



MAZHAR-E ELĀHI

MAZHAR-E ELĀHI (Manifestation of God), a key [Bahai](#) term designating the prophets/founders of the world's religions as the manifestations of the names and attributes of God. The Bahai scriptures assert that the teachings of each of these figures have taken humanity a stage forward in its social evolution.

The term *mazhar* and its cognate *zohur* (appearance) have a history in Islamic thought. They were used by the [Ekwān-al-Şafā](#) for the process by which God emanated divine attributes upon the Universal Intellect and through that upon the world; by [Isma'ili](#) philosophers, such as [Naşir-al-Din Ṭusi](#) (d. 672/1274), who wrote of the connection of the Creator to the world through a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*; Ṭusi, p. 374); by Şehāb-al-Din Sohrawardi (d. 587/1191), the founder of the philosophy school of [illuminationism](#) (*ḥekmat-e eşrāq*), who tends, however, to use the associated word *tajalli* (manifestation) to express the same concept and applies it to all human beings and to the Paraclete/Comforter (e.g., see pp. 87-88); and by the [Shi'ite](#) philosopher [Mollā Şadrā](#) (d. 1050/1640), who wrote of God manifesting himself through His names and attributes (e.g., see tr., pp. 238-39). But there was also a stream of thought in Islam, exemplified by the school of the distinguished Sufi Ebn al-'Arabi (d. 638/1240), that considered the manifestation of God to mean the manifestation of the essence rather than the attributes of God (Ebn al-'Arabi, pp. 32-34; tr., pp. 64-65; on Islamic uses of the term *mazhar*, see Cole, pp. 15-17).

In none of these Islamic writings does the concept of *mazhar-e elāhi* have the importance and centrality that it does in the Bahai scriptures. According to



Bahai metaphysics, between the world of God (*‘ālam-e ḥaqq*) and the world of creation and humanity (*‘ālam-e kalq*), there is an intermediate world, the world of the [Divine] command (*‘ālam-e amr*). Bahā’-Allāh states that the world of God is entirely unknowable for human beings, but God has designated a small number of individuals, the prophet/founders of the world’s religions, to be the intermediaries between the world of God and humanity (Bahā’-Allāh, 1934, pp. 74-75; tr., pp. 99-100). These intermediaries have a twofold nature, namely, their physical body and human nature, which belong to the *‘ālam-e kalq*, and their spiritual reality, which belongs to *‘ālam-e amr*. They represent God on earth and reflect all that humans can know of God, by perfectly manifesting all of the names and attributes of God (Bahā’-Allāh, 1934, pp. 77-78; tr., pp. 103-4; idem, 1984, no. 30, p. 55; tr., p.74; ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, pp. 110-12, 114-16; tr., pp. 146-48, 151-53; Dāwudi, pp. 129-37), hence each is designated a Manifestation of God (*mazhar-e elāhi*) and this is the term that Bahā’-Allāh uses in relation to himself rather than such terms as messenger (*rasul*) or prophet (*nabi*). Thus in the Bahai faith, this term indicates a manifestation of the Divine attributes and not an incarnation of God.

Since the Manifestation of God is the only access to God available to human beings, Bahā’-Allāh states that the knowledge of God can only be attained through these Manifestations, and, indeed, recognizing these Manifestations and obeying them is recognizing and obeying God (Bahā’-Allāh, p. 74; tr., p. 99; idem, no. 21, p. 40; tr., p. 50; ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, p. 168; tr., p. 222). Because of this, it is possible, Bahā’-Allāh states, to identify the Manifestation of God with God (as Christians do with Christ). On the other hand, bearing in mind the lower, human nature of the Manifestation, it is possible to assert (as Muslims do) that Moḥammad was just a man who was a messenger of God (Bahā’-Allāh, 1934, pp. 138-39; tr., pp. 178-79).

An important and distinctive aspect of this Bahai doctrine is the assertion that, since God is unknowable and utterly transcendent and the Manifestations of God are the representatives and agents of God in this world, everything that is stated in the scriptures of all religions describing God and His actions in the world applies in reality to the Manifestations of God (‘Abd-al-Bahā’, pp. 112-13; tr., p. 149). This applies in particular to prophecies in various scriptures of the **eschatological** meeting with God at the Time of the End, or the Day of Judgement, which, in the exegesis of the Bāb and Bahā’-Allāh, becomes the appearance of a new Manifestation of God (i.e., themselves) at the end of a religious dispensation, which is the time when the followers of the previous



religions are judged according to whether they recognize the new Manifestation of God or not, hence the Day of Judgement. Their coming alive spiritually through this recognition is the Resurrection (The Bāb, 2:7, pp. 30-33; Bahā'-Allāh, 1934, pp. 107-11; tr., pp. 138-43; Dāwudi, pp. 141-48).

One consequence of this doctrine of the Manifestation of God is that the essential nature and station of all of the Manifestations of God is one, and indeed they can be considered, at the spiritual level, as one reality that has appeared in the world at different times (Bahā'-Allāh, 1934, p. 118; tr., p. 152; idem, 1984, no. 34, p. 58; tr., p. 78). Therefore there is also a transcendent unity of the religions brought by these Manifestations of God (Bahā'-Allāh, 1984, no. 132, pp. 287-88; tr., p. 184; see also Schaefer, 1995, pp. 144-57). Another consequence is that each of the Manifestations of God can be considered as the “return” of a previous one, and this is the basis for the claim of Bahā'-Allāh to be the return of Christ (Bahā'-Allāh, 1934, p. 120, tr., p. 154). Similarly, since they are one in reality, Bahā'-Allāh states that any of the Manifestations can claim to be the first or the “Seal of the prophets” (*kātam al-nabiyyin*; Qor'ān 33:40) and that this is the real meaning of this latter Qor'ānic expression (Bahā'-Allāh, 1934, pp. 111-12, 139; tr., pp. 161-62, 179). On the other hand, Bahā'-Allāh asserts that each of the Manifestations of God comes at a particular time and has a specific mission, which is determined by the condition of humanity at that time. Hence they and the religions that they bring appear to human beings to be different. The successive Manifestations of God have been the agents of the progressive unfoldment of the Divine will and the main catalysts for humanity's social evolution, each one building on the teachings of the previous one (Bahā'-Allāh, 1934, pp. 137-38; tr., pp. 177-78; idem, 1984, no. 132, p. 184; tr., p. 288). In addition to those mentioned in the Bible and Qor'ān, such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Moḥammad, the authoritative Bahai texts also recognize Zoroaster, Krishna, and the Buddha as Manifestations of God and assert that numerous others have come to humanity whose names may have been lost, such as, for example, among Native Americans (Bahā'-Allāh, 1984, no. 87, pp. 115-16; tr., p. 84; Fāẓel Māzandarāni, pp. 46-47).

In a more general sense, Bahai theology regards everything in creation as manifesting some of the attributes of God to a certain degree. Human beings alone among created things, however, have the capacity to manifest all of the attributes of God (Bahā'-Allāh, 1984, no. 27, p. 50; tr., p. 65; Dāwudi, pp. 99-119), but the prophets/founders of the world's religions are the Manifestations of



God par excellence, because they perfectly manifest all of the attributes of God. Belonging as they do to a realm and an order entirely distinct and above humanity, it is not possible for any human being to attain this station of being a Manifestation of God (‘Abd al-Bahā’, pp. 116-18; tr., pp. 154-56; Dāwudi, pp. 126-29).

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