

## *Introduction*

The Word of God in every major religion has been delivered to humankind through His great Prophets. Bahá'u'lláh, whose name means the “Glory of God,” and whose followers believe him to be the most recent in the succession of these great Prophets of God, has brought a new revelation for today. His followers, known as Bahá'ís, regard his recorded writings and utterances as holy scripture.

During the forty years of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry (1852–1892)—despite exile from his native land of Iran, bitter religious persecution, and unspeakable physical hardships and suffering—he delivered an immense and glorious revelation that is unique for its breadth as well as its authenticity. For the first time in history, the words of the Prophet have been recorded as he dictated them, sometimes even in his own hand. Many times the circumstances in which they were revealed were also recorded by his amanu-

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ensis or by other companions and followers who were in his presence.

Among the vast body of scriptures that Bahá'u'lláh has bequeathed to humanity is *The Hidden Words*, a collection of 153 gem-like aphorisms he revealed in 1858 while meditating and walking the banks of the Tigris River in Baghdad, Iraq. Composed partly in Arabic and partly in Persian, the book was first translated into English around the beginning of the twentieth century, making it one of the earliest works of Bahá'u'lláh to be made available in the West. It is now one of the best known of Bahá'u'lláh's many works, having been translated into many other languages and distributed virtually all over the world.

*The Hidden Words* was originally known to Bahá'ís as the "Hidden Book of Fatimah," the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and the holiest, most outstanding woman of Islam. According to the traditions of Shiah Islam, Fatimah was deeply stricken with grief after her father's death. The traditions hold that the angel Gabriel visited her and whispered inspiring, consoling words to give her spiritual comfort during a time of extreme anguish.

Bahá'u'lláh himself has identified *The Hidden Words* with the words of consolation that

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were whispered to Fatimah and characterizes it as “that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old.” Bahá’u’lláh states, “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.”

This work represents the ethical heart of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings. In it he has distilled and presented in brief form the spiritual essence of all previous revelations. Addressing myriad spiritual themes including purity, love, kindness, justice, radiance, faithfulness, selflessness, humility, detachment from worldly possessions, wisdom, and nearness to God—to name only a few—*The Hidden Words* reveals afresh the true foundations of religion. It is, as Bahá’u’lláh says, a “token of grace”—an expression of unmerited divine assistance given to humanity for its spiritual regeneration, a key to understanding the mysteries that surround our spiritual life, and a perfect guide to spiritual growth.

The sincere recitation of these holy verses—priceless gifts of a loving Creator—is a bounty

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that Bahá' u'lláh promises will have a profound effect on oneself and the world:

Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Bahá' u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá' u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 295.