

Baha'i Studies Review 12 (2004) 15–31

Symbolism in the Badi' Calendar

ROBIN MIHRSHAHI

Abstract

This paper examines cosmological, ontological and theological concepts of the Babi and Baha'i religions that find symbolic expression in the structure and organization of the Badi' calendar. It traces the Shaykhi origins of the Bab's cosmology and ontology, their development in the Babi scripture and finally their expression in and through the Badi' calendar. It also explores how the Bab used this new calendar to express the relationship between his own religious mission and the revelation of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', the promised future Manifestation of God ('Manifestations' is Baha'i terminology for the founders of the worlds religions) repeatedly referred to in his writings.

Introduction

Ever since the beginning of recorded history human beings have devised and used calendars that have helped them to understand and compute time and to organize and structure their lives more effectively.¹ Most religious communities have their own calendars that are used to celebrate or commemorate important events commonly associated with the founders of their religion, and these often begin with the inception of their faith or another episode of similar significance. Most calendars use three readily observable cycles in nature: the day, the lunar month and the solar year.² Some calendars, however, deviate from these cycles. The Islamic calendar, for example, does not make use of the solar year, while the Mayans of Central America used months that were only 20 days long and thus not synchronized with the phases of the moon.³

The Baha'i Faith also has its own calendar, called the Badi' (wondrous, new) calendar, which was devised by the twin founding figures of this religion, the Bab and Baha'u'llah. The Badi' calendar, however, is not simply a system that is used to calculate time or commemorate important events associated with the central figures of this Faith. Having been created principally by the Bab and later completed by Baha'u'llah, the calendar expresses symbolically a number of concepts that were central to the Bab's perception of the nature of being and the universal laws underlying all of creation.⁴ Furthermore, it also contains allusions to the relationship between the two religious systems created by these two figures.

This paper aims to explore some of the symbolism contained in the Badi' calendar. In doing so, it will consider the Shaykhi origins of the Bab's cosmology and ontology, examine

¹ I am very much indebted to J. Vahid Brown for offering his comments on various drafts of this paper and for supplying me with information and materials that have greatly benefited it. The numerous remarks and suggestions offered by Borhan Borhani have likewise been very valuable.

² John Walbridge, *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996) 174.

³ *ibid* 175.

⁴ The Badi' calendar is certainly not the only religious calendar to contain such symbolism. A comparative analysis of a number of different calendars and their respective levels of symbolism is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

how these Shaykhi concepts are developed in the Babi writings and, finally, note how these concepts find symbolic expression in the structure and organization of the Badi' calendar.

Shaykhi Origins

Before turning to the Babi Faith, most of the early followers of the Bab, including the Bab's childhood teacher Shaykh 'Abid and many of the Bab's family members, had been Shaykhis, that is to say, followers of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i and Sayyid Kazim Rashti. The Bab himself had also attended some of Rashti's classes in Karbala and had referred to him as 'my teacher' in some of his early writings.⁵ For this reason the Bab predictably made frequent use of Shaykhi terminology and theories in his writings. In so far as it is constructed upon and around a number of metaphysical and cosmological Shaykhi concepts, the Badi' calendar constitutes no exception to this. A brief summary of some of these concepts will therefore be necessary for a better understanding of the origin and symbolic significance of various aspects of this calendar.

According to Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, the founder of the Shaykhi school, the whole of creation is constituted of divine letters.⁶ Each of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet corresponds to a divine name or attribute as well as to a metaphysical plane or level of existence. In this schema the first letter, *alif*, for example, corresponds to the divine name '*al-Badī'*' (wondrous, new, first, beginning) and to the metaphysical plane of the Universal Intellect, which is the first emanation from the Divine Will. This Universal Intellect is also called 'the One' (*Wāhid*).

According to the so-called *abjad* system, each letter of the Arabic alphabet has a specific numerical value. The numerical value of the first letter, *alif*, for example, is 1, and that of the word *wāhid* (which has the meaning of 1) is 19. For this reason God is said to have uttered 19 letters on the plane of the Universal Intellect, thereby creating the lower 19 levels of existence: the 9 spheres (of planets), the 4 elements (water, fire, air, earth), the 3 kingdoms of nature (mineral, plant and animal kingdom), as well as humans, *jinn* (invisible beings, genies) and angels. These 19 letters form the invocation '*Bismi'llāhi'r-Rahmāni'r-Rahīm*'⁷ (In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful) which precedes all chapters of the Qur'an with the exception of the ninth.⁸

Attributing even more importance to the number 19, Sayyid Kazim Rashti states, furthermore, that although the Arabic alphabet has 28 letters, in reality there are only 19.⁹ This is because some letters (e.g. the letters *bā'*, *tā'* and *thā'*) are essentially the same and only distinguished from one another by one or more dots placed above or underneath them. He supports this statement with a saying attributed to Muhammad, which reads, 'the letters are nineteen'.¹⁰ The number 19, therefore, constitutes a universal principle, which governs and underlies the whole of creation. This universal 'law of 19' is expressed in, and signified

⁵ Todd Lawson, 'Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'an Commentary of the Bāb', *Journal of Baha'i Studies*, 2, no. 4 (1990) 17-43 (see p. 21).

⁶ Juan R. Cole, 'The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i', <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/ahsai2.htm> (cited 12 January 2004).

⁷ Hereafter this formula will be referred to as the Bismi'llah.

⁸ Cole, 'The World as Text'.

⁹ Todd Lawson, 'Reading Reading Itself: The Bab's "Surah of the Bees", A Commentary on Qur'an 12:93 from the Surah of Joseph', <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/bhpapers/vol1/nahl2.htm> (cited 12 January 2004).

¹⁰ Sayyid Kazim Rashti, *Sharhu'l-qasida al-lamiyya* (Tabriz: n.p., 1853) 93. Quoted in translation in Lawson, 'Reading'.

by, the Bismi’llah,¹¹ a formula that is said to sum up and contain all levels of contingent being.¹²

The Bismi’llah occupies a central position in Islamic theology. It is regarded as a prayer in its own right and a source of divine knowledge and healing. It is said to have been designated ‘the greatest verse in the Book of God’ by Imam Ja‘far Sadiq, the sixth Imam of Shi‘i Islam, and has been described by Rashti as being closer to the ‘Greatest Name of God’ than the pupil of the eye is to the white.¹³ This Greatest Name of God¹⁴ is believed by Shaykhis to be a hidden and unpronounced name that sums up being in its entirety, thus making it even more all-embracing than the Bismi’llah, which only contains and manifests the different levels of contingent being.¹⁵ According to Shi‘i traditions, the knowledge of this name is with the hidden Imam and will be revealed by him when he returns.¹⁶

According to Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi-Talib, the first Imam of Shi‘i Islam, the Bismi’llah itself, and thereby the entire contingent world, is, furthermore, condensed in its first letter, *bā’*: ‘All that is in the world is in the Qur’an, and all that is in the Qur’an is condensed in the *Fātiḥah* [first chapter] of the Book, and all that is in the *Fātiḥah* is in the Bismi’llah, and all that is in the Bismi’llah is in the *bā’* and I am the point under the *bā’*.’¹⁷ The ‘point under the *bā’*’ is what differentiates this letter from other letters of similar shape and is thus its essence and distinguishing feature. For this reason it was also called ‘*Furqān*’ (distinguisher) by the Bab, a title that traditionally denotes the Qur’an as the distinguisher between believers and unbelievers and which was also applied by him to his own writings, especially his first major work the *Qayyūmu’l-Asmā’*.¹⁸ Because all letters are potentially contained within it, this point signifies the Divine Unity and Simplicity¹⁹ and the Universal Will of God,²⁰ which is the origin of all created things.²¹ The *bā’* without its dot is therefore for Rashti nothing more than a cloak, shell or exterior for the point.²²

¹¹ Rashad Khalifa even argues that the whole Qur’an is mathematically based upon the number 19. This notion has, however, been rejected by most other Muslim scholars. See, for example, Khalifa, *The Computer Speaks: God’s Message to the World* (Tucson, Arizona: Renaissance Productions, 1981).

¹² Cole, ‘Cosmologies’.

¹³ Lawson, ‘Reading’.

¹⁴ Baha’u’llah claims that the name ‘Bahā’ (glory, splendour), which he chose for himself, is this Most Great Name of God. The Bab also placed great emphasis on the name ‘Bahā’ and even instructed his amanuensis to write this name in red ink when preparing manuscript copies of some of his writings while all other words were to be written in black. See Abu’l-Qasim Faizi, *Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest Name* (New Delhi: Baha’i Publishing Trust, n.d.) 8.

¹⁵ Cole, ‘Cosmologies’.

¹⁶ Denis MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Baha’ism* (London: British Academic Press, 1994) 50.

¹⁷ Rashti, *Sharḥu’l-Qasida* 85f and 92 (trans. adapted from Lawson, ‘Reading’).

¹⁸ Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran. 1844-1850* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 202, 216n.

¹⁹ Lawson, ‘Reading’.

²⁰ MacEoin, *Rituals* 76n.

²¹ In this respect Baha’u’llah, in his *Kitāb-i-Īqān* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, 3rd edn., Wilmette IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1983) 184, quotes Muhammad as saying ‘Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied.’

²² Lawson, ‘Reading’.

The Bab's Concept of 'All Things'

The Bab used and expanded these Shaykhi concepts, shaping them into a new system which underlies his religion. After having declared himself to his first follower, Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, on the night corresponding to the Gregorian calendar date of 22 May 1844, he instructed the latter not to divulge his claim to anyone until another 17 individuals had 'spontaneously and out of their own accord' accepted him and recognized the truth of his revelation.²³ These 18 first disciples he called 'Letters of the Living' (*Hurūfu'l-Hayy*).²⁴ Together with the Bab himself, they formed the first '*Wāhid*' (unit, unity, one), i.e. unit of 19, of the Babi dispensation. Each one of them was regarded as the incarnation of one of the 19 letters of the Bismi'llah. The Bab himself was the manifestation of the first letter *bā'*, Mulla Husayn represented the second letter *sīn*, and so on.²⁵

The Bab, furthermore, did not only identify himself with the *bā'* of the Bismi'llah but also more specifically with the point under this letter. This is evident from titles such as 'the Primal Point' (*Nuqṭih-yi Ūlā*) or the 'Point of the Bayan' (*Nuqṭih-yi Bayān*), which he chose for himself.²⁶ It is possible, in this context, that the Bab used the term 'Point' to refer to himself as the locus of divine revelation, the source of all knowledge and the manifestation of the Universal Will, while alluding to his physical being (i.e. the carrier of this revelation) when identifying himself as the letter *bā'*, which is the outer shell or cloak of that point.

A very similar interpretation of the Bismi'llah is given by the Bab in the context of Islam. Here the first letter *bā'* signifies the 'Point of the Qur'an', the second letter *sīn* is manifested in the person of the Prophet Muhammad and the remaining 17 letters stand for Muhammad's daughter Fatimih, the 12 Imams of Shi'i Islam and the 4 emissaries or *abwāb* (sing. *bāb*) of the hidden Twelfth Imam. Together, these 19 constitute the primary *Wāhid* of the Islamic dispensation. The reason why the Bab distinguishes in this schema between the Point of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad is that in Islamic thought only the text of the Qur'an is regarded as the authentic word of God, while the Prophet's other utterances are not necessarily considered a product of direct divine revelation.²⁷

Being the incarnations of the same letters of the Bismi'llah, the Bab and the 18 Letters of the Living are considered the separate returns of the members of this primary *Wāhid* of the Islamic dispensation. The Bab is therefore the return of the Point of the Qur'an in the form of the Point of the Bayan, Mulla Husayn is the reappearance of Muhammad, and so on.²⁸ A significant difference in this schema is that the Bab makes no distinction here between his own person and the Point of the Bayan, which was the case with Muhammad and the Point of the Qur'an. This is because the Bab claims that, in his case, divine

²³ Nabil (Zarandī), *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabīl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation* (trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, New York: Baha'i Publishing Committee, 1953) 63.

²⁴ The Bab used the term 'letters' to refer to the followers of various religions. *Al-Hayy* (the Living) is one of the names of God and was also used by the Bab in reference to his own person. The title 'Letter of the Living' could therefore be interpreted on a more literal level as simply meaning 'follower of the Bab'. The numerical value of the word *hayy* is 18, thus specifying the number of letters. This is the reason Shoghi Effendi translated *Hurūf al-Hayy* (sometimes *Hurūfāt al-Hayy*) as the 'eighteen Letters of the Living'.

²⁵ Amanat, *Resurrection* 175.

²⁶ Lawson, 'Reading'.

²⁷ Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History and Order in the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh* (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2000) 295f.

²⁸ This was the Bab's way of fulfilling common Shi'i expectations relating to the return (*raj'a*) of the hidden Twelfth Imam (the Mahdī) with a certain number of his supporters immediately before the end of the world and the Day of Resurrection. For a detailed explanation of these apocalyptic Shi'i expectations see Amanat, *Resurrection*.

revelation is continuous and that therefore all his writings are the word of God.²⁹ The person of the Bab is therefore identical with his revelation, which he collectively refers to as the Bayan (utterance, exposition), while the Prophet Muhammad is not always synonymous with the Qur'an.

After the first *Wāhid* of the Babi dispensation had been formed, the Bab instructed the Letters of the Living to disperse and spread the news of his revelation. The name of every new believer they enrolled was to be recorded and forwarded to him. 'I shall classify these lists,' he explained to them, 'into eighteen sets of nineteen names each. Each set will constitute one *Wāhid*. All these names, in these eighteen sets, will, together with the first *Wāhid*, consisting of My own name and those of the eighteen Letters of the Living, constitute the number of *Kullu Shay'*'.³⁰ The term *kullu shay'* literally means 'all things' and its numerical value is 361 (19 x 19). In this way the Bab tried to materialize on earth what was an essentially metaphysical concept of him (and of the divine manifestation in general) as the 'Primal Point from which have been generated all created things'.³¹

Being basically an extended version of the Shaykhi 'theory of 19', this concept of 'all things' (*kullu shay'*) constitutes for the Bab a divine and universal principle underlying the whole of creation. Both the Persian and Arabic Bayan, as well as many of the Bab's later writings, were, therefore, also structured according to this formula, each consisting of 19 *wāhids* of 19 chapters or gates (*abwāb*).³² The Bab thus states in the beginning of the Persian Bayan that God has structured the creation of all things according to the number of 'all things' and that the chapters of the religion of the Bayan therefore have also been arranged according to the number of 'all things'.³³

***Kullu Shay'* and the Computation of Time**

That the universal principle of 'all things' occupies a central position in the Bab's cosmology and ontology may be seen in its use for the computation of time. The Bab grouped the period following his revelation into cycles of 19 years, which he again called *wāhids*. The first 19 *wāhids*, i.e. 361 years, constitute the first *kullu shay'* of the Babi/Baha'i era. The 19 years that make up one *wāhid* were given names whose numerical value is identical with their position within the *wāhid*. The first year of each *wāhid* is thus named '*alif*', which is the first letter of the Arabic alphabet and has a numerical value of 1. The names of the 19 years of each *wāhid* are as follows:

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Nabīl, *Dawn-Breakers* 123 (transliteration adapted and italics added).

³¹ *Selections from the Writings of the Bāb* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1976) 12.

³² The Persian as well as the Arabic Bayan, however, were left unfinished by the Bab and thus end in the middle of the 9th and after the 11th *Wāhid* respectively. The Bab left the completion of these works up to 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' (*man yuzhīruhu 'llāh*), the promised future figure repeatedly mentioned in the Bab's writings. Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah is this promised one and that his Kitab-i Iqan constitutes the completion of the Bab's Bayans. See Saiedi, *Logos*, 126f.

³³ Edward G. Browne, 'A Summary of the Persian Bayān' in *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne on the Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions* (ed. Moojan Momen, Oxford: George Ronald, 1987) 322.

1	<i>Alif</i> (The letter 'A')	11	<i>Bahhāj</i> (Delightful)
2	<i>Bā</i> (The letter 'B')	12	<i>Jawāb</i> (Answer)
3	<i>Ab</i> (Father)	13	<i>Aḥad</i> (Single)
4	<i>Dāl</i> (The letter 'D')	14	<i>Wahhāb</i> (Bountiful)
5	<i>Bāb</i> (Gate)	15	<i>Widād</i> (Affection)
6	<i>Wāw</i> (The letter 'W')	16	<i>Badī</i> (Beginning)
7	<i>Abad</i> (Eternity)	17	<i>Bahī</i> (Luminous)
8	<i>Jād</i> (Generosity)	18	<i>Abhā</i> (Most Luminous)
9	<i>Bahā</i> (Splendour)	19	<i>Wāḥid</i> (Unity)
10	<i>Ḥubb</i> (Love)		

In his writings the Bab put special emphasis on the years 9 (*Bahā*') and 19 (*Wāḥid*) following his declaration and linked them to the coming of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. Shoghi Effendi summarizes some of these references as follows:

'In the year nine,' He, referring to the date of the advent of the promised Revelation, has explicitly written, 'ye shall attain unto all good.' 'In the year nine, ye will attain unto the presence of God.' And again: 'After *Hīn* (68)³⁴ a Cause shall be given unto you which ye shall come to know.' 'Ere nine will have elapsed from the inception of this Cause,' He more particularly has stated, 'the realities of the created things will not be made manifest.' . . . 'Wait thou,' is His statement to 'Azīm, 'until nine will have elapsed from the time of the Bayan. Then exclaim: "Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers!"' 'Be attentive,' He, referring in a remarkable passage to the year nineteen, has admonished, 'from the inception of the Revelation till the number of *Wāḥid* (19).' 'The Lord of the Day of Reckoning,' He, even more explicitly, has stated, 'will be manifested at the end of *Wāḥid* (19) and the beginning of eighty (1280 AH).'³⁵

The year nine of the Baha'i era (1852-3 AD), i.e. the year of *Bahā*', is the year in which Baha'u'llah, whom Baha'is believe to be the object of these prophecies, according to his own testimony received his divine revelation while lying in chains in an underground dungeon in Tehran. Another interesting reference to this year can be found in the Bab's Arabic Bayan 6:15: 'Ye should all rise up in respect upon hearing the mention of "Him Whom God shall make manifest"', and ye should watch the difference between the *Qā'im* and the *Qayyūm*, for in the year nine ye shall attain unto all good.'³⁶ The *Qā'im* (he who arises), whom the Bab identified with his own person, is the awaited Mahdi, or return of the Twelfth Imam, of Shi'i Islam. Baha'is believe that the term *Qayyūm* (an emphatic form of *Qā'im* and often translated as 'the Self-Subsisting' by Shoghi Effendi), which is used as an

³⁴ Note by the author: This is a reference to the year 1268 AH (1851-2 AD), which is the year eight of the Baha'i Era. 'After *Hīn*' therefore refers to the year nine after the declaration of the Bab.

³⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974) 29 (transliteration adapted and italics added).

³⁶ Translation adapted from a provisional rendering by Khazeh Fananapazir posted to the Baha'i translation list Tarjuman <<http://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=tarjuman-list>>, 2 December 2003. Reproduced here in an amended version with the permission of the original translator.

attribute of God in the Qur'an, is a reference to Baha'u'llah.³⁷ The difference in numerical value between these two terms is nine.

The first *wāhid* after the Bab's declaration, alluded to in the above assemblage of quotations from Shoghi Effendi, ended in March 1863 and the year 1280 AH began in June of the same year. Baha'u'llah's declaration to his followers assembled in the garden of Najib Pasha, which was later designated by him as the 'Garden of *Riḍwān*' (paradise), took place on the 22 April 1863 and, therefore, fell exactly between these two dates mentioned by the Bab.

'All Things' and the Badi' Calendar

The principle of *kullu shay'* that governs the flow of time on the macrocosmic level of years, decades and centuries also regulates the microcosm of days and months within each year. The new calendar devised by the Bab thus consists of 19 months of 19 days each, thereby forming one *kullu shay'* within each year.³⁸ To constitute a whole solar year, however, 4 or 5 intercalary days need to be added to these 19 months. The Bab himself did not specify where within the year these intercalary days should be placed and, in this way, rendered his calendar practically unusable until the coming of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', who was the only one with the authority to complete the Bab's design. This promised one of the Bab was to complete the Badi' calendar in a similar way as he was expected to conclude the Persian and Arabic Bayan. With omissions like this, the Bab probably aimed to demonstrate that his own revelation and that of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' are essentially one and the same and cannot be separated from each other.³⁹

The name of the Bab's new calendar is also of symbolic significance. As mentioned above, the Arabic word '*Badī'*' can be variously translated as 'first', 'beginning', 'new', or 'wondrous',⁴⁰ and thus connotes the act of divine creation.⁴¹ We have also seen that in Shaykhi cosmology '*al-Badī'*' stands for the Universal Intellect which in turn is often referred to as 'the One' (*Wāhid*). The terms *Wāhid* and *Badī'* are therefore somewhat interchangeable and both signify the Universal Intellect which is the first emanation from the Divine Will. This Divine Will is in turn manifested in the person of the Bab, who is the Primal Point from which all things (*kullu shay'*), including the 'all things' of the Badi' calendar, have been generated.

The 19 Baha'i months are all named after attributes or names of God, which are derived from the dawn prayer that Shi'i Muslims recite during the month of the fast (Ramadan). This

³⁷ See, for example Nabīl, *Dawn-Breakers*, n42. It is interesting to note that this attribute plays a similar role in the authority claims of 'mujaddid' Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi in the 11th century AH. See J. G. J. ter Haar, *Follower and Heir of the Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) as Mystic*, Leiden, 1992, in index under 'qayyūmiya'.

³⁸ The Badi' calendar therefore displays a strong element of fractality with the number 19 being the organizing component on all levels of computation.

³⁹ Saiedi, *Logos*, 127f.

⁴⁰ The Arabic root of the word *Badī'* is *bā'-dāl-'ayn* (B-D-') meaning [he] created, invented, contrived, introduced, said something new, did something for the first time, excelled, etc.

⁴¹ Walbridge, *Sacred Acts*, 193. This is probably why Baha'u'llah gave the name Badi' to Aqa Buzurg Khusrawi, the youth who delivered his letter to Nasiru'd-Din Shah. Baha'u'llah states that he had created Badi' anew in order to fulfil this mission and had sent him out as a ball of fire. See Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh*, vol. 3 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987) 179. Furthermore, Baha'u'llah also used the adjective *Badī'* to describe both his 'wondrous Cause' (*Amr-i Badī'*) and his 'New World Order' (*Nazm-i Badī'*).

prayer is attributed to either the fifth (Muhammad Baqir) or sixth (Ja‘far Sadiq) Imam of Shi‘i Islam. The opening words of this prayer read: ‘O my God! I entreat Thee by Thy most splendid splendour [*Bahā*’], for splendid is all Thy splendour. O my God! I entreat Thee by all Thy splendour. O my God! I entreat Thee by Thy most beautiful beauty [*Jamāl*] . . .’⁴²
The names of the 19 months, which are also the names of the 19 days of each month, are:

1	<i>Bahā</i> ’ (Splendour): 21 March – 8 April	11	<i>Mashiyyat</i> (Will): 27 September – 15 October
2	<i>Jalāl</i> (Glory): 9 – 27 April	12	<i>‘Ilm</i> (Knowledge): 16 October – 3 November
3	<i>Jamāl</i> (Beauty): 28 April – 16 May	13	<i>Quḍrat</i> (Power): 4 – 22 November
4	<i>‘Azamat</i> (Grandeur): 17 May – 4 June	14	<i>Qawl</i> (Speech): 23 November – 11 December
5	<i>Nūr</i> (Light): 5 – 23 June	15	<i>Masā’il</i> (Questions): 12 – 30 December
6	<i>Raḥmat</i> (Mercy): 24 June – 12 July	16	<i>Sharaf</i> (Honour): 31 December – 18 January
7	<i>Kalimāt</i> (Words): 13 – 31 July	17	<i>Sulṭān</i> (Sovereignty): 19 January – 6 February
8	<i>Kamāl</i> (Perfection): 1 – 19 August	18	<i>Mulk</i> (Dominion): 7 – 25 February
9	<i>Asmā</i> ’ (Names): 20 August – 7 September	19	<i>‘Alā</i> ’ (Loftiness): 2 – 20 March
10	<i>‘Izzat</i> (Might): 8 – 26 September		

Being a solar calendar with months named after divine attributes, the Badi‘ calendar is much more similar to the Zoroastrian calendar, which has 12 months bearing the names of angels, than to the lunar calendar of Islam. Muhammad had explicitly forbidden the Arabian practice of intercalation that served to keep the lunar calendar of 12 months in accordance with the solar year. This is why the Islamic year only consists of 354 or 355 days. By reintroducing intercalary days into his religious calendar the Bab therefore asserted the independence of his revelation from that of Muhammad.

The Badi‘ calendar also contains a seven-day week like that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Following Islamic custom, the Baha’i week starts on Saturday, with Friday being the day of rest.⁴³ Each day of the week is again named after a divine attribute, the first three of which are identical to the names of the second, third and eighth month respectively, while the remaining four are unique. The names of the days of the week are:

- (1) Saturday: *Jalāl* (Glory)
- (2) Sunday: *Jamāl* (Beauty)

⁴² Adapted from Walbridge, *Sacred Acts* 185. Imam Rida, the eighth Imam, is believed to have said that the Most Great Name is found in this prayer. See Faizi, *Greatest Name* 6.

⁴³ The Islamic week does not have a designated day of rest, but Friday is the day when Muslims perform their congregational prayer. See Walbridge, *Sacred Acts* 177.

- (3) Monday: *Kamāl* (Perfection)
- (4) Tuesday: *Fiḍāl* (Grace)
- (5) Wednesday: *'Idāl* (Justice)
- (6) Thursday: *Istijlāl* (Majesty)
- (7) Friday: *Istiqlāl* (Independence)

Similar to Islamic as well as Judaic practice, the Babi/Baha'i day starts at sunset.

The Significance of the Seven-day Week

The seven-day week finds its 'origin' in the Old Testament's Book of Genesis in which God is said to have created the world in six days, after which He rested on the seventh. These seven days of creation mentioned in the Bible and the Qur'an are linked by Baha'u'llah to the appearance of cycles of Manifestations. In an interpretation of the Qur'anic version of this account of creation⁴⁴ he thus states that the coming of the Bab signified the rolling up, like a scroll, of the 'heavens' of the religions 'raised in the Qur'an'.⁴⁵ According to Shi'i Islam, the number of 'prophets endowed with constancy' (Manifestations) that were sent down to earth by God is six: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.⁴⁶ This cycle of six divine Manifestations is signified for Baha'u'llah by the first six days of creation. The Bab is therefore the seventh Manifestation of God and above and beyond that also the completion of the entire six-thousand-year-long cycle of divine revelation that started with Adam.⁴⁷

This same principle of religious cycles is also signified for the Bab and Baha'u'llah by the letter *Wāw* of the Arabic alphabet, a letter on which Shaykh Ahmad had placed great emphasis.⁴⁸ If spelled out, this letter is written as *Wāw-Alif-Wāw* (W-A-W). Having a numerical value of six, the first one of these two *Wāws* symbolizes for the Bab and Baha'u'llah the six Manifestations that appeared before the Bab. The Bab himself is signified by the second letter, the 'upright *Alif* (*al-alifu'l-qā'ima*), while Baha'u'llah's revelation, being as potent as those of the first six Manifestations together, is referred to by the second *Wāw*.⁴⁹ This is why Baha'u'llah states in the *Kitab-i Aqdas*: 'Well is it with him whom God hath aided to recognize the "Six" [Baha'u'llah] raised up by virtue of this "Upright Alif" [the Bab].'⁵⁰ The seven days of creation, and by implication possibly also the seven days of the week, are thus a symbol for the religious cycle begun by Adam and completed by the Bab.

Some additional clues relating to the significance of the number seven can be found in one of the Bab's tablets in which he gives instructions on how to construct a circular

⁴⁴ See for example Qur'an 50:38; cf. 7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4.

⁴⁵ MacEoin, *Rituals* 148.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ This schema only includes the major religions accepted by Shi'i Islam and therefore does not take into account figures such as Krishna, Buddha and Zoroaster, which are also regarded as divine manifestations in the Baha'i writings.

⁴⁸ Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1992) note 172, p. 240.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid* 75-6.

talisman called *Da'ira*.⁵¹ This *Da'ira* consists of seven concentric circles, each of which is divided into 19 sections. These sections contain various signs, letters and words, many of which are derived from the Bismi'llah. In the centre of these circles a square consisting of seven by seven compartments or 'houses' (*bayt*) is located.⁵² As it is thus constructed upon basically the same elements as the Badi' calendar, a study of the Bab's *Da'ira* might also shed some light on the significance of various aspects of this calendar itself.

In his instructions on how to construct such a talisman the Bab states:

. . . and the seven circles are together the light of the 'Night of Decree', for the geometry of the shape of the Decree is this: 304; and when you put the two of them [i.e. the 3 and 4] together, there appears the number seven. What is written there is what has been decreed here. And these are the gates of all good . . . for the seven letters have been sent down in the four words and when you join it there appears the number of the word *Huwa* ['He' = 11 = 7+4], for that is the mention of the 'Seal of the Point' from the beginning of its mystery in the letters of the *Bismi'llāh* until the end of its descent unto its centre, which is the Point itself. . .⁵³

The 'Night of Decree' (*Laylatu'l-Qadr*) is the night in which, according to the Qur'an, Muhammad received his divine revelation from the angel Gabriel. As indicated in the above quotation, the numerical value of the word '*Qadr*' is 304, the cross total of which is seven. For this reason the Bab states that the light of this night is represented by the seven circles of his talisman. The 'seven letters' are probably a reference to the Bab himself whose name 'Ali Muhammad consist of seven Arabic letters while the 'four words' might signify the words of the *Bismi'llah*, which are four in number. Referring to the four words and 19 letters of this phrase, the Bab has therefore stated that the entire structure of the Qur'an and of the Islamic dispensation is based upon the identity of four and 19.⁵⁴

The Bab's assertion that 'the seven letters have been sent down in the four words' might thus imply that he (the 'seven letters') has revealed himself ('been sent down') through the four words of the Bismi'llah. This interpretation appears reasonable if we consider that the structure of the Bismi'llah also constitutes the underlying principle and order of his own revelation and dispensation.

The ultimate origin of both the Bab and his revelation is God or the 'Seal of the Point'. Being the creator of the numbers 7 (representing the Bab) and 4 (ostensibly symbolizing the Bab's revelation through the structure of the Bismi'llah), God is thus signified by the number 11, which is the total of both these numbers. As implied by the above quotation, this number thus descends from God in the form of 4 and 7 until it reaches the Point, which signifies the Bab as the revealer of divine verses and the origin of all things.

Being a reference to both the divine decree as sent down upon the Manifestations of God and the person of the Bab himself, the number 7 might therefore signify these Manifestations in their role as the recipients of the divine decree or revelation. In this

⁵¹ See Mirza Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani, *Asrār al-athār* vol. 4 (Tehran: Mu'assisih Millī Matbū'at Amrī, 1967-73) 115f. A provisional translation of this text is published in MacEoin, *Rituals* 101f.

⁵² A representation of such a *Da'ira*, together with a pentagramic talisman called Haykal, can be viewed online at <http://wilmetteinstitute.org/jw/daira-haykal1_full.jpg> (cited 12 January 2004).

⁵³ Adapted from MacEoin, *Rituals* 104.

⁵⁴ Saiedi, *Logos* 295.

context it is, moreover, of interest to note that the title Baha'u'llah as well as his birth name Husayn 'Ali both also have 7 Arabic letters.⁵⁵

Reiterating a Shi'i concept, the Bab and Baha'u'llah assert, furthermore, that 'the completion of every existence [is] realized through the 7 stages of Will (*mashiyyat*), Purpose (*irādih*), Predestination (*qadar*), Fate (*qadā*), Permission (*idhn*), Fixed time (*ajal*), and the Book (*kitāb*).'⁵⁶ In this schema we can thus discern another indication of the significance of the number 7 in the process of divine revelation. It seems to be through these 7 stages that God's will is communicated to the divine Manifestation in order to be finally revealed to humankind in the form of 'the Book'.

In such a numerical representation of the act of divine revelation, God Himself is thus represented by the number 11 (*Huwa*), while the process of the communication of the Divine Will to the person of the Manifestation of God and the latter's role as the recipient of this revelation appear to be symbolized by the number 7. In his function as the source of revelation in the human world, however, the divine Manifestation is, as explained above, signified by the number one. This number is in turn represented by the Point from which all things are created through the structure of *wāhids* (19) and *kullu shay*'s (361). While the number 19, through the principle of *kullu shay*', thus governs the process of the Bab's (as well as Muhammad's) revelation to humanity, the number 7 appears to play a significant role in the process of the communication of divine revelation to the Manifestations of God. Together, the two principles of 7 and 19 might therefore describe the entire process of divine revelation, which could be another reason why both of these numbers feature so prominently in the Bab's *Da'ira* as well as the Badi' calendar. Another indication of the significance of the number seven can be found in the Bab's interpretation of the 7 verses of the *Fātiḥah*. In a schema similar to that of the association of the primary *wāhid* of both the Islamic and the Babi dispensations with the 19 letters of the Bismi'llah, the seven verses of this surih are linked by him to the 14 'Pure' or 'Infallible Ones' (*Ma'sūmūn*) of Shi'i Islam: Muhammad, Fatimih and the 12 Imams. This association works for the Bab because these 14 figures only have seven different names, as 4 of them are called Muhammad, 4 are 'Ali and 2 are Hasan, while the remaining 4 (Fatimih, Husayn, Ja'far and Musa) have unique names.⁵⁷ Through this pattern of association the Bab offers a novel interpretation of one of the more common names of the Qur'an's opening chapter, namely 'the seven doubled' (*as-sab' al-mathānī*).⁵⁸ Linking this pattern back to the process of creation, he then also states that one of the results of this process is that 7 becomes 14.⁵⁹

Considering that the Bab also associated the 7 days of the week with these 14 *Ma'sūmūn* in several of his writings,⁶⁰ the holy family of Islam, which in Shaykhi thought symbolically represents the Divine Will,⁶¹ therefore forms a link between the 7 days of the Baha'i week and the first surah of the Qur'an. As shown in the quotation from Imam 'Ali

⁵⁵ This is why 'Abdu'l-Baha states in one of his tablets that 'the seven spirits and the seven stars mentioned in the Apocalypse refer to the seven letters of the alphabet which constitute the Most Great Name'. (From a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 7 August 1978.)

⁵⁶ Provisional translation by Keven Brown from a tablet of Baha'u'llah published in 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavarī, *Mā'idih-yi Āsmānī*, vol. 8 (Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'āt-i Amrī, 1972-4) 191. Translation available at <<http://www.sisqtel.net/~kevenbrown/sevenstages.html>> (cited 12 January 2004).

⁵⁷ Lawson, 'Interpretation' 26.

⁵⁸ *ibid* 27.

⁵⁹ *ibid*.

⁶⁰ Personal communication from Vahid J. Brown, 20 December 2003.

⁶¹ Lawson, 'Interpretation' 27.

cited above, this opening chapter in turn ‘contains, *in potentia*, all creation’.⁶² Such a pattern of association would thus, in several ways, be similar to that of the correlation between the primary *Wāhids* of the Islamic and Babi dispensations with the days of the month and the months of the year, as well as the letters of the Bismi’llah. Owing to a lack of additional textual evidence for the existence of a more developed schema of this kind, however, I cannot, at this stage, ascertain whether the Bab actually intended to establish such a pattern of symbolic association.

Some further indications of the importance the Bab placed on the number 7 are the mention he makes in his writings of 7 spiritual grades or levels (*marātib*) each occupied by a different people (*ahl*), of 7 hells each being the shadow of a paradise (plus the eighth paradise of ‘the Absolute’ which has no infernal counterpart), 7 classes of people, 7 grades of lordship (*rubūbīyat*), as well as 7 heavens and 7 earths.⁶³

In concluding this discussion of the significance of the number 7 in the Bab’s writings it will be of interest to note that while the ‘law of 19’ features especially prominently in his later works, the principles of 7 and 14, which appear to be mainly based on the Bab’s interpretation of *as-sab’ al-mathānī*, are mostly of importance in his earlier texts. Many of the above-mentioned heptadic structures were indeed introduced in a work titled *Tafsīr Sūratu’l-Baqara* (Commentary on the Surah of the Cow), which even predates the Bab’s declaration to Mulla Husayn in 1844.⁶⁴ A number of the early writings of the Bab that were revealed after his declaration are, furthermore, based on a 14-fold structure, and in his *Khuṭbah Dhikriyyih* (Sermon of Remembrance), he not only confirms this fact but also dedicates his first 14 works to the 14 *Ma’sūmūn*.⁶⁵

One could thus state that the order in which the Bab revealed his various writings seems to reflect his perception of the processes of creation and divine revelation in general. As described above, in this act of God’s revelation to humankind the number 7, which largely derives its significance from the 7 verses of the *Fātiḥah*, appears before the product of this process is made manifest. This number is then ‘doubled’ and revealed to humankind in the form of 14, which symbolizes the 14 Pure Ones, before it finds its final and complete expression in the number 19 signifying the primary *Wāhid* of the Islamic as well as of the Babi dispensation. Possibly in an effort to mirror this pattern, the Bab thus placed great emphasis on the number 7 before the time of his declaration, then structured his revelation according to the number 14, before finally making the principle of 19 the underlying and organizing element of his dispensation.

The Coming of ‘Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest’

The details of the Badi’ calendar were introduced by the Bab in a number of his later writings, most notably the Persian Bayan and the *Kitāb al-Asmā’* (*Book of Names*). Consisting of 19 *wāhids* of 19 chapters each, this latter work also follows in its structure the law of *kullu shay’*. Like many other writings of the Bab, including the Persian Bayan itself,⁶⁶ the main theme of the *Kitāb al-Asmā’* is the coming of ‘Him Whom God shall make

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid* 31f.

⁶⁴ *ibid* 25.

⁶⁵ Personal communication from J. Vahid Brown, 20 December 2003.

⁶⁶ The Persian Bayan mentions ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’ more than 300 times. See Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) 98.

manifest'. Preparing the Bab's followers for the appearance of this promised figure was one of the Bab's major objectives, and this overall aim of his ministry also appears to underlie the design of the Badi' calendar. In the Persian Bayan 5:3 the Bab states:

. . . the Lord of the Universe hath created all the years by His command, and by the manifestation of the *Bayān* hath appointed 'the Number of All Things' [361] as the number of every year, and hath appointed it [to consist of] nineteen months, and hath appointed each month nineteen days . . . And He hath called the first month *Bahā'* and the last *Alā'* . . .

And the first month is the month of the 'Point', and around it revolve the months of 'the Living' [18]; and it is like unto the sun amidst the months, the other months being like mirrors wherein shineth forth the light of that month, and wherein naught is seen save that month. And it hath been named by the Lord 'the month of *Bahā'*' in this sense, that the brightness of all the months is in that month. And [God] hath set it apart for 'Him Whom God shall manifest', and hath assigned every day of it to one of the 'Letters of the Living'. And the first day [thereof], which is the *Naw-Rūz*, is the day of 'there is no god but God'; the like of that day is as the 'Point' in the Bayan, from which all are created, and unto which all return.⁶⁷ And He hath made the manifestation thereof in the 'Point of the Bayan', the 'Person of the Seven Letters',⁶⁸ and hath made it the throne of 'Him Whom God shall manifest' in this manifestation.⁶⁹

The structure of the Badi' calendar thus reflects and represents the primary *Wāḥid* of the Babi dispensation on two levels: on the level of the months, the first month (*Bahā'*) signifies the Point⁷⁰ (i.e. the Bab) while the remaining 18 months symbolize the Letters of the Living. The same schema is then repeated on the level of the days of each month, where the first day (the day of *Bahā'*) again stands for the Bab while the other days are similarly dedicated to the 18 Letters of the Living. Both the first month of the year and the first day of each month, i.e. the month of *Bahā'* as well as the day of *Bahā'*, however, are not only dedicated to the Bab but also to 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. This denotes on the one hand that the revelation of the Bab and that of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' are essentially one and the same and on the other hand suggests that the latter promised Manifestation is expected to appear in the name of *Bahā'*. In the context of the association of the Point with the name *Bahā'* and the coming of Him Whom God shall make manifest it is also of interest

⁶⁷ This idea of the Point 'from which all are created, and unto which all return' is expressed mathematically through the concept of *kullu shay'*. The Point is represented by the number one, which is the origin of all numbers. As explained above, from this number the numbers 19 (*wāḥid*) and 361 (*kullu shay'*) are generated. Both of these numbers have a cross total of ten and the essence of ten is one again, so that in the end 'All Things' have returned to the Point. (I am indebted to David Levick for pointing this out to me.)

⁶⁸ As mentioned above, the Bab's name, 'Ali Muhammad, has seven letters in Arabic.

⁶⁹ 'Abdu'l-Baha, *A Traveller's Narrative: Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (trans. E. G. Browne, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891, reprinted 1975) 421f (transliteration adapted and italics added).

⁷⁰ As indicated above, the term 'Point' signifies the Divine Unity and Universal Intellect as manifested in the person of the manifestation of God. The day of Naw-Ruz is thus also dedicated to the Unity of God, which is evident from the Bab's assertion quoted above that it is the day of 'there is no God but God'. Probably also for that reason every Babi was to recite 361 times the verse 'God beareth witness that there is no God but Him, the Ineffable, the Self-Subsistent' during the night of Naw-Ruz; and during the day, 'God beareth witness that there is no God but Him, the Precious, the Beloved'. See Walbridge, *Sacred Acts* 215.

to note the presence of a tradition attributed to Imam Ja‘far Sadiq which reads: ‘The *bā*’ of the *Bismi’llāh* is the glory of God (*Bahā’u’llāh*).’⁷¹

‘Abdu’l-Baha confirms the Bab’s above identification of the day of Naw-Ruz,⁷² which falls on the day of Baha’ of the month of Baha’, with the revelation of Him Whom God shall make manifest. For ‘Abdu’l-Baha, who obviously regards Baha’u’llah as this promised one of the Bab, the day of Baha’u’llah’s revelation marks the beginning of a new era in the religious history of mankind in a similar way in which the day of Naw-Ruz is the first day of the new year and thus signifies the start of a new cycle in nature:

The rising of the sun at the equinox is the symbol of life, and likewise it is the symbol of the divine Manifestation of God, for the rising of the sun of truth in the heaven of divine bounty established the signal of life for the world. The human reality begins to live, our thoughts are transformed and our intelligence is quickened. The sun of truth bestows eternal life, just as the solar sun is the cause of terrestrial life.⁷³

The other month mentioned in the above quotation from the Persian Bayan is the month of ‘Alā’ (Loftiness), which is the last month of the Baha’i year. In the Baha’i writings the name ‘Alā’ is associated with the person of the Bab, which is evident from commonly used titles such as ‘His Holiness the Exalted One’ (*Ḥaḍrat-i ‘Alā’*).⁷⁴ This month was designated by the Bab as the month of the fast.⁷⁵ Baha’u’llah accepted this placement of the fast⁷⁶ but changed some of the specific regulations related to it.⁷⁷

In the writings of the Bab, Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha, the fast is described as a symbol of restraint, detachment and spiritual purification:

. . . this material fast is an outer token of the spiritual fast; it is a symbol of self-restraint, the withholding of oneself from all appetites of the self, taking on the

⁷¹ Sayyid Hashim al-Bahrani, *Kitāb al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1 (Tihran: Aftab, 1955) 43f. Trans. adapted from Lawson, ‘Reading’. Although such an interpretation is not given in the Baha’i writings or Islamic literature, the number of letters in the Bismi’llah (19), which is the organizing element of the Badi’ calendar, can in itself also be read as a reference to the name Baha’u’llah, as it consists of the two numbers: one, which signifies the Divine Unity and thus God (*Allāh*), and nine, which is the numerical equivalent of *bahā’* (glory). Put together, these two words form the name Baha’u’llah (Glory of God). The same holds true for the number 361, as three plus six equals nine (*bahā’*) while one, again, stands for Allah. (I am indebted to Grover Gonzales for making me aware of this.)

⁷² Naw-Ruz, which falls on the day of the vernal equinox (usually 21 March) and thus marks the beginning of the spring season in the northern hemisphere, is the oldest New Year’s Day in recorded history. It has been celebrated for over five thousand years in some parts of the Middle East.

⁷³ Adapted from a talk given by ‘Abdu’l-Baha on 21 March 1913, published in translation in *Star of the West*, 5, no.1, 4.

⁷⁴ Walbridge, *Sacred Acts* 190.

⁷⁵ *ibid* 70.

⁷⁶ According to the Bab, the laws of the Bayan were dependent upon the acceptance of Him Whom God would make manifest. See Hasan M. Balyuzi, *The Bāb: The Herald of the Day of Days* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973) 154.

⁷⁷ The Babi fast was, for example, compulsory for believers from the age of 11, which is numerically equivalent to, and thus signifies, the word *Huwa* (He = God), until the age of 42, which stands for the word *balā* (yea!), indicating humanity’s response to the divine covenant. Baha’u’llah changed this law making the fast binding for believers between the age of 15 and 70. See Walbridge, *Sacred Acts* 70.

characteristics of the spirit, being carried away by the breathings of heaven and catching fire from the love of God.⁷⁸

And again:

These are the days whereon Thou hast bidden all men to observe the fast, that through it they may purify their souls and rid themselves of all attachment to any one but Thee . . . Cleanse Thou by its means the hearts of Thy servants . . .⁷⁹

Being the last month of the year, the month of 'Alā' therefore serves as a period during which the believers cleanse themselves from the burdens of past attachments and appetites and thereby purify their hearts in preparation for the coming of the next year.

The last 19 days (*wāḥid*) of each year are thus associated with the Bab and constitute a period of preparation for the next cycle (year), while the first day of the new year signifies the coming of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' in the name of Baha'. This seems to suggest that the month of the fast symbolizes the first *wāḥid* (i.e. 19 years) of the Babi/Baha'i era, the end of which, according to the Bab, would witness the revelation of his promised one.

During these first 19 years after the Bab's declaration, which, for Baha'is, mark the duration of the Babi dispensation, thousands of Babis gave up their rank, possessions and often even their lives for their new faith, thus demonstrating the ultimate degree of self-sacrifice and detachment. The month of the fast might therefore constitute something like a symbolic re-enactment of this early period of Babi/Baha'i history.

In a similar way in which the fast prepares the believer for the start of the new year, this first *wāḥid* of the Baha'i era, according to the Bab, served the purpose of preparing his followers for the coming of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' and thus the beginning of a new religious cycle. The Bab therefore states that the faith of his followers is dependent upon the acceptance of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' and begs the latter to grant a period of 19 years to prepare them for his revelation:

I, indeed, beg to address Him whom God shall make manifest, by Thy leave in these words: 'Shouldst thou dismiss the entire company of the followers of the Bayan in the Day of the Latter Resurrection by a mere sign of Thy finger even while still a suckling babe, Thou wouldst indeed be praised in Thy indication. And though no doubt is there about it, do thou grant a respite of nineteen years as a token of Thy favour so that those who have embraced this cause may be graciously rewarded by Thee. Thou art verily the Lord of grace abounding.'⁸⁰

The Completion of the Badi' Calendar

During the early years of the Babi/Baha'i era there was considerable confusion about the proper use of the Badi' calendar. As already mentioned, the Bab had not specified the placement of the intercalary days and it was also not always quite clear which name corresponded to which month and with which year the calendar was supposed to have

⁷⁸ 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of the 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978) 70.

⁷⁹ Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1987) 59.

⁸⁰ Bab, *Selections 7*.

begun. The Azalis⁸¹ had, for example, placed the intercalary days at the end of the year just before Naw-Ruz, and some Baha'is believed that 1863, the year of Baha'u'llah's declaration, marked the commencement of the calendar. Near the beginning of 1870 Baha'u'llah therefore instructed Nabil A'zam to prepare a summary of the Badi' calendar in order to clarify some of these questions. Baha'u'llah himself then specified that the calendar was to begin with Naw-Ruz of the year 1844, the year of the Bab's declaration. In the *Kitab-i Aqdas* he, furthermore, later ruled that the intercalary days should be placed before the month of the fast and designated them as 'Ayyam-i Ha', the 'Days of (the letter) *hā*'. These days were to be dedicated to hospitality and charity or, as explained by Shoghi Effendi, to the giving of gifts:⁸²

We have ordained that these, amid all nights and days, shall be the manifestations of the letter *Hā*, and thus they have not been bounded by the limits of the year and its months. It behoveth the people of *Bahā*', throughout these days, to provide good cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy, and with joy and exultation to hail and glorify their Lord, to sing His praise and magnify His Name; and when they end – these days of giving that precede the season of restraint – let them enter upon the Fast.⁸³

The letter *hā*, in the term 'Ayyam-i Ha', can have a number of different meanings. Having a numerical value of five it could on the one hand be meant to indicate the highest possible number of intercalary days.⁸⁴ On the other hand, the number five is also associated with the numerically equivalent title 'Bab'. Being shaped like a human body, the five-pointed star, which the Bab called *Haykal* (temple), is, furthermore, a symbol for the human frame of the Manifestation of God and is thus, according to Shoghi Effendi, the symbol not only of the Babi but also of the Baha'i Faith.⁸⁵ Moreover, the letter *hā* also stands for the terms *Huwa* (He), which signifies God,⁸⁶ and *Huwiyyah* (essence, ipseity) denoting the unknowable Divine Essence.⁸⁷

When Baha'u'llah states in the above quotation that these days 'shall be the manifestations of the letter *hā*, and thus they have not been bounded by the limits of the year and its months', this might therefore indicate that while all the other days and months of the year are dedicated to divine attributes, the days of *Hā* signify the unknowable essence of Divinity (*Huwiyyah*). In the same way in which this Divine Essence is outside the range and limits of human understanding these days are, then, not part of the *kullu shay'* (all things) of the year and thus beyond the limits of time and names.

If we try to place the Festival of Ayyam-i Ha into the framework of the interpretation of the Badi' calendar as a symbolic re-enactment of early Babi/Baha'i history suggested above, it would denote the time immediately preceding the declaration of the Bab. According to

⁸¹ Followers of Mirza Yahya (Subh-i Azal), a half-brother and the main rival and adversary of Baha'u'llah.

⁸² Walbridge, *Sacred Acts* 182.

⁸³ Baha'ullah, *Aqdas* 25 (transliteration adapted and italics added).

⁸⁴ *ibid* 179.

⁸⁵ *Lights of Guidance: a Reference File*. Comp. by Helen Hornby (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983) 110.

⁸⁶ Walbridge, *Sacred Acts* 216.

⁸⁷ Baha'u'llah, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2002) 237n.

Amanat,⁸⁸ it was during this time, especially the year before his declaration to Mulla Husayn, that the Bab started to make to his family members the first allusions regarding the claims he was later to announce publicly. We can thus assume that this was the time when the Bab first came to the conviction that he had been chosen by God to be the bearer of a new divine revelation.

In the light of this interpretation we could therefore argue that the letter *hā*, because of its numerical value of five and its association with the *Haykal* (temple), signifies the person of the Bab as the recipient of divine revelation and at the same time, owing to its association with God (*Huwa*) and the Divine Essence (*Huwiyyah*), symbolizes the Divinity which is the source of this revelation. The dreams and visions that caused the Bab to become convinced of his divinely ordained mission were, then, not part of this world in the same way as the days of *Hā* are not part of the 19 months of the year and thus beyond ‘all things’. In this context it is also of interest to note that the phrase ‘*Ayyam-i Ha*’ is numerically equivalent to 59, which, according to the Islamic calendar, corresponds to the year before the Bab’s declaration.⁸⁹

By specifying the day of Naw-Ruz 1844 as the beginning of the Badi‘ calendar and by placing the intercalary days before the month of the Fast and designating them as *Ayyam-i Ha*, Baha’u’llah, therefore, completed this calendar in such a way that its structure now reflects the chronology of some of the major events associated with the early years of the Babi/Baha’i era. Whether this was done intentionally or not I cannot, at this stage, ascertain; but the precision of this match between the organization of the Badi‘ calendar and the sequence of events surrounding the birth of the Babi and Baha’i religions suggests that it is not a mere coincidence.

Conclusion

The Badi‘ calendar, as devised by the Bab and completed by Baha’u’llah, constitutes much more than just a system designed to help calculate time, structure and organize human lives and commemorate events of religious significance. Being founded upon a number of Islamic and, particularly, Shaykhi ideas and theories that were adopted, expanded and elaborated upon by the Bab, it expresses, through its structure and organization, a wealth of symbolic allusions to metaphysical, cosmological and theological concepts of the Babi and Baha’i religions.

Furthermore, it appears to reflect and re-enact symbolically certain of the more significant events and phases in the early history of these two religions and gives some indication of their intrinsic connectedness and interdependence as perceived by the Bab and Baha’u’llah.

⁸⁸ Amanat, *Resurrection* 149f.

⁸⁹ The Bab’s declaration took place in the year 1260 AH.