



KALEMĀT-E MAKNUNA

KALEMĀT-E MAKNUNA (The Hidden Words), a collection of aphorisms (71 in Arabic and 82 in Persian) by Bahā'-Allāh on spiritual and moral themes, dating from 1274/1857-58 and considered one of his most important writings.

There is also a work with the same title by Mollā Moḥsen Fayz, concerning Shi'ite esotericism, mysticism, and mystical philosophy and quoting a wide variety of Islamic authors. Other than the fact that it is written in both Arabic and Persian, it bears little resemblance to Bahā'-Allāh's work (Lawson, 1999).

History. This work is reported to have been dictated by Bahā'-Allāh over a period of time as he walked along the banks of the Tigris River during his exile in Baghdad. The original manuscript exists, and a facsimile is on display in the Mansion of Bahji, near 'Akkā in Israel. This manuscript shows that the individual sections were written down randomly on a large piece of paper. They were organized in the present order by Mollā Zayn-al'Ābedin Najafābādi, known to Bahais as Zayn-alMoqarrabin, one of Bahā'-Allāh's secretaries, under Bahā'-Allāh's instructions (Ma'ani, I, pp. 1-2; Shoghi Effendi, p. 140). The title of the work was given to it by Bahā'-Allāh, who also identified it as the *Moṣḥaf-e Fāṭema* (The book of Fāṭema; Bahā'-Allāh, 2001, p. 12; tr., p. 15), a book said in Shi'ite traditions to have been dictated to the daughter of the prophet Moḥammad by the Angel Gabriel to console her after her father passing (Majlesi, pp. 79-80, 195; Ṭabari, pp. 105-6); it is also said to be in the possession of the Hidden Imam (for a more metaphorical explanation by Shoghi Effendi, see Universal House of Justice, 1999-2000, p. 256).



The work was very highly thought of by the Babis when it was first distributed and contributed to the success of Bahā'-Allāh in gaining the allegiance of most Babis when he put forward his claims a few years later. For instance, when Mirzā Ḥosayn returned to Yazd from Baghdad, bringing with him the first copy of the Hidden Words, Hāji Āqā Moḥammad records that “we all became believers in the Cause of Bahā'-Allāh” (Fāzel Mazandarani, pp. 751-52, 813).

Contents. The work consists of a short exordium in Arabic followed by seventy-one Arabic and then eighty-two Persian aphorisms (*kalemāt-e maknuna*), with a short concluding section in Persian. There is a difference of order between some editions of the Persian part and the standard English translation. For instance, number 82 in many Persian editions is number 35 in the English translation. Some Persian editions also split number 19 and thus have the total of 83. The order and numbering of the standard English translation by Shoghi Effendi appears to be the correct one, however, since it accords with the published facsimile manuscript (see below) by Zayn-al-Moqarrabin (for him, see above), and it is this one that is used in this article. The length of the individual aphorisms varies from twelve words (Ar. no. 59) to 152 (Pers. no. 77), with those in Persian being generally longer than the Arabic ones.

Each aphorism begins with an invocation that is generally of the form “O Son of...” with the next word usually being an attribute of humanity, whether positive or negative (e.g., “O Son of love” *Ay pesar-e ḥobb*, “O Son of worldliness” *Ay pesar-e 'ayš*). The exordium of the book proclaims its contents to be “the inner essence” of that which was “revealed unto the prophets of old” and which has now been set down “clothed . . . in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous.” George Townshend, one of the leading British Bahais, differentiated the two parts of the work by saying that the Arabic section is “simple, direct, definite, ethical,” and the Persian section “more personal, appealing, mystical, poetical”; and that “the approach, the tone of the Author, is different in the two parts: the writer in Arabic is a loving teacher, the writer in Persian a teaching lover” (Townshend, p. ii).

The content includes such subjects as the nature and station of human beings; the characteristics of the spiritual and physical worlds; the station and function of the manifestation of God (the prophet-founders of the world religions); the eternal covenant between God and humanity; human faithlessness to this covenant and its consequences; and how human beings can advance spiritually by detaching the self from worldly things and vain



imaginings, by acquiring positive spiritual attributes and refraining from negative attributes and actions. The text of each aphorism, especially the Arabic ones, is usually phrased as God’s words addressed to humanity. There are also a few that are more esoteric (e.g., Pers. nos. 19 and 77). Both ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ and Shoghi Effendi have written in explanation of these (see Universal House of Justice, 1999-2000, *passim*). Shoghi Effendi considered that the order of the aphorisms was of no significance and that the word “son” in the invocations was a way of addressing all humanity and had no connotation of sex differentiation (Hornby, p. 489). They have been compared to some of the divine Hadith (*ḥadiṭ-e qodsi*, considered to relate the words of God) compiled by Sufi authors in terms of their mystical themes (Lewis, pp. 138-40). They can also be compared to the *Book of Proverbs* in the Bible in terms of their ethical precepts.

‘Abd-al-Bahā’ attached great importance to the Hidden Words. In what he wrote to some Bahais, he urged them not only to read it daily but to memorize it and especially to strive to live their daily lives in accordance with it (Universal House of Justice, 1991, I, pp. 196-97; *idem*, 1999-2000, p. 255). Shoghi Effendi called it a “marvellous collection of gem-like utterances” and considered it of “unsurpassed pre-eminence among the . . . ethical writings of Bahā’-Allāh” (p. 140). It was among the first works that he decided to translate once he had assumed leadership of the Bahai community. It has also been the subject of scholarly studies (see Savi, Banani, Lawson, 2005).

Publication and translation. *Kalemāt-e maknuna* was widely distributed in manuscript form among the Persian Bahais during the nineteenth century. Because of its short length, it was often bound together with other works of Bahā’-Allāh in compilation manuscripts. A facsimile of such a manuscript written by Zayn-al-Moqarrabin in Moḥarram 1311 (July 1893) was published in India (Pers. text only, pp. 1-36, n.d.). A facsimile of an attractively illuminated manuscript by Mirzā Ḥosayn Meškin-Qalam, dated 1326/1908, was published in Germany (Hofheim-Langenhain, 1983) with the English translation. Possibly the first printing of the Persian Hidden Words was in the compilation *Ad’iya-ye Ḥazrat-e Maḥbub*, first published in Egypt, 1919. Both Persian and Arabic texts were published in a compilation of Bahā’-Allāh’s works (Cairo, 1920, pp. 17-32, 373-98) and with Jeanne Stannard’s translation (see below) in 1921.

A few of the Hidden Words were translated by Edward G. Browne as part of his translation of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’s work (II, pp. 125-26), but the first English



translation of a substantial part of the Hidden Words was by Ibrahim George Kheirallah, who translated all of the Arabic ones (pp. 521-32), which was also published as a separate pamphlet (n.p., n.d.). A translation of the Persian Hidden Words was published not long afterwards (New York, n.d.), but the translator is not indicated. A selection from these two translations was brought together in a study by Nathan Ward Fitz-Gerald (pp. 260-80). A translation of the Arabic Hidden Words made by Ḥosayn Ruḥi is appended to Myron Phelps's book on the teachings of 'Abbās Effendi (pp. 237-49). Both Arabic and Persian texts were retranslated by Aminollah Farid and published in a volume in 1905. Jeanne Stannard, working with the Bahais of Egypt and Palestine, published a translation of both Persian and Arabic Hidden Words as well as the original texts and some of 'Abd-al-Bahā's explanations (Cairo, 1921).

Shoghi Effendi's translation of the Hidden Words was first published in 1923 (London ; New York, 1924) but it was when he had an opportunity for refining the translation with the assistance of some English Bahais, such as George Townshend, Ethel Rosenberg, and John Esslemont that he produced his final definitive translation (London, 1929). Shoghi Effendi's norms in translating the Arabic Hidden Words are examined by Diana Malouf. The first French translation was of the Persian Hidden Words by Hippolyte Dreyfus and Mirza Habib Ullah Chirazi (Ḥabib-Allāh Širāzi) in 1905. The Hidden Words is one of the most frequently published and translated Bahai books; translations exist in many European, Indian, and Far Eastern languages.

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