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*The Central Figures*

# *Bahá'u'lláh*

*Volume Three*



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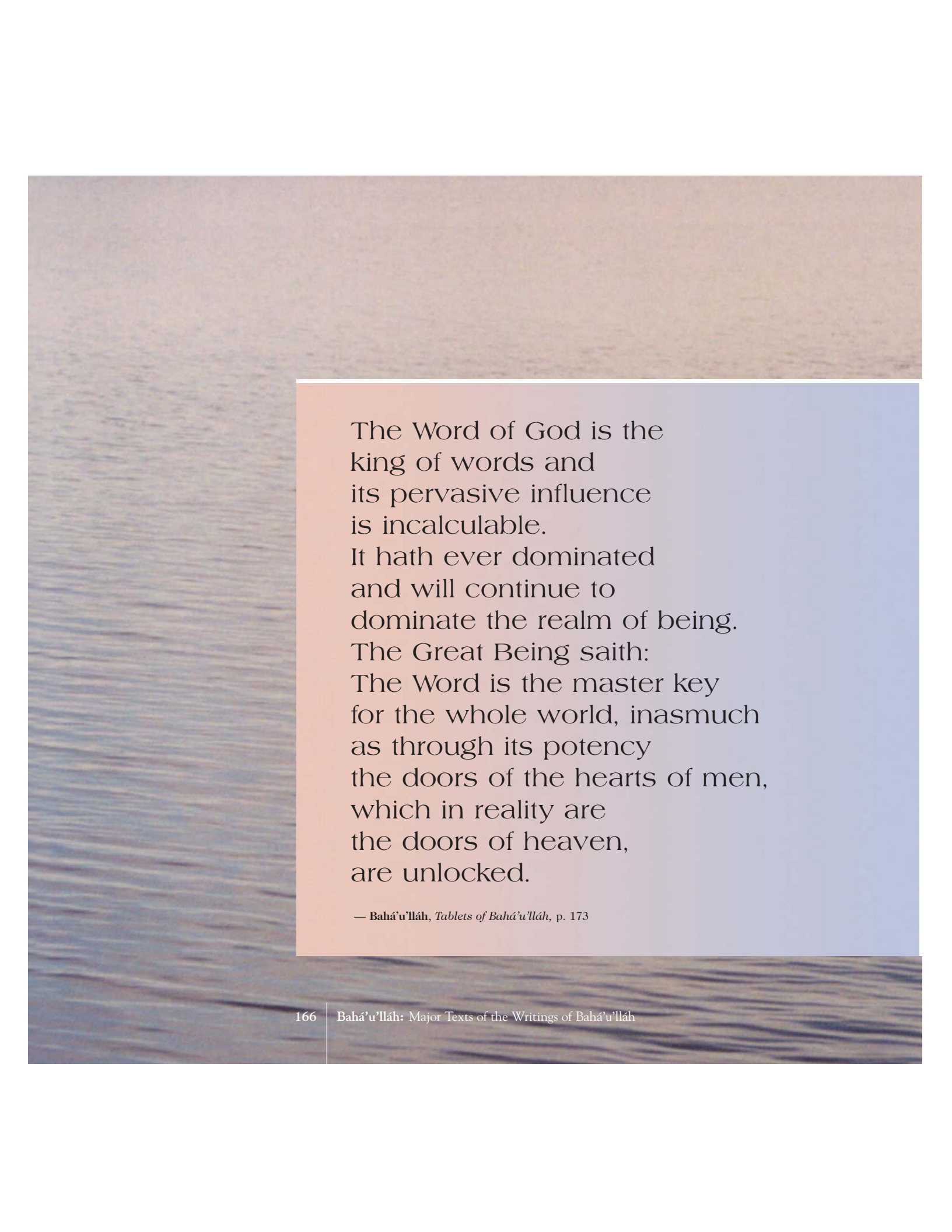
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The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 173

# Papers in the River

*Written by Duane L. Herrmann*

*Photography by Pepper Oldziej*

“I saw him today, and I spat on him!” Father announced proudly when he came home one day.

“Who, dear?” Mother asked.

“That Persian who claims to be God!” he answered with scorn. “He was at the head of a group—filthy Persians! Don’t know why the government lets them stay here in Baghdád—they will only stir up trouble!”

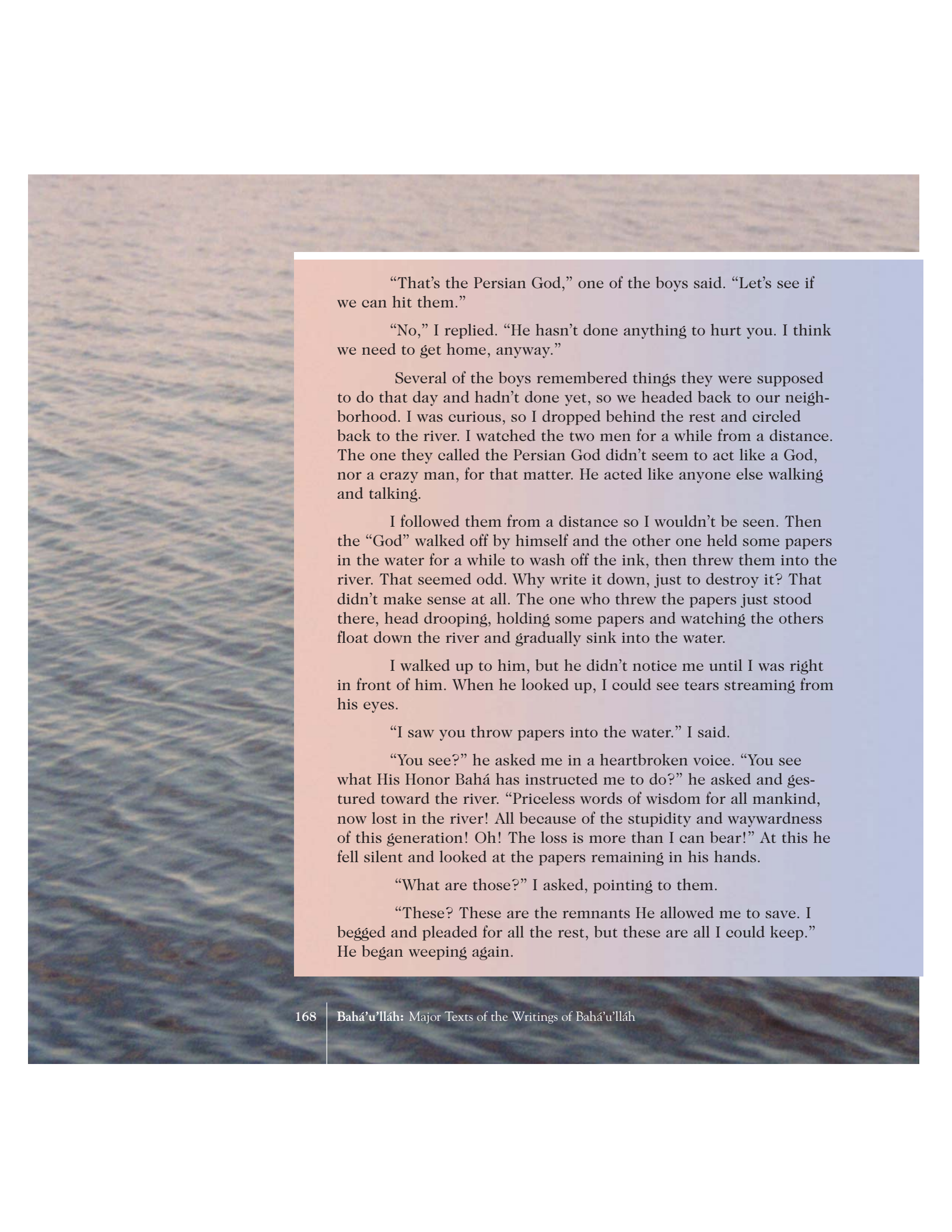
“I’d rather not talk about those people in front of the children,” mother said softly. Father grumbled some more, and then was quiet.

I’d heard about the Persians. They’d been exiled to Baghdád from their homes. Why these Persians would want a man for their God seemed strange to me. God is God, the All Powerful, the Almighty.

The next evening when I was alone with mother, I asked her about the Persian man-God.

“It doesn’t matter what people say,” she answered. “The man may simply be insane and they are his friends and don’t want him to feel bad.” She paused, then added, “Don’t worry yourself about him. He’s none of your concern.”

I forgot all about this until one day when I was out for the afternoon with some friends on the banks of the Tigris River that runs through the city. We threw stones for a while, and then I noticed two men walking. One was writing down the words the other one was saying.



“That’s the Persian God,” one of the boys said. “Let’s see if we can hit them.”

“No,” I replied. “He hasn’t done anything to hurt you. I think we need to get home, anyway.”

Several of the boys remembered things they were supposed to do that day and hadn’t done yet, so we headed back to our neighborhood. I was curious, so I dropped behind the rest and circled back to the river. I watched the two men for a while from a distance. The one they called the Persian God didn’t seem to act like a God, nor a crazy man, for that matter. He acted like anyone else walking and talking.

I followed them from a distance so I wouldn’t be seen. Then the “God” walked off by himself and the other one held some papers in the water for a while to wash off the ink, then threw them into the river. That seemed odd. Why write it down, just to destroy it? That didn’t make sense at all. The one who threw the papers just stood there, head drooping, holding some papers and watching the others float down the river and gradually sink into the water.

I walked up to him, but he didn’t notice me until I was right in front of him. When he looked up, I could see tears streaming from his eyes.

“I saw you throw papers into the water.” I said.

“You see?” he asked me in a heartbroken voice. “You see what His Honor Bahá has instructed me to do?” he asked and gestured toward the river. “Priceless words of wisdom for all mankind, now lost in the river! All because of the stupidity and waywardness of this generation! Oh! The loss is more than I can bear!” At this he fell silent and looked at the papers remaining in his hands.

“What are those?” I asked, pointing to them.

“These? These are the remnants He allowed me to save. I begged and pleaded for all the rest, but these are all I could keep.” He began weeping again.

“I’m sorry,” I said. I couldn’t think of anything else to say. Then I blurted out, “Do you really think he’s God?”

The man looked up, startled, as if he didn’t understand the words. Then he understood, and smiled. “No, He is not God. But, if my senses can be trusted, and if you can keep this secret,” he lowered his voice in a confidential way, “I believe He is the Voice of God, and these words are the Words of God.”

“Really?” I was startled.

“What I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears—no human could have known, but He has known. The words have come flowing from Him like a river. The onrush has been so great that I cannot write it all. When the revelation comes in that way, its power fills the room like perfume. It is a most amazing experience. These are not the words of an ordinary man.” He spoke softly, but firmly. “He has bade me keep silent, for the time of announcement has not yet come, but I feel it will be soon, very soon indeed!”

“What were the papers about?” I pointed to the water.

“Beautiful prayers, Tablets of knowledge that would solve the problems of the world, and a new language that all the people of the world could learn in addition to their own, and they could travel anywhere and speak to anyone! What a marvel that would be! But gone now, all gone!” he exclaimed in despair.

“And these?” I pointed to the ones in his hands.

“This one is ‘The Prayer of the Maid of Heaven.’” He was silent for a moment then said, “I must return to His Honor Bahá. He said I could have a few moments to collect these papers. I must see if He has more for me to write down.”

I nodded and he walked off to join the man he called Bahá: the Voice of God. I went home slowly to think about all I had learned and seen. ★