, the Single, the One, the Powerful, the Knowing, the Wise.

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<sup>4</sup> Qur'ān 6:91.

<sup>5</sup> Qur'ān 31:16.

Alas! Alas! O my God! My great sins and my grievous trespasses, and my heedlessness, have hindered me from turning toward the Dayspring of your signs and the Dawning Place of your evidences, and from recognising the rays of the dawning light of your Manifestation and from beholding the traces of your pen.

Alas! Alas! O my Desire and my Adored One! I know not for which of my misfortunes I should cry and lament. Should I weep for what has escaped me during the days in which the Luminary of Divine Revelation shed its radiance above the horizon of your will, or should I weep for my remoteness from the court of your nearness when the pavilion of your grandeur was raised above the highest banners through your power and your sovereignty?

O my God! The more you showed compassion and patience toward me, the more my heedlessness and opposition increased. You remembered me when I failed to remember you, and you turned toward me with the Manifestation of yourself when I hesitated to turn toward the radiance of your face, and you called out to me when I was unable to hear your call issuing from the Dayspring of your Cause.

I swear by your glory! My negligence has encompassed me on all sides by reason of following my selfish desires. Alas! Alas! My desire has withheld me from your desire, and my will has veiled me from your will, inasmuch as I have clung to my own path while renouncing your straight path and your great glad tidings.

You see and hear, O my God, my sighing and my weeping, my abasement and my affliction.

O Lord! This embodiment of iniquity yearns for the waves of the ocean of your forgiveness and pardon; this essence of negligence longs for the wonders of your gifts and bounties.

Alas! Alas! The tumult of the people has prevented me from giving ear to your utterance, and the clamour of your creatures has hindered me from beholding the horizon of your Revelation. I swear by your glory! I want to weep for as long as your dominion and your kingdom endure! How can I not weep? I weep that my eyes were prevented from seeing the light of the Sun of your Manifestation and my ears from listening to your glorification and praise.

I swear by your glory, O Lord of the world and Sovereign of the nations! I want to hide my face under layers of earth and dust out of shame at what my hands have committed in my ignorance.

Alas! Alas! You were with me and you heard from me things unworthy of your station, but by your grace you concealed it from me and you did not reveal the wretchedness of my state, my deeds, and my words.

Alas! Alas! I do not know what you have ordained for me with your most exalted pen and what your will has decreed, O Lord of all names and Creator of the universe!

Alas! Alas! that your irrevocable command withholds me from your choice sealed wine. I beseech you by the fragrant breezes of your revelation and the lights of your throne, and by he who diffused the fragrance of your robe in the Ḥijāz, and by the light of your command through which the heavens and the earth have been illuminated, to cause me under all conditions to turn toward you, detached from all besides you, holding fast to your cord, and clinging to the hem of the robe of your bounty and generosity. I choose for myself what you have chosen for me by your loving-kindness and your great bounty, O you in whose grasp are the reins of all things. No God is there but you, the Lord of the throne above and the earth below, and the Possessor of this world and the world to come.