

BAHÁ'IS OF HIGHLAND NEWSLETTER

“Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welletth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire. The one is guided by the principle: “Fear ye God; God will teach you;” the other is but a confirmation of the truth: “Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and his Creator.” The former bringeth forth the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love; whilst the latter can yield naught but arrogance, vainglory and conceit.

The Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh, pg. 76

Dear Friends,

Happy Naw-Rúz! We are excited to bring to you the 11th issue of our newsletter! Continuing on the description of the worlds of God we started in our last newsletter about the world of Habut, this month we would like to share an excerpt on the world of Labut from *“The Tablet of All Food: The Hierarchy of the Spiritual Worlds and the Metaphoric Nature of Physical Reality”* by Jean-Marc Lepain, translated by Peter Terry, *Bahá'i Studies Review* 16 (2010): 43–60. DOI: 10.1386/bsr.16.43/1.

In the world of Labut, the attributes of God begin their unfoldment. The potentialities contained in the divine essence manifest themselves, but only within the boundaries of the divine essence. A distinction between the essence and the attributes can finally be made. Baha'u'llah describes this level of existence of the divine Manifestations as ‘the station of pure abstraction and essential unity’. At this level of existence, it is impossible to make any distinction between God and the divine Manifestations. The Manifestations exist only in total union with the essence of God. They have no individuality, no separate identity. They do not possess any other self but the divine self; this is the reason this world is called the kingdom of ‘He is He Who is and there is no other but Him’ (Huwa huwa wa la ila huwa). This world is the world of the first divine emanation (tajall), that is to say the Holy Spirit or the divine Word. The Word is the spiritual force God uses to create the world. The philosophers have named this spiritual force ‘Logos’ or ‘Nous’. Baha'u'llah, in many passages of his writings, refers to the world of the divine Word as the invisible force that animates his

manifestation and the inspiration that moves his pen. Sometimes he speaks of it as a totally divine world, external to himself, where the essence of God manifests itself as ‘the Lord of Lords’. Sometimes he describes the Word as manifesting itself through his own person and incarnating in him. This indicates two points of view, both of which



are relative and neither of which is exclusive. In his writings Baha'u'llah frequently distinguishes these two ontological viewpoints. The western reader would be mistaken in believing

that they are pure artifices of poetry. When, for example, Baba'u'llah refers to himself as 'the Tongue of Grandeur', or 'the Most Exalted Pen', he does not use simple poetic metaphors. Rather, such expressions introduce different ontological and metaphysical distinctions between him as a person and the Word for which he is the mouthpiece. Once he spoke from Labut and at another time he spoke from the Jabarut. These ontological stations change the perspective he gives on reality and these expressions become precious indications that allow the spiritual and metaphysical meaning of such passages to unfold. As already stated, there is no possibility of making any distinction between God and His Manifestation in the world of Labut. The Manifestation appears in the absolute nakedness of his own essence and in union with the divine essence. There is no trace of his individual self, and any other vestige of his personal identity has vanished.



For this very reason, this station is called 'the Universal Manifestation' (*Mazhar-i kull*). It is to this station that Baba'u'llah refers when he identifies himself with 'the burning bush or the light burning on Mount Sinai'. It is this Universal Manifestation whom the Prophet Muhammad encountered during his ascension to heaven (*mi'raj*), taking the form of the 'Tree of the boundary' or 'Divine Lote Tree' (*Sadrat al-muntaha*), the image that designates the point beyond which there is no passage for any human spirit.

Jesus was speaking of this ontological level when he said: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega'; as was Muhammad when he said 'I am the first and the last of the messengers of God'. For on this level of existence each divine messenger is the return of all those who have preceded him and is the incarnation of all those who will follow him for they form but one spirit in total union with the divine Being. The world of Labut contains in potentiality all the other levels of existence and all the creatures of these worlds. It is through the activity of the Word of God that the creation passes from a virtual existence to an existence in act. This is the reason that Baba'u'llah refers to this level of existence as a world in which the two letters K and N (which form in Arabic the word *Kun!* or *Be!*) were 'joined and knit together', for, according to the *Qur'an*, it is by this word that God created the world. Only the divine Manifestation has access to the world of Labut. The divine dove and the mystical nightingale are other personifications of the world of Labut. It is from this world that divine inspiration descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove on the day of his baptism and the angel Gabriel who appeared to Muhammad is another personification of that world. In the writings of Baba'u'llah, the prophetic inspiration is sometimes symbolized by a dove or a nightingale, sometimes by a virginal and angelic creature which is called a *Huri*. Like the dove on the day of Jesus' baptism, this celestial *Huri* appeared to Baba'u'llah in the *Siyah-Chal* at the moment in which he received the first intimation of his prophetic mission. It is important to note that the *Huri* does not represent an actual vision. Rather it should be taken as an image depicting in symbolic terms the mystical experience of the prophetic inspiration that results from total union with God.

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Bahá'is of Highland

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