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Abstract:

Five unrelated questions: Identity of the Letters of the Living; "List of Illustrations" in the *Dawn-Breakers*; Status of the Writings of Quddus; Naming of the Terraces at the Arc; and The Bab's Tablets in the *Dawn-Breakers*.

Notes:

Name retained with permission of recipient.

Classified in collection [UHJ Letters](#).

Various questions: Letters of Living, Dawn-Breakers, Quddús, Terraces

by Universal House of Justice

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The research Department has studied the questions concerning the Letters of the Living raised by Dr. Ahang Rabbani in his email message of 4 March 2000 to the Universal House of Justice. We provide the following comment.

1. Identity of the Letters of the Living

Dr. inquires whether there is "an official position regarding the identity of the Letters". He explains that he is posing his question because "there are discrepancies among various historical sources in this regard." He does not, however, specify the sources to which he refers.

The title "Letters of the Living" (*Huruf-i-Hayy*) is used specifically to refer to the first eighteen followers of the Bab, who independently searched for and found the Bab and became believers in His Revelation. As Dr. Rabbani is aware, "*Hayy*", meaning "living", is numerically equal to eighteen. In the words of Shoghi Effendi, these eighteen, "together with the Bab, constitute the First Vahid (unity) of the Dispensation of the Bayan." (God Passes By, p. 8) The list of the eighteen names is given in chapter III of the *Dawn-Breakers*. (*The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 80-81)

No doubt Dr. Rabbani is familiar with the comprehensive compilation of the Letters of the Living,

prepared by Mr. Hushang Guharriz. Entitled *Huruf-i-Hayy* (New Delhi: Mir`at Publications, 1993), the compilation comprises Tablets, historical information and relevant articles.

2. "List of Illustrations" in the *Dawn-Breakers*

Dr. Rabbani calls attention to the identification of Bahá'u'lláh as the "Twentieth Letter of the Living" in the "list of illustrations" in the *Dawn-Breakers*. He asks whether the list was prepared by Shoghi Effendi, and if so, whether it is to be considered "an official listing of the Letters of the Living" and how the designation might be understood. The following extract, from a letter dated 27 November 1978 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, addresses these issues:

The Research Department has examined the points you raised and reported its findings to the House of Justice which has authorized the following changes to next printing of the English language editions of this work by the United States and the United Kingdom Publishing Trusts:

1. Although the Table of Contents was prepared by Shoghi Effendi, there is correspondence on file at the World Centre which makes it clear that the List of Illustrations and the Index were compiled by a committee headed by Mr. Alfred Lunt. The committee was in error in listing in the illustrations (p. xvii of the prelims): "Twentieth Letter of the Living". The House of Justice authorizes the deletion of this reference and the substitution therefor of the words: "To 'Him Who will be made manifest': Bahá'u'lláh". (This brings it into conformity with the caption of the facsimile immediately preceding the introduction on page xxiii.)

In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to George Townshend on 30 November 1930 reference is found to "the 19th Letter who was Himself (the Bab)" and in the light of this the House of Justice has not authorized altering the reference in the list of illustrations to the "Nineteenth Letter of the Living: the Bab Himself". The letter to Mr. Townshend states:

"Shoghi Effendi has found in the papers of `Abdu'l-Bahá a complete set of the Bab's Tablets to the Eighteen Letters of the Living all written in His own handwriting and bearing His seal. In addition to these there are two other Tablets both written by Himself in exquisite handwriting, the one addressed to the Nineteenth Letter who was Himself, and the other to 'Him Whom God will make manifest', i.e. Bahá'u'lláh. This last one has three seals and is written on blue paper. All these will be reproduced in facsimile and will be inserted in the book.

3. Status of the Writings of Quddus

Dr. Rabbani wishes to know whether the writings of Quddus are considered "part of our scripture", and if not, whether translations of Quddus's writings, rendered by Dr. Rabbani, must be identified as "provisional" if they are included in a work he is preparing for publication. We provide for Dr. Rabbani the following two extracts concerning the station of Quddus. The first is from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the second from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice:

Regarding the station of Quddus, he should by no means be considered having had the station of a Prophet. His station was no doubt a very exalted one, and far above that of any of the Letters of the Living, including the first Letter, Mulla Husayn. Quddus reflected more than any of the disciples of the Bab the light of His teaching. (11 November 1936, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

It may be helpful to consider that in the Dispensation of the Bab, Quddus is referred to as the "Last Point", and the "Last Name of God", is identified, as pointed out in *God Passes By*, with one of the "Messengers charged with imposture" mentioned in the Qur'an, and is one of the "two witnesses" into whom "the spirit of life from God" must enter, as attested by Abdu'l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions*, yet, despite these sublime stations, he is not regarded as an independent Manifestation of God. (24 August 1975, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

It is apparent that, despite his uniquely high station, Quddus is not regarded as a Manifestation of God. His writings do not appear to constitute "part of our scripture". As to the necessity of identifying as "provisional" translations of the writings of Quddus, the guidelines for the publication of new translation into English apply specifically to the Bahá'í Holy Writings. However, if the writings of Quddus are to be published, these should be checked with the Bahá'í World Centre in accordance with existing policy related to historical documents.

4. Naming of the Terraces

Reference is made to a report contained in the published pilgrim's notes of the Hand of the Cause Ali-Akbar Furutan, to the effect that the Guardian had wished for the Terraces to be named after the Eighteen Letters of the Living. Dr. Rabbani asks whether consideration has been given to the "implementation of this wish of the Guardian", and if so, how the list of the Letters was determined.

For Dr. Rabbani's information, the Research Department has found no reference to an identification of the Terraces with the individual Letters of the Living in the Bahá'í Writings or in the letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi. The following extract from a letter dated 28 July 1994, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, sets out the perspective of the Supreme Body on this issue:

While the eighteen terraces are known to be symbolic of the number of the Letters of the Living, just as the eighteen lancet windows of the drum of the Shrine of the Bab are reminiscent of His appointees, the House of Justice has not decided that each terrace should be specifically named after each of the eighteen Letters of the Living.

5. The Bab's Tablets in the *Dawn-Breakers*

Dr. Rabbani inquires about the availability of a copy of the set of the Tablets revealed by the Bab that appear in facsimile form in the beginning of the *Dawn-Breakers*. It is his understanding that "years ago one of the friends in Iran" had read these Tablets. We regret that it is not possible, at this time, to provide Dr. Rabbani with a complete transcription of these Tablets of the Bab. However, should he, in the course of his study, need assistance in deciphering isolated words and phrases in these Tablets, he might consider referring his specific questions to the House of Justice.

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