

# Concerning The Tablet (*lawh*) And The Pen (*qalam*)

Says the Shaykh: Our belief concerning the Tablet (*lawh*) and the Pen (*qalam*) is that they are two angels. [1](#)

[1](#). The Urdu translator protests against this extraordinary proposition, and says as follows (D, 31): "Shaykh Mufid says that to think that the *lawh* (tablet) and the *qalam* (pen) are two angels is contrary to the true belief, because it is clear from several traditions that the *lawh* is a book in which God has, in His power, written down all events that are to happen till the Day of Resurrection. Also in the Qur'in we have: 'And verily We have written in the Psalms (*zabur*), after the Reminder: My righteous slaves shall inherit the earth' (cp. Psalms, xxxvii. 29) [21, 105] .

That is to say, 'We have written after the reminder, on account of Our Power, that My righteous slaves shall inherit the earth'. In this verse by *dhikr* is meant the *lawh*. And *qalam* is the name of that thing by the instrumentality of which the events of the time and the happenings of the world are inscribed. When God intended to acquaint the angels with some secret of His, or to send revelations to one of the prophets, the angels were commanded to read the *lawh*. Shaykh Saduq himself, while describing the manner in which revelation was sent down, writes that there was a *lawh* in front of the two eyes of Israfil. When Allah desired to send a revelation, the *lawh* would be brought in contact with his forehead. Thus it is apparent that *lawh* is not the name of an angel, nor do we find in any dictionary that *lawh* and *qalam* are two angels". This is a very interesting refutation of the Shaykh's doctrine by his disciple, Shaykh Mufid (for whom see *Rawdatu 'l-Jannat*, 563). Unfortunately the original text of the *Tashih* on the point is not available to me. MB also mentions that such is the belief of Shaykh Saduq.

In Sunnite theology the meaning of *lawh* is quite different. It is of vast dimensions, of white pearl, and contains a record of everything from beginning to end (MC, 148). The Pen however was created before and has priority (*ibid.*, 162). Two ideas emerge: (a) the Tablet as the original copy of the Revelation, and (b) as the record of the decisions of the Divine Will (EI, iii. 19-20). According to Western Isma'ilis, *qalam* is the primal source of the universe (FC, 21), and *lawh* is the most guarded Tablet (*ibid.*, 86). The Isma'ilif influence can be seen in Ibnu'l-'Arabi. He uses *qalam*, *lawh* and 'arsh for the Neo-Platonic First Intellect, Universal Soul and Universal Body, respectively (Affifi, 63, n. 1; 67).

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