

Short introduction to *Akhláq al-Rúháníyyín*  
By Wahid N. Azal

The *Akhláq al-Rúháníyyín*, or the ‘*Ethics of the Spiritually-minded*’, is originally a Baghdád era work of **Subh-i-Azal**’s dealing with the moral imperatives and ethical propaedeutics of spiritual wayfaring (*sulúk*) from the Bayání perspective. While broaching much in terms of both ethical and prescriptive matters, this work pretty much belongs to the genre of ‘*irfán*’ (gnosis and esotericism). It’s original recipient was one **Aqá Abu’l-Qásim Káshání** who was later murdered in Baghdád by the Bahá’ís during the period of the **Direful Mischief** (*fitna-i-saylam*) in the mid/late 1860s. Two different versions of this work presently exist: **1)** a longer Arabic version by **Subh-i-Azal** and **2)** an abridged Persian summary translation of the longer Arabic by **Hádí Dawlatábádí** undertaken at the request of one **Hájj Muhammad Hussein Isfáhání**, see *Yád-dásht-há-ye Qazvíní* (**Qazvini’s notes**), (ed.) Iraj Afshár, Tabríz **1363 shamsí**, vol. **7-8** (in one), p. **260**.

Unfortunately **Qazvini’s notes** do not indicate when **Hádí Dawlatábádí’s** translation was actually carried out. It should be noted, however, that the scan of the longer Arabic *ms.* version in our possession contains **sixty-two** (62) folio pages with **fifteen** (15) lines per page -- and no colophon. Our word-processed Persian rendition of **Hádí Dawlatábádí’s** adaptation, minus the translator’s preface, is **forty-three** (43) pages long with **thirteen** (13) lines per page. We should mention here as well that we have not perused **Dawlatábádí’s** original but only the **PDF** kindly forwarded to us in August 2009 by a member of the Iranian Bayání community: i.e. a word processed typescript set in a fine *nasta’līq* font. Omitting the entirety of the exordium as well as the initial doxography, while including the opening words of the opening address (i.e. occurring just after the second lengthy doxology following the exordium in the original Arabic), **Dawlatábádí’s** translation properly begins on **page 4**, starting at **line 4**, of our lengthier Arabic text and concludes with the prayer commencing on **page 32, line 14**, ending at the top of **page 35, line 3**, of the Arabic *ms.*

The main body of the text of *Akhláq al-Rúháníyyín* is divided into six sections constituting the response to six questions posed by our original querent **Aqá Abu’l-Qásim Káshání**. Our Arabic *ms.* contains a seventh and eighth section as well. The seventh (**pp. 35-47**) seems to be addressing the community of the Bayání faithful as a whole, or several specifically unnamed individuals, as it begins immediately after the aforementioned prayer and with the interjection ‘*yá ‘ibád*’, O servants! The following eighth section deals with a response to a question posed by one **Hajjí Kamál Daráiyih** (**pp. 47-62**). Pending consultation of another complete *ms.* of *Akhláq al-Rúháníyyín*, we are presently working with the assumption that the seventh and eighth sections constitute a contiguous unit to the overall piece, or even appendices to the preceding six sections, and not another work appended to our text. But since the Persian rendition does not include these in its abridgement, here we will limit our summary only to the six main sections of the text, concluding with a translation of the prayer mentioned which closes section six (note: the benediction opening the prayer in the Persian rendition does not occur in the Arabic text). Our page numbering below refers to our *ms.* of the Arabic text.

The **first section** (**pp. 3-19**) deals with the preliminary characteristics necessary of the spiritual seeker (*sálik*) to embark upon the path of wayfaring, particularly in acquiring the requisite behaviors and attitudes incumbent on its success -- viz. *makárim al-akhláq*,

praiseworthy character traits, which involves cutting the worldly bonds and fetters and purifying the inner life such that the inner and outer characteristics fully accord with one another becoming one and the same, etc. In this section **Subh-i-Azal** also explains how the various levels of wayfaring build upon each other whilst corresponding such levels of wayfaring to the metaphysical presences of the Divine, i.e. *háhút*, *láhút*, *jabarút* and *malakút*. One by one the various moral and ethical necessities requisite to success are detailed while the numerous pitfalls and dangers of the path are likewise spelled out. Practical instructions follow with specific rejoinders regarding the prescriptive ordinances laid out in the **Bayán**, including prayers, specific verses and the number of daily scriptural recitations to be made, including the introduction of doxological formulas by **Subh-i-Azal**, which are then clarified as regards their inner significance as well as metaphysical correspondences. Throughout the discussion the pivotal importance of maintaining the correct attitude towards *Tawhíd* (the Unicity of the Divine), particularly in its Bayání enumeration, as well as towards the **Living Mirror** who is the dispenser of Divine grace as its vicegerent, are reiterated thereby rooting the full spectrum of the individual spiritual quest firmly within the larger soteriological orbit of the Bayán.

**Section two (pp. 19-23)** is **Subh-i-Azal's** response regarding the question of the **Threshold/Gate of Knowledge** (*báb al-'ilm*) of the era. Here the **Gate of Knowledge** is identified in the first instance as being the **Point of the Bayán** and in the second instance as **Subh-i-Azal** himself as the **Mirror** to this **Point**, with the latter explicitly asserting his complete spiritual identity with the **Essence of the Seven Letters**. The characteristics of what constitutes a genuine **Point of Knowledge** are enumerated, such as unacquired and inspired knowledge, which is then contrasted to any who might falsely claim such a position without possessing the qualification detailed. Without naming any individual claimants, **Subh-i-Azal** categorically rejects such claims by others as malefically inspired and thus manifestations of satanic motivation. It should be noted that while the Persian editor of **Hádí Dawlatábádí's** adaptation has placed remarks parenthetically within the text suggesting Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Núrí Bahá' and the Bahá'ís as the possible identify of the suggested culprit(s), it needs to be emphasized that, until the mid-1860s when the Bahá'í founder made his own claim explicit, several other claimants had also arisen positing similar claims. We mention this because the word processed Persian text appears to generate some ambiguity about the actual location and dating of the original of this piece, when it is a Baghdád era work.

**Section three (pp. 23-26)** responds to a question regarding the differences amongst the creatures of creation as regards faith (*imán*) and infidelity (*kuf'r*), or why some are guided and others misguided and so led to error from the truth, even though the totality of creation *in-itself* is considered equal from the Divine point of view. Here **Subh-i-Azal** instances the examples of light and darkness, life and death, etc., as the dual contrasting elements determined by the singular determination of the Divine providence itself. As such, while on one level faith constitutes the individual determination of drawing nigh unto the Divine, and conversely infidelity its turning away, from another point of view such guidance or misguidance is also simultaneously to be deemed providentially determined by God *in illo tempore* in the primary instance.

**Section four (pp. 26-27)** responds to a question regarding the primal life (*hayyát al-úlá*) or the life of the world (*hayyát al-dunyá*) and the hereafter (*ákhira*). Here **Subh-i-Azal** posits the symbolism of two lights and two fires, namely, the light of the world and the light of the hereafter, and the fire of the world and fire of the hereafter. The light of the world corresponds to the light of the hereafter and likewise the fire of the world to that of

the hereafter. Whomsoever enters the light of the world, so long as he/she remains steadfast to this light in the world, will enter the light of the hereafter, and conversely those who are with the fire of the world will enter that of the corresponding fire of the hereafter. Light represents faith, specifically in the **Bayán** and its **Speaker** (here **Subh-i-Azal**), and fire represents rejection and infidelity. This reoccurring symbolism is one of the key themes and motifs in both the Persian and Arabic Bayáns as well as throughout the entirety of the corpus of the writings of the **Essence of the Seven Letters** from **1847-50**. It should be noted that one of the epithets of **Subh-i-Azal** was Light (*núr*) such that here the intention is explicit as to who and what the Light of the world denotes, and conversely what (and later, *who*) the fire (*nár*) is. It should also be noted that this theme is also one reoccurring within the writings and sayings of the Shi'ite Imáms, particularly in the collection compiled by Kulayní, see especially Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, **The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam**, (trans.) David Streight, Albany, 1993, pp. **87-88**, *passim*.

**Section five (pp. 28-30)** answers questions regarding marriage. Here **Subh-i-Azal** prescribes marriage with believers only and stipulates that marriages contracted not exceed beyond two wives, the exceeding of which is scripturally proscribed (*harám*). He encourages mutual respect within matrimonial life, supports equality in the relationship, and likens spouses as mirrors to each other and as two equal limbs within the same metaphoric body. Since this work is a Baghdád era work it is interesting to note that such a position, already enunciated earlier in the **Bayán** by the **Essence of the Seven Letters**, is even more strongly voiced by **Subh-i-Azal** in this epistle at such an early period; that is, a period well over a decade or more before Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Núrí Bahá' articulated the same position verbatim in his own tablets and book. Among other principles plagiarized by the Bahá'í founder from the **Bayán** and the writings of **Subh-i-Azal**, this is yet another glaring example. Even the choice of symbolism and metaphor here employed by **Subh-i-Azal**, not to mention the number of wives not to be exceeded, are identically the same ones drawn on in the **1870-1871** period when Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Núrí Bahá' composed his assorted tablets and the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* where such principles are likewise articulated. Additionally in this section Subh-i-Azal reiterates several **Bayání** prescriptions regarding the ritual impurity of unbelievers and the duties of future **Bayání** rulers regarding relations with unbelievers.

**Section six (pp. 30-35)** rearticulates the points already detailed in the first section as a conclusion. It once again re-emphasizes the central importance of maintaining the correct attitude towards *Tawhíd* as enumerated in the **Bayán** and concludes with offering the following prayer translated below as an obligatory prescription to the quirent.

**Prayer of Subh-i-Azal closing the Persian version and occurring on Pp. 32-35 of the Arabic Ms.**

*Glorified art Thou, O God my God, I indeed testify to Thee and all-things at the moment when I am in Thy presence in pure servitude, upon this, that verily Thou art God, no other God is there besides Thee! Thou art unchanged, O my God, within the elevation of Grandeur and Majesty, and shall be unalterable, O my desirous boon, within the pinnacle of power and perfection inasmuch as nothing shall frustrate Thee and nothing shall extinguish Thee! Thou art unchanged as Thou art the Capable above Thy creation and Thou art unalterable as Thou indeed shall be as from before inasmuch as nothing is with Thee of anything and nothing is in Thy rank of anything! Thou accomplisheth and willeth and doeth and desireth! Glorified art Thou, O God my God, with Thy praise, salutations be upon the Primal Point, the Chemise of Thy Visage and the Light of Thy direction and the Luminosity of Thy Beinghood and the Clarity of Thy Selfhood and the Ocean of Thy Power by all that which Thou hath bestowed upon Him of Thy Stations and Thy Culminations and Thy Foundations, for nothing shall frustrate Thee of anything and nothing shall extinguish Thee of anything! No other God is There besides Thee, for verily Thou art the Lord of all the worlds! And blessings, O God my God, be upon the one who was the first to believe in Thee, the Visage of Thy Selfhood and the Decree of Thy direction; and upon the one who was the last to believe in Thee, the Essence of Thy direction and the Visage of Thy Holiness; and upon those whom Ye have made martyrs/witnesses (shuhadá') unknown except by Thy Command nor restrained except by Thy Wisdom; then upon those to whom Ye have promised that Ye shall make Him manifest on the Day of Resurrection and He whom Ye will upraise on the Day of the Return by all which Thou will bestow upon Him of Thy Power and Thy Strength, for nothing shall extinguish Thee and nothing shall frustrate Thee! Ye determine all-things, for verily Thou art powerful over whatsoever Thou will! And I indeed testify, O my God, between Thy hands that verily there is no other god besides Thee and that He whom Ye shall make manifest on the Day of Resurrection is the Chemise of Thy Creativity and the Visage of Thy Manifestation and the direction of Thy Victory and the substance of Thy Pardoning and the branch of Thy Singularity and the clarity of Thy Unicity and the Pen [of the Letter] Nún (al-qalam al-nún) within Thy Beinghood and the setting of the Cause-Command within Thy Essentiality inasmuch as there is no difference between Him and Thee except that He is Thy servant in Thy grasp, such that whatsoever is in the Heavens and the earth and what is between them will then be filled by His Name and by His Light until it be made apparent that no other god is there besides Thee and no Beloved is there like unto Thee and no Desired One is there other than Thee and no Dread is there of Thy like and no Justice of Thy equal! No other god is there besides Thee! Glorified art Thou, O God, and by Thy praise, blessings, O my God, be upon the Guide to the Throne of the Hidden Cloud and the Path to Thy Presence in the Sinai of Authorization and the Caller by Thy Logos-Self and the Crier of Thy Permission between Thy Hands and the Ariser of Thy Attendance by Thy Command; then the Triumph, O my God, by all that which Thou will bestow upon Him of Thy Power, then that which will be made manifestly apparent of the Word upon the earth and what is upon it by Thy grandeur, and also in this that nothing shall ever put out His Light! Verily nothing shall frustrate Thee of anything and nothing shall extinguish Thee of anything! Thy mercy encompasseth all-things and verily Thou art powerful over what Ye have willed, and to the one who prays to Thee, Hearing, Answering, for verily Thou art Observant over us, and verily Thou art High, Praised beyond that which the inner hearts can comprehend!*