

# References of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to the Hidden Words

Compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.

Published in Bahá'í Studies Review 9  
Association for Bahá'í Studies English-Speaking Europe, 1999

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## INTRODUCTION

“That marvellous collection of gem-like utterances, the ‘Hidden Words’ with which Bahá’u’lláh was inspired, as He paced, wrapped in His meditations, the banks of the Tigris.”<sup>[1]</sup> Such is the Guardian’s description of the *Kalimát-i-Maknúnih*<sup>[2]</sup> (Baghdad c.1858), probably Bahá’u’lláh’s best known and most widely translated work.<sup>[3]</sup> The broad popularity of the *Hidden Words* means this enlightening, if somewhat slim, compilation of passages from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi will be of interest both to scholar and general reader alike. Future publication of an annotated edition of the *Hidden Words*, incorporating the quotations in this selection together with previously translated and published references, would greatly assist us all to gain greater insight into this work which occupies a position of “unsurpassed pre-eminence among the ... ethical writings of the Author of the Bahá’í Dispensation.”<sup>[4]</sup>

It is interesting to note that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá advised daily recitation of the *Hidden Words* (2). This is perhaps why selections from the Arabic and Persian sections of the work appeared in early printed prayer books such as *Ad’iyyih Hadrat-i-Mahbúb*.<sup>[5]</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s emphasis on personal conduct (3, 4, 25, 28, and 35) is noteworthy, although not surprising given the mainly ethical concerns of the work, and his use of the New

Testament (9) and the Qur'án (19) to expound the meaning of certain passages in the *Hidden Words* is a good example of Bahá'í scriptural correlation.<sup>[6]</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's comments on the circumstances of the revelation of the *Kalimát-i-Maknúnih* and its link to the mythical "Hidden Book of Fatima" (5) suggest that the Guardian valued research into the historical and literary background of Bahá'í scripture. Perhaps future annotated editions could also include valuable information on the *Hidden Words* uncovered in more recent Bahá'í scholarship.<sup>[7]</sup> Passage 13 of the compilation illustrates the evolution of the Guardian's translation of the *Kalimát-i-Maknúnih* through his own revision and the review of some English-speaking Bahá'ís.<sup>[8]</sup> Shoghi Effendi's defence of his translation "ungodly" for *ashrár* (the evil-ones) in Persian no.3 and his insistence that this passage refers to those who disbelieve in God and who are "perverse", shows that the Guardian sometimes favoured a more literalist interpretation of Bahá'u'lláh's work (16). His comments on Arabic no.70 (14) and Persian no.19 (22), however, show that he was equally open to an allegorical interpretation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi provide a model for the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture with their multiplicity of interpretations for Persian no. 19, suggesting that there is no single correct understanding for the phrase "true and radiant morn" (*an Şubḥ-i-Şádiq-i-Rawshaní*) and that "Tree of Anísá" (*Shajara-i-Anísá*) can signify both Bahá'u'lláh Himself and the Tree of Life (17-22). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's emphasis on how the Covenant and loyalty to Him as the Centre of the Covenant is expressed in *The Hidden Words* must be viewed in light of the machinations of the covenant-breakers at the time of writing (17, 20, 26, 29 and 35). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's pronouncement that the "Preserved Tablet" (*Lawḥ-i-Maḥfúz*) refers to Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Ahdí* (26) will be of interest to students of Islámic theology.<sup>[9]</sup>

Although many of these passages derive from tablets previously unpublished and/or untranslated, it would be useful for those wishing to cross-reference with the original if the source of the quotation was listed where possible.<sup>[10]</sup>

Dominic Brookshaw

1. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Company, 1950) 140.
2. *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*: Arabic, Persian and English edition (Brazil: Editoria Bahá'í, 1995).
3. Cf. Diana Malouf, *Unveiling the Hidden Words* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997) 67-107 on English translations of the *Kalimát-i-Maknúnih*.
4. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 140.
5. Published in Egypt (76 BE, c.1919) by Faraju'lláh Dhakíy al-Kurdí.
6. Bahá'u'lláh quotes from the New Testament just as he would from the Qur'án to illustrate his theological arguments (cf. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and *Javáhiru'l-Asrár*), something extremely uncommon in *Shí'ih* texts.
7. Cf. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* 1:71-83; Franklin Lewis, "Scripture as Literature: sifting through the layers of the text", *Bahá'í Studies Review* 7 (1997): 125-46.
8. Cf. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1969) 204-5.
9. Shoghi Effendi offers another interpretation (27). Muslims believe the text of the

*References of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to the Hidden Words*

Qur'án revealed to Muhammad through Gabriel is kept with God in Heaven on a "Preserved Tablet." Cf. Qur'án 85:21-2 *bal huwwa Qur'ánun majídun fí lawhin mahfúz.*

10. For example, passage 23 appears in *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání*, part II (New Delhi, 1984) 56.

## I. GENERAL<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All passages are extracts from previously untranslated or unpublished Tablets unless the source of publication is given.

1 The Hidden Words is a treasury of divine mysteries. When thou ponderest its contents, the doors of the mysteries will open.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian)*

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2 It behoveth us one and all to recite day and night both the Persian and Arabic Hidden Words, to pray fervently and supplicate tearfully that we may be enabled to conduct ourselves in accordance with these divine counsels. These holy Words have not been revealed to be heard but to be practised.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian)*

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3 Be thou assured in thyself that if thou dost conduct thyself in accordance with the Hidden Words revealed in Persian and in Arabic, thou shalt become a torch of the fire of the love of God, an embodiment of humility, of lowliness, of evanescence and of selflessness.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian)*

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4 We should memorize the Hidden Words, follow the exhortations of the Incomparable Lord, and conduct ourselves in a manner which befiteth our servitude at the threshold of the one true God.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian)*

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5 Next to this unique repository of inestimable treasures must rank that marvellous collection of gem-like utterances, the “Hidden Words” with which Bahá’u’lláh was inspired, as He paced, wrapped in His meditations, the banks of the Tigris. Revealed in the year 1274 AH, partly in Persian, partly in Arabic, it was originally designated the “Hidden Book of Fáṭimih,” and was identified by its Author with the Book of that same name, believed by Shí’ah Islám to be in the possession of the promised Qá’im, and to consist of words of consolation addressed by the angel Gabriel, at God’s command, to Fáṭimih, and dictated to the Imám ‘Alí, for the sole purpose of comforting her in her hour of bitter anguish after the death of her illustrious Father. The significance of this dynamic spiritual leaven cast into the life of the world for the reorientation of the minds of men, the edification of their souls and the rectification of their conduct can best be judged by the description of its character given in the opening passage by its Author: “This is that

which hath descended from the Realm of Glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue.”

*(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), pp. 139-40)*

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- 6 With regard to your question concerning the meaning of the name “Hidden Words”: It is, indeed, one of the most suggestive titles of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. These words are called “hidden” due to the fact that men have had neither the knowledge nor a true sense of appreciation of them before they were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. It is through Him, Who is the sole Mouthpiece of God in this age, that spiritual realities and truths have been once more reinterpreted and revealed afresh to mankind. Bahá'u'lláh's message is thus the only key to a true understanding of the mysteries that envelop man's spiritual life.

*(From a letter dated 1 September 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)*

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- 7 ...concerning those passages in “The Hidden Words” in which Bahá'u'lláh refers to man as “Son of Spirit”, “Son of existence”, “Son of humanity”, etc., the word “son” used in this connection is a kind of collective noun meaning mankind and has, therefore, no connotation of any sex differentiation between man and woman whatever.

*(From a letter dated 19 January 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)*

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## II. ARABIC HIDDEN WORDS

- 8 Arabic No. 7

As to the reference in the Arabic “Hidden Words” that the human being must become detached from self, here too the meaning is that he should not seek out anything whatever for his own self in this swiftly-passing life, but that he should cut the self away, that is, he should yield up the self and all its concerns on the field of martyrdom, at the time of the coming of the Lord.

*(“Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá” (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), No. 181, p. 217)*

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- 9 Arabic No. 13

Thou hast asked about the statement in the Hidden Words: “O Son of Spirit! Turn thy sight unto thyself that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, Mighty, Powerful and

Self-Subsisting.” This is the same statement as was made by Christ to His apostles in the Gospel: “The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in you.”<sup>2</sup>

It is evident that, when a heart is purified and through divine education and heavenly teachings becometh a manifestor of infinite bounty, it is like a clear mirror. The Sun of Truth will be reflected in it with might, power and omnipotence, to such an extent that whatever is brought before it is ignited and consumed. This is a brief interpretation because of lack of time. Therefore, do thou reflect and meditate upon it so that the doors of inner meanings may be opened before thine eyes.

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from Persian and Arabic)*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. John 14:20

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10 Arabic No. 13

As to the passage Arabic No. 13 of the Arabic “Hidden Words”: that which Bahá’u’lláh declares we can find abiding within us is the power of the Divine Spirit, the reflection of the light of His Revelation. This reflection of the Divine Spirit, however, can in no way be compared to the Revelation which God discloses to His Prophets and Messengers. The similarity in the terminology should not confuse this distinction, which is most fundamental.

*(From a letter dated 15 November 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)*

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11 Arabic No. 57

As to your question about the meaning in the Arabic Hidden Words, “...couldst thou but see with Mine eye”: When man reacheth the station of selflessness, and his love of self is entirely wiped out, his existence becometh like unto non-existence, and a ray from God’s presence sheddeth its light upon him. Then he can see with the eye of God, and can hear with His ear. This is like iron in the fire. The qualities of the iron, its coldness, darkness and hardness are concealed, and it manifests heat, luminosity, and fluidity, which are the qualities of the fire.

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian)*

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12 Arabic No. 59

Bahá’u’lláh in the Hidden Words stated that God, through His Prophets and Chosen Ones, explained that the heart of man is His home; it should be sanctified for His entry, and that his spirit is His place of Revelation; it should be cleansed so that it may become His abode. We, therefore, understand that nearness to God is possible through setting our faces towards Him.

Nearness to God is through entrance into the Kingdom of God. Nearness to God is made possible through service to humanity. Nearness to God is possible through the unity of all peoples and religions. Nearness to God is dependent upon kindness to all mankind. Nearness to God is made possible through investigation of the Truth. Nearness to God is through the acquisition of knowledge and praiseworthy virtues. Nearness to God is possible through service to universal peace. Nearness to God is dependent upon purity and sanctity. Nearness to God is dependent upon self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, and the giving up of one's glory and position for Him.

Consider how the sun shineth upon all creation, but only surfaces which are pure and clear can reveal its full glory and light. The light of the sun is bright, but the darkened stone hath no portion of the revelation of the light.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, from a talk, earlier version published in "Star of the West", vol. 3, no. 8, 26 May 1912, pp. 20-22)*

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13 Arabic No. 63

"Túr"<sup>3</sup> and "Sinai" should not be taken literally; the first is an allusion to Mount Sinai, which in this case means the Manifestation of God; the second, "Sinai", represents the human heart.

*(From a postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi to a letter dated 3 May 1947 written on his behalf to an individual believer)*

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<sup>3</sup> This statement referred to an early translation. The word "Túr" was later translated by the Guardian as "sacred Mount".

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14 Arabic No. 70

Hidden Word No. 70: this is not addressed to any person<sup>4</sup> but is a mystical expression and an allusion to the Manifestation of God.

*(From a letter dated 3 May 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)*

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<sup>4</sup> Response to a question asking to whom the words "O SON OF HIM THAT STOOD BY HIS OWN ENTITY IN THE KINGDOM OF HIS SELF!" were addressed.

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15 Arabic No. 71

The intent is total fulfilment of, and complete adherence to, the divine ordinances and exhortations.<sup>5</sup>

*(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi on the margin of an incoming letter – translated from the Persian)*

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<sup>5</sup> Response to a question asking about the stations which are higher than martyrdom in His path, mentioned at the end of the Arabic Hidden Words.

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### III. PERSIAN HIDDEN WORDS

16 Persian No. 3

In the passage “eschew all fellowship with the ungodly”, Bahá'u'lláh means that we should shun the company of those who disbelieve in God and are wayward. The word “ungodly” is a reference to such perverse people.

*(From a letter dated 27 March 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)*

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17 Persian No. 19

The “true and radiant morn” is the dawn of the Covenant, and the first light of the Testament of the Day-Star of the world. The “Tree of Anísá”<sup>6</sup> is the blessed tree which hath flourished in the Most Great Paradise and casteth its shadow upon all regions.

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian)*

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<sup>6</sup> In Shoghi Effendi’s translation of the Hidden Words, the term “Tree of Anísá” is rendered by him as the “tree of life”.

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18 Persian No. 19

By the term “that true and radiant morn” mentioned in the Hidden Words is meant the Dawn of divine Revelation when the Exalted One<sup>7</sup> manifested Himself in the plenitude of His glory, while the Blessed Tree referreth to the Ancient Beauty. By those “surroundings” is meant the realm of the heart and of the spirit, and the gathering of the people implieth a spiritual communion, not a physical one. However when the Call of God was raised in the realm of the heart and spirit, mankind remained heedless and inattentive, and therefore was dumbfounded.

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian)*

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<sup>7</sup> The Báb.

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19 Persian No. 19

By the “Tree of Anísá” is meant the Tabernacle of the Lord of Grace, the divine Lote-Tree, the Tree of Life, “the Olive that belongeth neither to the East nor to the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out even though fire touched it not”.<sup>8</sup>

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá – translated from the Persian)*



<sup>8</sup> Qur'án 24:35

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20 Persian No. 19

This is the Covenant and Testament which the Blessed Beauty established through the Supreme Pen in the Holy Land under the shade of the Tree of Anísá and which was promulgated after the Ascension.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá – translated from the Persian)*

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21 Persian No. 19

This has many spiritual meanings. Among them is that it designates the Tree of life, and at times it refers to the Temple of the Manifestation.<sup>9</sup>

*(From a letter dated 9 June 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi – translated from the Persian)*

<sup>9</sup> Response to an inquiry about the meaning of the Tree of Anísá.

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22 Persian No. 19

The passage<sup>10</sup> in “The Hidden Words” no. 19 has a spiritual meaning and is allegorical, as are also the other passages in that book. It refers to the spiritual presence of Bahá'u'lláh.

*(From a letter dated 14 January 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)*

<sup>10</sup> Response to an inquiry about the meaning of this passage of the Hidden Words, especially the last part in which reference is made to a "place" and "those surroundings".

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23 Persian Nos. 20, 37, 48

These are the Tablets of the Kingdom written by the Supreme Pen in the Preserved Tablet. Such Tablets have not descended from the Realm of the Kingdom to the earthly world; nay they are preserved and protected in an invisible treasury. If at any time a soul show such Tablets attributing them to God saying that it is the “Ruby Tablet” or the “Fifth Tablet of Paradise”, it is without truth.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá – translated from the Persian)*

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24 Persian No. 37

Thou hast asked about the pearls treasured in the Hidden Words where, addressing the abject and the foolish, Bahá'u'lláh hath admonished: "Abandon not for that which perisheth an everlasting dominion".

This is when man depriveth himself of the manifold favours of God, is debarred from the goodly gifts of the All-Merciful, is bereft of His infinite bounty and gracious rewards by following the prompting of his selfish desires, by seeking earthly pleasures and by indulging in corrupt imaginations. Hence "that which perisheth" is an allusion to every kind of corrupt inclination and evil deed. God indeed is the source of clear tokens!

*(Abdu'l-Bahá - translated from the Arabic)*

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25 Persian No. 38

Regarding the statement in "The Hidden Words", that man must renounce his own self, the meaning is that he must renounce his inordinate desires, his selfish purposes and the promptings of his human self, and seek out the holy breathings of the spirit, and follow the yearnings of his higher self, and immerse himself in the sea of sacrifice, with his heart fixed upon the beauty of the All-Glorious.

*("Selections from the Writings of Abdul-Bahá" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 181, p. 216)*

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26 Persian No. 63

Thou hast asked about the "Tablet of Chrysolite" and the "Preserved Tablet". By the "Chrysolite Tablet" is meant the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant which is the Preserved Tablet. It was hidden and preserved, now it is made manifest and resplendent. The Chrysolite Tablet is recorded and enshrined in the inmost recesses of the Book of the Covenant.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet - translated from the Persian)*

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27 Persian No. 64

The "Preserved Tablet" is a spiritual expression and has no actual existence. It sometimes refers to the Manifestation Himself, Whose knowledge encompasses the knowledge of the former and the latter generations.

*(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi on the margin of an incoming letter dated 8 July 1929, instructing his secretary - translated from the Persian)*

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28 Persian No. 69

“For ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity.”

This holy verse is replete with meaning, and as time is pressing only a brief mention is made as follows: naught else but upright conduct and pure deeds shall be accepted at His divine Threshold.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá from a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian)*

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29 Persian No. 71

The “Covenant” mentioned in the Hidden Words is the Covenant and Testament which was entered into by the pen of the Most High in the hallowed precincts of the Paran of the love of God, the summit of timeless time.<sup>11</sup> The “dwellers in the city of eternity” and the “concourse on high” are souls who are firm in the Covenant.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian)*

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<sup>11</sup> Zamán.

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30 Persian No. 71

The meaning of the references to “Párán” and “Zamán” in the passage no. 71 of the Persian “Hidden Words” has been explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá...

*(From a letter dated 15 November 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)*

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31 Persian No. 77

When considering the identity of the Name which at that time was not fully divulged, thou wilt readily see what unspeakable cruelties the company of the faithless perpetrated and what misdeeds they committed. No injury did they spare and no harm did they fail to inflict. With the sword of unyielding cruelty they cut this Wronged Body to pieces. This is clear and evident to everyone.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian)*

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32 Persian No. 77

This great name is the Greatest Name. The Blessed Beauty is intended. What we have today are the meanings of two of the letters of the Greatest Name. They are: B and H.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian)*

33 Persian No. 77

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind...

A reference to some of the already quoted utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will surely suffice to establish, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the truth of this cardinal principle. Might not the following passage of "The Hidden Words" be, likewise, construed as an allegorical allusion to the progressiveness of Divine Revelation and an admission by its Author that the Message with which He has been entrusted is not the final and ultimate expression of the will and guidance of the Almighty? "O Son of Justice! In the night-season the beauty of the immortal Being hath repaired from the emerald height of fidelity unto the Sadratu'l-Muntahá, and wept with such a weeping that the concourse on high and the dwellers of the realms above wailed at His lamenting. Whereupon there was asked, Why the wailing and weeping? He made reply: As bidden I waited expectant upon the hill of faithfulness, yet inhaled not from them that dwell on earth the fragrance of fidelity. Then summoned to return I beheld, and lo! certain doves of holiness were sore tried within the claws of the dogs of earth. Thereupon the Maid of heaven hastened forth unveiled and resplendent from Her mystic mansion, and asked of their names, and all were told but one. And when urged, the first letter thereof was uttered, whereupon the dwellers of the celestial chambers rushed forth out of their habitation of glory. And whilst the second letter was pronounced they fell down, one and all, upon the dust. At that moment a voice was heard from the inmost shrine: 'Thus far and no farther.' Verily We bear witness to that which they have done and now are doing."

*(Shoghi Effendi, "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 115-116)*

34 Persian No. 77

Concerning your second question, these two letters – the first and the second – refer to the blessed Name of the Ancient Beauty, namely B and H. What is intended by Bahá'u'lláh is this: that which is latent and enshrined within the inmost reality of these three letters has not been revealed, inasmuch as the world of being still does not possess the capacity and receptiveness to reflect fully the glorious radiance of this divine Revelation. Thus whatever is hidden in the inmost essence of the third letter of His blessed Name will gradually be unfolded before the eyes of all men.

In another sense these letters bear reference to the incalculable sufferings borne by the Blessed Beauty, while the people of the world are acquainted with but a fragment thereof.

*(From a letter dated 27 August 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer – translated)*

*from the Persian)*

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35 Persian No. 79

Concerning “wings” and “the comb” mentioned in the Hidden Words this means the Covenant of God. This Covenant was taken so that the believers would remain loyal to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and not lacerate Bahá'u'lláh's blessed throat, meaning His blessed Cause. However, they completely shut their eyes to fairness, committed misdeeds and indulged in grievous injustice.

*(Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet - translated from the Persian)*

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36 Persian No. 79

The expression “tend My raven locks, and not wound My throat” is an allegorical warning by Bahá'u'lláh against the misuse of anything bestowed by Him on the world.

*(From a letter dated 6 September 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)*

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