



TAQIYA II. AMONG BABIS AND BAHAIS

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Dissimulation of the faith was widespread among Babis and Bahais until the early years of the ministry of Shoghi Effendi (1921-57), when he, in a number of messages starting in 1927, prohibited its practice.

On different occasions the Bāb had advocated the time-honored practice among his followers (Nabil, pp. 44, 65, 373; Amanat, pp. 200-201). Due to the persecution of his adherents, Bahā'-Allāh also advocated dissimulation of the faith in a number of his scriptural writings. In a tablet produced after the execution of Badī', his messenger to Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, Bahā'-Allāh ordained *taqiya* (*amr-e taqiya nāzel*) and advised his followers to restrain from confessing their faith (*amr be 'adam-e eqrār ṣāder*), in order to protect and preserve them. Besides *taqiya*, the terms *setr* (concealment), *hejāb* (veil) and *hekmat* (wisdom) are also used in this context as synonyms for dissimulation (Fāzel Māzandarāni, III, pp. 118-19). The order to practice *taqiya* is also confirmed in a similar tablet in reply to questions raised by the Bahais of Māzandarān. As in the aforementioned tablet, Bahā'-Allāh reiterates a Tradition of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādeq, who reportedly had said: "taqiya is my religion and the religion of my forefathers," and urged his followers to conceal



their faith: *ḥokm-e setr nāzel* (*Payām-e Bahā'ī* 307, June 2005, pp. 43-44).

Taqiya was practiced by Bahais during this period as a matter of course. Many traveled in disguise, prayed as Muslims, and were often not aware of the identities of their co-religionists. This practice continued unabatedly during the ministry of 'Abd-al-Bahā' (1892-1921). Bahā'-Allāh and 'Abd-al-Bahā', as well as their intimate companions, were generally regarded to be Muslims, even among resident Europeans. To the German Templers, who had come at the same time as Bahā'-Allāh to Palestine expecting the near advent of Christ and who lived as close neighbors of the Bahais in Haifa, both 'Abd-al-Bahā' and his father had "remained Muhammedans" (Lange, p. 12). In only very rare cases were they perceived to be propounders of a new religion. They kept to Muslim traditions and rites, prayed in the mosque, and fasted during Ramadan (Fāzel Māzandarāni, III, p. 118). 'Abd-al-Bahā' himself urged his followers on different occasions to practice *ḥekmat* and abide by taqiya: *'alaykom be't-taqiyya* ('Abd-al-Bahā', pp. 325-27).

The first notion of a prohibition in regard to dissimulation seems to be contained in a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais in Iran, dated 9 November 1927. In it Shoghi Effendi mentions a telegram sent by him recently to the same assembly urging all Bahais wishing to apply for identity certificates and passports not to practice dissimulation (*ketmān*) any longer, but start to admit their faith openly and courageously, without fear and anxiety. In another letter dated 23 April 1934, Shoghi Effendi expounds that, whereas *ḥekmat* and taqiya had guaranteed security for the persecuted Bahais of the East and had been the only means for the preservation and protection of their religion, dissimulation (*taqiya* and *ketmān*) should now be regarded as a cause of disdain and debilitation and ought to be practiced no more (Eshrāq Kāvāri, pp. 456 ff.). Today dissimulation is regarded as contradictory to the teachings of the Bahai Faith, and its practice is strictly prohibited to Bahais.



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