

BAHA'I STUDIES REVIEW

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EDITORIAL

With the previous issue of the *Baha'i Studies Review*, there was a change of editor, and I feel that it is fitting for me to write an editorial expressing my appreciation of the previous editors, Dr Seena Fazel and Dr John Danesh, and acknowledging the debt that I owe – and indeed the whole field of Baha'i studies owes – to them.

They initiated the *Baha'i Studies Review* as an organ of the Association of Baha'i Studies (English-Speaking Europe) and shaped it as it grew from an uncertain beginning to a well-edited, well-produced journal in which some of the best research that has gone on in the field of Baha'i studies has been published – as witnessed by the citation analyses that Fazel and Danesh have carried out.¹

Many scholars in this field can bear witness to the creative and persistent way in which Fazel and Danesh pursued potential authors, made constructive suggestions for papers that each scholar could write and then held them to the tight deadlines that such a journal demands. It is safe to say that without their hard work generating material for this journal, it would have withered on the vine owing to the immature state of Baha'i studies and the paucity of work of sufficiently high quality for publication. They helped to nurse the feeble infant journal into health and stimulated its growth to its present flourishing state.

The present editorial team and editorial board hope to pick up where Fazel and Danesh have left off and take the journal forward with the same momentum that the previous editors have built up. The *Baha'i Studies Review* will continue to publish papers that can broadly be said to constitute both pure and applied Baha'i studies. The aim is to produce a journal that is of a high intellectual and academic standard such that it will add prestige to the papers published in it and also be informative and interesting to the non-specialist but informed reader.

In quest of this goal, I would like to invite researchers and scholars to submit suitable papers for consideration but to bear in mind that, as we only publish one issue a year, we are unlikely to be able to publish everything that we receive even if it is of a high standard. Please feel free to send comments on each issue of the journal and also suggestions for its improvement.

Moojan Momen

¹ Seena Fazel and John Danesh, 'Baha'i scholarship', *Baha'i Studies Review* 5.1 (1995) 13-26, and Seena Fazel, 'Contemporary developments in Baha'i studies', *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 7.1 (2003).

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The Bab's Stay in Kashan: A Historiographical Analysis of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* Based on the Kashan Pericope

KAVIAN MILANI

Abstract

The Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Kāf has been at the centre of many debates in Babi and Baha'i history and historiography since it was first brought to public attention in 1893. Even to this date most exposés and attacks on the Baha'i Faith rely heavily on this book. Therefore the authenticity, authorship, historical reliability of the text and its relevance are of both academic and apologetic importance for contemporary Baha'i scholarship. This article seeks to challenge the historically unnecessary tie to the martyred Haji Mirza Jānī through an examination of the stay of the Bab in Kashan as gleaned from the primary data provided by different sources. The synoptic examination of such a small episode is a useful way of bringing out some of the hidden traits of each manuscript author or manuscript tradition. The Babi texts developed out of, and responded to, the apologetic needs of the community of faith. A study of the Kashan event shows that neither Haji Mirza Jani nor Dhabih (his brother) could have been involved in the writing of the Nuqtat al-Kaf, given its highly deficient treatment of the one significant episode in which they would have been most directly involved. The provenance and authenticity of the book can then be better assessed. A great deal of the material in the Nuqtat al-Kaf is indeed early and useful, and it may have been part of an earlier Babi oral tradition, developing alongside the changing theological and apologetic needs of the early Babi community. Until recently, the absence of a properly identifiable manuscript tradition has further limited the search for the earlier versions of the narrative, adding to the uncertainty of the accuracy of the published version. Given the limitations in available manuscripts of the Nuqtat al-Kaf, all conclusions must be regarded as speculative, pending further research and the detailed examination of discovered manuscripts.

The *Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Kāf*¹ has been at the centre of a debate in Babi and Baha'i history ever since its publication in 1910. The narrative history, discovered by Edward Granville Browne in 1892 at the Bibliothèque Nationale, was identified in 1893 as the long lost early narrative by Haji Mirza Jani Kashani (d. 1852, Tehran) written around 1851-52. The authenticity, authorship and historical reliability of the text and the importance attached to it in the writings of Edward Granville Browne were strongly contested by contemporary Baha'i apologists. More recently, beginning with the publication of H. M. Balyuzi's *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith*,² that debate entered the realm of academic

¹ Haji Mirza Jani, *Kitāb-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kāf* (ed. E. G. Browne), E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, vol. 15, (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1910). In this paper, *Nuqtat al-Kaf* refers to the work in general, *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* refers to this book published by Browne. I am particularly grateful to William McCants and Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

² London: George Ronald, 1970.

discourse on Babi and Baha'i history and historiography. The current academic consensus is that the book is an early source for Babi history, while acknowledging the possibility of some later distortions. This study will focus on one minor episode in the life of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi, known as the Bab, through the lens of multiple primary sources and will demonstrate, from the internal evidence present in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, that while containing early material, it is probably not at all the work of Mirza Jani. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is probably part of a family of Babi histories (and only remotely related to the *New History*³) which form a manuscript tradition with multiple redactions.

The Kashan episode is of particular value for a comparative study of Babi sources. In short, with the death of the governor of Isfahan – Manuchihr Khan, the Mu'tamad ad-Dawlih – in the winter of 1847, the Bab lost his powerful protector and the last period of relative ease in his life came to an end. Gurgin Khan, the nephew of the late governor, and the deputy-governor, discovered shortly thereafter that the Bab had not been sent to the Imperial Court in Tehran as had been surmised. In fact Manuchihr Khan had secluded the Bab in his private residence, the 'Imarat-i Khurshid, waiting for an opportune moment to introduce his guest to the monarch. Upon receipt of this news, Muhammad Shah issued an order summoning the Bab to Tehran. Gurgin Khan arranged for the Bab to be sent to Tehran with a company of escort guards led by Muhammad Big Chaparchi. En route to Tehran the company arrived in Kashan, where they stayed for a few nights. The Bab's short stay in Kashan provides an interesting opportunity to study a number of sources on early Babi history and historiography.

The events of the Kashan stay have been narrated in a number of primary and secondary sources. Three general Babi primary sources that cover the Kashan stay are the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, *Tarikh-i Jadid* (the shorter version of the *New History* in Persian), and *The New History of Mirza 'Ali Muhammad the Bab* (the longer version of the previous book translated into English and annotated by E. G. Browne).⁴ Nabil-i-Zarandi, whose narrative account of early Babi history has been translated into English as the *Dawn-Breakers*, devotes one full chapter to the Kashan episode.⁵ Another primary source of importance is Ahmad Yazdi's memoirs as he was an eyewitness to the Bab's stay in his city.⁶ Further critical evidence can be found in the historical narrative of Haji Muhammad Isma'il Dhabih Kashani (Mirza Jani's brother) which is in the form of a *Mathnavi* that contains important details lacking in other sources.⁷ The *Tarikh-i Samandar* is a well-known history of the Babi and Baha'i religions that covers this episode rather superficially, but it is nevertheless important as it provides a relatively

³ Mirza Husayn Hamadani, *The New History of Mīrzā 'Alī Muhammad, the Bāb* (trans. and ed. Edward G. Browne), Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1980.

⁴ Hamadani, *New History* 213-15. The *Tarikh-i Jadid* is an important source based on earlier documents, compiled by Mirza Husayn Hamadani before 1880. It was translated into English by E. G. Browne and it was published in 1893. Hamadani's history exists in a number of manuscripts. I have used two manuscripts, a longer one, which has been translated into English by E. G. Browne, and a shorter Persian manuscript in my possession. There are a number of manuscripts of the *Tarikh-i Jadid* (see Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*, E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1992, 153-71). I have not been able to examine one manuscript of particular importance for the purposes of this paper, and that is the one located in the Cama Oriental Library, Bombay. This manuscript may be an earlier one than the ones examined here and therefore an important source in future studies of Babi history and manuscript development.

⁵ Nabil [Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabī's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation* (trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970) 217-22.

⁶ See 'Abd al-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, *Muḥādirāt* (2 vols., Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i Verlag, 1987) 653-61.

⁷ The relevant parts of the historical *Mathnavi* are cited in Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, *'Ahd-i A'lā* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) 241-5.

early Baha'i account.⁸ Two secondary sources are also germane to this study, the *Zuhūr al-Haqq* (vol. 2)⁹ and the *Kawākib ad-Durriyyih*.¹⁰ While, strictly speaking, these two latter books are secondary sources, they nevertheless introduce and synthesize data from a number of primary sources. The most detailed examination and reconstruction of the Kashan stay among the secondary sources occur in *Resurrection and Renewal* by Abbas Amanat and *Hadrat-i Bab* by Nosratollah Muhammad-Hussein.

The historian's mandate is to reconstruct history and bring new insights from its analysis. In so doing one distinguishes between the 'event' itself, the 'data' and the 'reconstructed event'. Clearly no historical event can be fully reconstructed, and the historian's task is to reconstruct the surviving evidence, given this limitation. It is not too difficult to reconstruct the Kashan stay of the Bab, at least in its main outline. In fact the Kashan event can be studied as a pericope.¹¹ The Kashan event can then be reconstructed, not only as an end in itself, but also as an attempt to compare and contrast the sources, and comment in a historiographical vein on the authors and narrators of the accounts as primary transmitters of data. The conclusions of such a process will then open further debates in Babi historiography. The Kashan episode is an appropriate choice for such an analysis as it provides a sufficiently minute event with adequate sources that permit a comparative historiographical survey. This study will, in particular, critique the current academic consensus surrounding the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. It will be maintained that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, while an early and important source, was probably not authored by its alleged author Haji Mirza Jani. Based on internal evidence, the authorship of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* should be reconsidered. It goes without saying that all conclusions remain highly tentative until all relevant manuscripts are located and fully interrogated.¹²

The Kashan Event

The Bab probably arrived in Kashan just before Naw-Ruz 1847. Given the nature of the journey from Isfahan, and the haste with which it was occasioned, the Bab suffered much en route, as he was without adequate preparation in terms of food, and he was without a steed. The escorts sought forcibly to obtain a steed for the Bab from the villagers and peasants they encountered on the way, but the Bab was disinclined to allow such methods to be used in order to obtain a horse. Sources differ, but reportedly either Haji Mirza Jani or his brother Dhabih Kashani had had a dream the night before the Bab's arrival, in which they were informed of the Bab's arrival and were bidden to make preparations to receive him. The Bab and his escort guards were met by Mirza Jani and possibly one other Babi at the 'Ata Gate of Kashan. The chiefs of the company of guards were bribed, to entice them to stay in Kashan and to release the prisoner to Mirza Jani for a few days. The ancient Iranian festival of Naw-Ruz was observed with Mirza Jani and others.

⁸ Shaykh Kazim Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar va Mulḥaqqāt*. (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974) 222-3.

⁹ Fadil Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Haqq* vol. 2 (<http://www2h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol4/2tzh>) 134-5.

¹⁰ 'Abd al-Husayn Avariḥ (Ayati), *Kawākib ad-Durriyyih fi Ma'āthir al-Bahā'īyyah* (Cairo: Maṭba'a al-Sa'āda, 1923) 90-3.

¹¹ A pericope is a unit of textual material, such as a text, parable or an event that occurs in different narratives.

¹² The present author and William McCants have discovered two surviving manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* bearing dates in their colophon of 1268 AH (1852) and 1327 AH (1909). See William McCants and Kavian Milani, "The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of the *Nuqtatu'l-kaf* Dated 1268 (1851-52)," *Iranian Studies* 37 (Sept. 2004) 431-49. For the purposes of this article I have necessarily avoided an analysis of the manuscript families and possible variants, limiting this study to a careful reading of the published text. Also see MacEoin, *Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History* 134-52.

During this short stay the Bab met many clerics and Babi sympathizers. Notable among the visitors was Sayyid ‘Abd al-Baqi who was a man of learning and erudition and the head of a theological seminary in the city with Babi leanings. Most sources agree that the Bab did not make himself known to ‘Abd al-Baqi. Even though he attended sessions where the Bab was engaged in revealing verses, ‘Abd al-Baqi nevertheless failed to recognize the Bab that night. He did however recognize later that he had been in the presence of the Bab and became saddened and remorseful. Another guest that met the Bab was Ahmad Yazdi, whose attendance is not mentioned by any source except his own memoirs.¹³ His absence from other sources may be due to the fact that he was at the periphery of the community or due to the secretive nature of the Babi community, given possible safety concerns.¹⁴ After a stay of two nights and two days, the Bab and the company of guards departed for Tehran. Table 1 summarizes some of the data provided by different sources.

Historiographical Considerations of the Kashan Event

The present study assumes the existence of a variety of oral traditions in early Babi historiography transmitted by the original witnesses to these events. These transmissions were eventually written down and recorded, sometimes by the original eye-witnesses and at times by others. Clearly, the further the oral narration has travelled from the original witness-source, the less dependable it becomes. In some cases the sources acknowledge and inform the reader of the chain of transmission, whereas other sources are silent as to the original source and the chain of informants.

In addition to the above, in our analysis of event, data and the reconstructed event, the theological affiliation of the author is also of utmost importance. The reconstruction of a historical moment and its meaningful interpretation is sometimes done through a third party, who, however disinterested and objective, will nevertheless introduce their own interpretative biases into the narrative. Accordingly, one’s view of a particular event or its interpretation is often influenced by one’s experiences, ideology and belief system. The authors are also writing for different communities of faith and their writing therefore reflects the theology and historical self-understanding of their respective community. Sources on early Babi history, such as those examined above, are highly susceptible to such biases and must be carefully examined with regard to such methodological considerations. While the analytical thrust of this paper is the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and the problems of its dating and authorship, it is nevertheless important to recognize that similar textual criticism could (and must) be applied to other Babi historical narratives for a more holistic reconstruction of Babi history.

¹³ Ahmad Yazdi is the recipient of the well-known Arabic Tablet of Ahmad written by Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Nuri, Baha’u’llah, in Adrianople.

¹⁴ It should be noted that while some guests were Babi sympathizers and others were known Babis, such as Jani’s brother Dhabih, Ahmad seems to think there were only two Babis in Kashan, himself and Jani. Since none of the other sources, including Nabil, mention him it would seem that he was a peripheral character in the Kashan community. It may also be that the Babis were prudent, if not secretive, and they may not have all known one another.

Table 1. Summary of nine sources on the Bab's sojourn in Kashan.

	<i>NN</i> ⁵	<i>ZH-2</i>	<i>NK</i>	<i>NH-E</i>	<i>NH-P</i>	<i>KD</i>	<i>MOA</i>	<i>DK</i>	<i>TS</i>
Narrator	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear ¹⁶	Unclear	Unclear	Author	Ahmad Yazdi	Dhabih Kashani	Shaykh Kazim
Time of Arrival	After-noon								
Date	20 March 1847, 2 Rabi', 1263	19 March 1847, 1 Rabi' 1263					possibly Dec-Jan, 1847 ¹⁷		
Duration of stay	3 days	2 days 2 nights	2 days 2 nights	2 days 2 nights	2 days 2 nights	1 night	2 days	3 days 3 nights	2 days
Vision	Yes	Yes						Yes	
Whose Vision	Jani	Jani						Dhabih	
Time of Vision	Eve of arrival							20 years prior	
Number of Guards	'guards'	'guards'	6	7	6				'guards'
The Bab's condition		Poor preparation; hard journey	Poor preparation; hard journey						
Bab is first seen	'Attar Gate	'Attar Gate							
Bribe-(Amount)	Jani offers to pay expenses to the guards but the Bab refuses.	Yes	Not mentioned	Yes	Heavy bribe	100 tumans	200 tumans	Yes	300 tumans-offered by both brothers
Naw-Ruz	Yes	Yes							
Siyyid-Hasan Yazdi	Arrives earlier								
'Abdu'l-Baqi	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Not mentioned by name		
'Abdu'l-Baqi recognizes the Bab	Yes, but later. Hears the Bab revealing verses but the Bab hides his identity from him.	Yes		Yes, but later.			No		
Departure	Leaves Kashan in grief	Leaves Kashan in grief							
Other attendees	Mahdi, a later martyr at Tabarsi, and a few others	Haji Mulla Hashim Naraq, Aqa Muhammad Taqi Navvab (Jani's uncle) and two others.					Local clerics and one servant. The servant believes in the Bab later on.		

¹⁵ The abbreviations key follows here: *NN*, *Nabil's Narrative*; *ZH-2*, Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq* vol. 2; *NK*, *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*; *NH-E*, *New History* (English version); *NH-P*, *New History* (Shorter Persian version); *KD*, Avarihi, *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih*; *MOA*, *Memoirs of Ahmad Yazdi* (cited in Ishraq-Khavari, *Muhadirat*); *DK*, Mathnavi of Dhabih Kashani (cited in Afnan, *Ahd-i A'la*); *TS*, *Tarikh-i Samandar*.

¹⁶ This has been left as unknown since it is the argument of this paper that it is extremely unlikely that Haji Mirza Jani was the author of *Nuqtat al-Kaf* as Browne has asserted.

¹⁷ This is understood from Dhabih's poetry and its reference to the month of *Day* (*Shahr-i-Day*) the tenth month of the Persian solar calendar.

Nabil's Narrative and its Relationship to Other Accounts

Table 1 provides interesting elements for a comparative study among the sources. Each narrative is an important window into the narrator's historiography in that it provides the author's interests, preoccupations and theological views. A study of the sources also demonstrates the extent to which these sources borrow from one another and how much each author is indebted to his fellow historians. For example, a comparison of *Nabil's Narrative* and *Zuhur al-Haqq* suggests that one very closely follows the other, and that these diverge little in terms of the major (and even minor) details. Even transcription errors are transmitted from one to the other, as seen in the case of the Gate of 'Attar mentioned in both accounts. This should, in all likelihood, be the Gate of 'Ata (*Darwāzih-yi 'Atā*), as suggested by Muhammad 'Ali Faizi.¹⁸ In this case, one can assume that Fadil Mazandarani may have relied on Nabil. It is important to note that all the other sources presented in Table 1 appear not to be based on Nabil's informants. Hence Nabil (and by extension *Zuhur al-Haqq*) represents an independent line of sources, informants and historiography, which distinguishes it from other sources. The texts of neither the *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* nor the *Tarikh-i Samandar* (nor indeed the *Kashf al-Ghita*) seem to be informed by the data contained in Nabil.¹⁹

Nabil's Narrative is a very interesting account from a historiographical perspective, in that it generally identifies the informant-sources used by the author. This is an unusual feature for a pre-modern historian. The Kashan account is a rare occasion where Nabil does not identify his source, but it was possibly Sayyid Husayn Yazdi, whom the Bab had dispatched earlier from Isfahan.²⁰ A careful reading of Nabil demonstrates some unique historiographical traits, such as his particular fascination with the ancient Persian festival of Naw-Ruz. One notes that Nabil (and naturally Mazandarani, following Nabil) is the only source that synchronizes the Kashan stay with Naw-Ruz. Nabil synchronizes many of the major events in the life of the Bab with Naw-Ruz, including the calm of the second Naw-Ruz after declaration (190) and the arrival of Mulla Husayn in Mah-Ku and his stay with the Bab (255-7), among others.

Another item of interest in the Kashan pericope is that of the bribe offered by the Kashani brothers to the company of guards. Virtually all sources, except the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, indicate that a bribe or incentive of some type was offered by the brothers to the chief of the guards. The amounts differ, as shown in Table 1. The reasons behind this omission from the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* will be examined later, but it suggests that it was not written by either of the Kashani brothers. Nabil's treatment of this event diverges from other sources. According to Nabil, Mirza Jani offered 'to defray the expense of the horsemen's three days' stay in Kashan', which was a culturally acceptable way of offering a bribe. Nabil reports that the Bab rejected this offer commenting that it was 'unnecessary'.²¹ Nabil's reconstruction of the event is more consistent with later Baha'i teachings on the prohibition of bribe-taking and

¹⁸ Muhammad 'Ali Faizi, *Hadrat-i-Nuqtih-yi 'Ulā* (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1975) 208.

¹⁹ There is however some evidence that suggests a literary dependence of Abu'l-Fadl's *Kashf al-Ghita* (1919) on the *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* (1914) as suggested by their respective treatment of the Kashani brothers. See, for example, the reference in both sources to two prominent Kashani merchants with the name Haji Mirza Jani, hence the need for both sources to distinguish between Haji Mirza Jani Buzurg and Haji Mirza Jani Turk (*kūchak*). Haji Mirza Jani Buzurg is the Babi merchant who hosted the Bab and was eventually martyred. The *Kashf al-Ghita* and the *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* are the only two sources that preserve this detail.

²⁰ *Nabil's Narrative* 214 and 219.

²¹ *Nabil's Narrative* 219.

bribe-giving than other contemporary accounts.²² Such characteristics allow the historian to identify the author whose work is being examined and his theological affiliation.

Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf

Since its publication in 1910 as the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, this work has proven to be one of the most disputed and controversial accounts of early Babism. The Kashan episode holds important keys to some problems in Babi historiography including the authorship and dating of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

In order to place the evidence from the Kashan episode in its proper perspective, it is essential to capture, however briefly, some of the century-long debates surrounding the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. Strangely enough the historical narrative of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* text itself contains no date, whereas the Babi apologetic epistle incorporated in the book contains two internal dates referring to 1267 AH and 1270 AH (1850-1 and 1853-4) respectively.²³ Edward Granville Browne, who uncovered the relevant manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in April 1892, considered it the 'most important document which exists for the study of early Babis'.²⁴ His writings, including the introduction to the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, indicate that he was convinced that the manuscript was an early document, later suppressed and distorted by Baha'is with omissions from, and additions to, it in the later preparation of the *Tarikh-i Jadid*, aiming to undermine the position of Yahya Azal in favour of Baha'u'llah. It should be pointed out that Browne does not provide any evidence for the suppression of *Nuqtat al-Kaf* by Baha'is. Furthermore Browne was unable to explain the absence of such an important early source from the Babi-Azali circles even supposing a Baha'i inspired plot to suppress the manuscript.

Upon the book's publication, 'Abdu'l-Baha – the eldest son of Baha'u'llah, and the head of the Baha'i Faith from 1892 to 1921 – dismissed the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* and particularly its Persian introduction as an Azali-inspired forgery, and instructed a number of prominent and scholarly Baha'is to write rebuttals and refutations to the book. 'Abdu'l-Baha was aware of the fact that the few fragments written by Mirza Jani had already been incorporated in the text of the *Tarikh-i Jadid* and there was no reason to assume that Mirza Jani had written any other works. He also noted that Mirza Jani was a merchant with little formal education and questioned the grounds on which Browne conferred an undisputed historical primacy on *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. The gist of 'Abdu'l-Baha's argument, as gleaned from a later tablet to Browne dated 1913, is to place the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* within its proper place in historiography. He seems to seek to bring more balance to Browne's analysis and emphasized the importance of relying on multiple sources (other than the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*) for early Babi history.²⁵

A number of contemporary Baha'is wrote rebuttals to the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* with the most significant Baha'i apology being written by Mirza Na'im Sidihi and Mirza Hasan Adib as

²² See 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Secret of Divine Civilization* 15.

²³ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 61 and 92 respectively. The apologetic treatise has long been considered to be an independent and separate book that was later added to the manuscript that Browne entitled and published as *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*. More recent evidence supported by comparative handwriting analysis and stylistic grounds suggests that the two parts are by the same author and are part of the same book by its original author(s). This data will be presented in forthcoming studies examining the original clean copy of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

²⁴ *New History* xiv-xv.

²⁵ M. A. Faizi, *Hayat-i Haqrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Langenhein: Baha'i-Verlag, 1994) 220-2.

early as 1911-12. There is some indirect evidence, based on their correspondence with Abu'l-Fadl, suggesting that these two authors had actually tracked down the scribe who had written the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in order to support their case. There is no report of this work ever being published and since the manuscript of this apologetic treatise is not available at this time it is impossible to appraise it critically.

It is, however, extremely likely that Mirza Abu'l-Fadl had access to the book by Sidihi and Adib when composing his *Kashf al-Ghiā 'an Hiyal al-A'dā* (The Removal of the Veil from the Machinations of the Enemies), the most systematic and methodical Baha'i rebuttal published at that time (in 1919). Here the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* was examined and critiqued by the Baha'i scholar Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani and his learned nephew Sayyid Mahdi Gulpaygani. This work is a provocative read and raises excellent questions concerning the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. However, it has been faulted (with some justification) on grounds of its apologetic tone and at times deficient treatment of the subject.²⁶ The *Kashf al-Ghita* manages to expose some important problems in Browne's chronology, such as the date the text had left Iran. Browne had suggested that the manuscript had left Iran by 1274 AH (1858 CE), whereas the incomplete manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* was dated 1279 AH (1863 CE), some five years after Gobineau's departure, causing difficulties for Browne's timeline. They also correctly point out that there is no reference to the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in Gobineau's *Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, published in 1865, and that in fact the former at times contradicted the latter.²⁷ Abu'l-Fadl is clearly interested in exposing *Nuqtat al-Kaf* as a forgery, but the only concrete evidence for a possible Azali forgery presented by the *Kashf al-Ghita* is the evidence he cites indicating that the *haykal* (calligraphic temple) reproduced by Browne (in the published book) as a work of the Bab is actually a calligraphic work of Azal.²⁸

Despite its strengths, the *Kashf al-Ghita* is marred by its own particular problems, such as failing to take into account (following Browne) that the Comte de Gobineau had a second term in Persia ending in 1863, and that he could have acquired his manuscripts during the second term in Persia and afterwards. In short, as Abbas Amanat has pointed out, the book introduces new material and raises more questions than it answers.

The debate was reopened in the modern era by H. M. Balyuzi who devoted one chapter to a treatment of *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* in *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i Faith*. He concludes that book should be de-emphasized as an early source primarily on grounds that it represented a work perhaps only loosely based on the narrative of Haji Mirza Jani. On the issue of authorship he suggests that Jani's brother, Ahmad, a supporter of Azal, could have had 'a hand in tampering with the text of fragmentary history written by his martyred brother'.²⁹ He acknowledges that no documentary evidence exists that supports this theory. Balyuzi nevertheless raises important issues especially with regard to the authorship of the Persian Introduction of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*.³⁰ Later authors who have dealt

²⁶ Denis MacEoin, following Muhammad Muhit Tabataba'i, suggests that the book was 'ill received' by 'Abdu'l-Baha and that he ordered all copies burnt. Neither one presents any evidence for this assertion. The present author's investigation of the latter allegation has not unearthed any supporting evidence.

²⁷ *Kashf al-Ghita* 170.

²⁸ *Kashf al-Ghita* 11. Abu'l-Fadl argued this point on the basis of a comparison with a copy of Azal's writings that he had obtained from the collection by Sayyid Asadu'llah Qumi. It contained 13 temples and 43 letters (tablets).

²⁹ Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne* 64.

³⁰ There is now an academic consensus that the Persian Introduction to *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* was penned by Muhammad Qazvini, a collaborator with Browne and a literary critic. See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and*

systematically with the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* include Abbas Amanat, Denis MacEoin and Juan Cole, all of who seem to suggest that it is an early book based largely on the original narrative of the Haji Mirza Jani. All three also present a critical and analytical approach to the book and suggest that it is an early and useful source on early Babism. Amanat for instance, writes that 'Browne's edition of *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* appears to be the nearest to this yet-untraced old history. But there is no definite proof that *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* is the original version of the old history. Controversy surrounds the authenticity of some of its passages, and the possibility exists of later distortions.'³¹ He nevertheless emphasizes the usefulness and reliability of the book and adds that 'as far as the events of the earlier years are concerned, *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is largely in agreement with other sources of the period'.³² Denis MacEoin has also made a similar observation after a detailed examination of many of the available versions of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. In addition to bringing to light a number of valuable manuscripts of the book, MacEoin's most significant contribution regarding the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is his 'synoptic' study of the differences in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and *Tarikh-i Jadid* narratives that demonstrates significant differences between the sections in *Tarikh-i Jadid* where the notes of Mirza Jani are quoted and the extant text of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. Notwithstanding the above, MacEoin's overall assessment is that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* 'deserves to retain its reputation as the earliest comprehensive internal history of Babism'.³³ All of the above authors essentially trace the historical nucleus of the book to 1850-2, and to Mirza Jani, the Babi martyr.

In a recent study published on the H-Bahai website, Juan Cole has attempted to bring together current academic thinking on the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. His study is particularly innovative because he attempts to introduce the methods used in textual analysis in New Testament scholarship to the study of Babi historical texts. No doubt the readers are familiar with the basics of the literary criticism that deals with the synoptic problem, but a brief review may be in order. The synoptic problem is, in brief, the establishment of the literary dependence between the three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. There is clearly a large amount of material that the three Gospels share. In fact it has been suggested that Matthew reproduces 90 per cent of the material in Mark, whereas Luke reproduces only slightly more than half of Mark.³⁴ The two-source theory of literary relationship for instance, argues that both Matthew and Luke used Mark and another source called Q (for *Quelle* meaning source in German).³⁵ The four-source theory in New Testament literary criticism argues that in addition to Mark and Q, both Matthew and Luke used other unique sources as well, generally abbreviated as M and L. While Juan Cole does not use any particular unit of analysis for comparative purposes he nevertheless argues that most academicians in the field agree that the earliest manuscript of the historical narrative preserved as *Nuqtat al-Kaf* can be traced to the Kashani merchant. He notes that 'it is certainly the case that some portion of this work derives from his [Jani's] early chronicle'.³⁶ Cole suggests that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*

Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran 1844-1850 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 423 and Denis MacEoin, 'Afnan, Hatcher and an Old Bone', *Religion* 16 (1986) 195.

³¹ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 423.

³² Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 423.

³³ MacEoin, *Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* 151.

³⁴ Freed, Edwin D., *The New Testament: A Critical Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1986) 49.

³⁵ In this case Q would be the entire body of text common to Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark.

³⁶ Juan Cole, 'Nuqtat al-Kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions', *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, 2/6 (August 1998) at <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/notes/vol2/babihist.htm> (2002).

represents a ‘manuscript tradition’ traced back to Jani, and not a single book. Cole further theorizes the existence of an 1851 codex (written by Jani) and an 1854 one (called anonymous but may be by Dhabih), and one or two later redactions in the 1860s. Here Cole presents a very intriguing possibility with respect to manuscript development, with all manuscripts grounded in the codex 1851 authored by Jani. His theory remains of little practical application since he produces no textual analysis of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* or any of the other texts he identifies as stemming from the same family of manuscripts. Given the lack of any units of analysis and the absence of any synoptic parallels in his study, it cannot be critically assessed on this ground. In fact, the Kashan pericope strongly questions the link to the Kashani merchant.

The Kashan Accounts and the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*

The Kashan episode sheds additional light on the authorship of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*. It should be kept in mind that the authorship of the book has been attributed to Mirza Jani only because Azal responded as such to Browne’s inquiry about the purported author of his find. It is known that Azal did at no time see the entire book or its facsimile, but only the descriptions that Browne had sent him of the five manuscripts located in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Azal wrote to Browne: ‘The history to which you allude must, by certain indications, be by the uplifted and martyred Haji [Mirza, Jani], for none but he wrote [such] a history.’³⁷ The copy of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* manuscript that Browne located in Paris and eventually published is both undated and anonymous. It does not contain the name of the scribe either. Internal dating of the portion of the text that is an apologetic epistle bears two separate dates of 1267 and 1270,³⁸ and the historical narrative is not directly dated as mentioned earlier.

If one accepts that the Bab stayed in Kashan for two nights at the house of Mirza Jani, as two primary and first hand witness accounts suggest (Ahmad-i Yazdi and Dhabih-i Kashani), as well as Jani’s memoirs preserved in the *New History*, a proposition supported by data contained in all other sources, it would be expected that Mirza Jani would have written of the Bab’s stay in detail, outlining both major and minor events. It may strike the reader as surprising that Jani, as an author, leaves out of his narrative his own unique experiences such as his mystical vision beforehand, his encounter with the Bab at the Gate of ‘Ata, the bargaining with the guards to temporarily release the Bab, the (generous) bribe given to the guards, the celebration of the Naw-Ruz holiday, the guests and their interactions with the Bab, as well as his revelation of verses as confirmed by other sources. It is ironic that of the seven sources examined, the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* has the least amount of detail (conveying next to nothing) and is by far the least specific with regard to the Kashan stay. Even the account given by Ahmad Yazdi, who had only one audience with the Bab and had a very peripheral role in the Kashan Babi community, is richer in terms of details than the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

The reader of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* will note that the author of the book records encounters and audiences of less significance that he had had with Babi leaders such as Mulla

³⁷ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, English Introduction xvi.

³⁸ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* 61 and 92. The two conflicting dates in the apologetic section indicates that even that portion had existed in different versions and was subject to redactions at different times. In Babi literature, such as the Persian Bayan, the year 1270 means 1260 AH as suggested by Persian Bayan 2:7. In this case however the 1270 is probably from the *Hijrah* (AH) and different from the customary Babi dating, which was not based on the *Hijrah* of the Prophet of Islam but rather was calculated starting from his open proclamation.

Muhammad 'Ali Zanjani (Hujjat) and Sayyid Yahya Darabi (Vahid). These encounters are present in exhaustive detail, as is the interview with the much less important Muhammad Big Chaparchi and other peripheral characters, so one has to wonder why there is no treatment of the Bab's stay in Kashan for two days and two nights, definitely the most significant encounter Mirza Jani ever had with any Babi leader.³⁹ This oddity had not escaped the attention of Browne himself who appears puzzled by the lack of reference when he writes: 'Concerning the Bab's stay at Kashan, it is very remarkable that Mirza Jani, whose guest he was, says nothing beyond what is given in the footnote on p. 214 *supra*.'⁴⁰ Unfortunately Browne seems to have accepted Azal's assertion about the authorship of the manuscript rather uncritically. Any narrative based on memoirs of Mirza Jani must have included the historical nucleus of his encounter with the Bab, and yet it is barely mentioned. One can conclude that the Kashan episode by itself is strong enough evidence to seriously undermine the possibility that Mirza Jani is the author of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. In other words, it has always been assumed that Mirza Jani is the author of the fragmentary notes that form the framework of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* but no evidence is given to support such an assumption, and the assessment by Azal based on reading Browne's description should therefore be regarded as unsatisfactory.

A counter-argument to the above analysis may be anticipated. It can be suggested that a more substantial and appropriate narrative of the Kashan stay existed in the original notes and that it was later removed or redacted by later editors, or that Mirza Jani was such a humble and self-effacing person that he opted not to record much of his historic encounter with the Bab. Neither explanation stands up to the evidence. It is known that the author of the *New History* produces sections that we are told are penned by Mirza Jani himself (214-16), containing specific details of the Kashan stay. How is it that these passages corresponding to the Kashan stay have been deleted only from the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*? By whom and to what end? It is hard to imagine why any redactor or editor would have taken the time to omit such a central piece of the narrative. Moreover, such a deletion would have created a textual problem by leaving a break in the narrative. One notes, however, that the narrative is smooth and without any awkward lacunae. As to the second possibility there can not be any reason whatsoever explaining why Mirza Jani gives appropriate details of the Kashan episode in the passage attributed to him in *New History*, whereas only Mirza Jani's *Nuqtat al-Kaf* narrative bears the mark of his humility and self-effacement. The only acceptable alternative is that Mirza Jani did not write the fragmentary notes or the narrative surviving as the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

Two modern authors, Denis MacEoin and Nicola Towfigh, have also pointed out the problematic absence of the Kashan episode.⁴¹ MacEoin seems to suggest that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* was compiled around 1853-4 with the involvement of a number of individuals including Dhabih and possibly Aqa Muhammad Rida (Jani's nephew) while simultaneously maintaining it was grounded in the Jani account.⁴² However an analysis of the Kashan pericope presented earlier argues strongly that neither Jani nor his brother Dhabih could have been the authors of an 1851 or 1854 version of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, as a history by either one would have presented more details of the Bab's stay in Kashan. Also MacEoin seems to be ignoring the strong evidence to the contrary presented in the important historical narrative

³⁹ For the encounters with Vahid and Hujjat, see *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 120-1 and 125-7 respectively.

⁴⁰ Hamadani, *New History* 349.

⁴¹ See Udo Schaefer et al, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahā'ī Apologetics*. (trans. Geraldine Schuckelt, Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) 503 and MacEoin, *Sources* 149..

⁴² *Sources* 151.

Mathnavi, by Dhabih. The details given in Dhabih's *Mathnavi* differ from the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in so many details that Dhabih could not possibly be the author of the latter.⁴³ It seems that MacEoin is attempting to deal with the problems posed by the strong evidence suggesting that Jani is not the author, while striving to maintain that the book is early (and based on Jani's account). Having presented the evidence cited above against Jani being the author, MacEoin then appears to contradict himself by stating that the 1854 manuscript was based on Jani's 'notes'.⁴⁴ Another piece of evidence with regard to the Kashan episode comes from the encounter between the author and Muhammad Big Chaparchi, who was the officer in charge of the company of guards. This encounter occurred after he had delivered the Bab to Adharbayjan. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* does not identify this as their second meeting, as would have been expected if the author was indeed Mirza Jani (as they had certainly met in Kashan). This is consistent with the other parts of the narrative where Mirza Jani is consistently referred to in the third person.⁴⁵

Important for the problems of dating and authorship of *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is that the book is frequently in error regarding some of the basic events in the life of the Bab, or with regard to specific events in the history of the Babi movement. One clearly cannot expect historical accounts to be free of mistakes, given the exceptionally difficult nature of historical writings, and the difficulties presented by maintenance of records and manuscripts by authors of old. It is therefore not surprising that narrative accounts contain internal inconsistencies. Thus, for example, *Nabil's Narrative* gives two separate and mutually exclusive dates for Sayyid Kazim Rashti's birth date,⁴⁶ but Nabil was not a contemporary of Sayyid Kazim. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* however suffers from serious omissions (and errors) not expected from a contemporary source. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* does not mention the arrival of Mulla Husayn at Mah-Ku during the fourth Naw-Ruz after the declaration of the Bab. It is also highly unexpected for a person as central and informed as Mirza Jani seems to have been to state that the duration of the Bab's imprisonment in Mah-Ku was three years, as reported in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.⁴⁷ The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* also suggests that the Badasht gathering occurred in 1847.⁴⁸ Again, one would not expect a contemporary narrator (such as Jani) to make such basic errors with regard to the life of the Bab and Babi chronology in his timeline. Such errors suggest that the author was not an informed contemporary. This is consistent with the conclusions drawn from the Kashan pericope.

Some have pointed at evidence suggesting later redactions to the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in the late 1850s and the early to mid-1860s. Some of these are suggested by Moojan Momen, Juan Cole and Nicola Towfigh.⁴⁹ It is significant for instance that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* reports that the Babis had spread to all regions (*jamr'-i bilad*) including India and Turkey.⁵⁰ It was

⁴³ See Table 1 above.

⁴⁴ *Sources* 151.

⁴⁵ In fact the text never refers to Mirza Jani in the first person.

⁴⁶ See *Nabil's Narrative* 10, 45. According to page 10, Sayyid Kazim was ten years old in 1815-16, giving a birth date of 1795-6, whereas page 45 suggests that in 1843 he was sixty years of age, giving a birth date of 1783.

⁴⁷ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 132.

⁴⁸ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 144. It also contradicts Azal's writings. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* claims that Azal received and buried the body of the Bab in Adharbayjan after his martyrdom, whereas Azal himself has stated that the casket containing the body of the Bab was stolen.

⁴⁹ See Moojan Momen, *The Bāb and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 32-4, and Juan Cole, 'Nuqtat al-Kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions'. Also see Schaefer et al., *Making the Crooked Straight* 500-13.

⁵⁰ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 172.

clearly many years after Mirza Jani's martyrdom before the Babi religion had spread to that extent. It is also important for the dating of the later redactions that one finds it stated in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* that a large number of Babis are present in Istanbul, a development that did not actually occur until mid-1860s as pointed out by both Momen and Cole. It appears that this evidence is not determinative one way or the other and that it merely represents speculation and some exaggeration on the part of the author. The same may be said for another criticism found in the *Kashf al-Ghita* (p. 248). Sayyid Mahdi Gulpaygani argues for a later redaction in the glowing passages that specifically narrate the story of Yahya Azal because of the occurrence of an important switch in the manner in which the purported author refers to himself. Throughout the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, he is referred to as *haqīr* (lowly one) whereas in the passages about Azal the author refers to himself as *haqīr-i mussanif* (lowly writer). It is important to note that while the premise is valid, and that this combination indeed occurs only once, it nevertheless does not provide any determinative evidence one way or the other.

It has been previously noted by other historians that the claim that Yahya Azal was the Babi Messianic figure, 'Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest', (as asserted by the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*) is somewhat anachronistic for 1852.⁵¹ Such a claim would have been completely natural and expected for a post 1865 redaction.⁵² However here again the evidence is not at all conclusive. The early Babi milieu was one that was replete with claims and counter-claims, and it would not be at all surprising to find a pocket of early Babis claiming for Azal a claim that he did not advance until more than a decade later: 'that he had been made the recipient of divine revelation', a claim consonant with the promised prophetic figure of the Bayan, 'Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest'.⁵³

The most accurate way to date the text using internal evidence comes from the portions of narrative that deal with the end of Amir Kabir, the Persian Prime Minister. Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, then Prime Minister of Iran, is best known in Babi and Baha'i histories for his persecutions of the Babis and for the enforcement of his policy to execute the Bab. Naturally, the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* does not treat him kindly, and an *en passant* reference is made to his dismissal from premiership (233-4). The dismissal of Amir Kabir (from premiership) occurred on 6 November 1851 (10 Muharram 1268) and he was dismissed from the position of Amir Nizam (commander-in-chief) on 21 November 1851 (25 Muharram 1268).⁵⁴ He was murdered on 13 January 1852, and the news of his death was announced in the official state gazette *Waqāyi' Ittifāqiyyih* on 30 January 1852 (18 Rabi' al-Awal 1268). The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* refers to his dismissal (*azl*) but does not refer to the Amir's death. Therefore the most likely date for the composition of the text seems to be in the interval 6 November 1851-30 January 1852.

There are clues however that pre-1865 manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* existed.⁵⁵ It is perhaps to such a manuscript of Mirza Jani's narrative that Avarih refers in his *Kawakib ad-*

⁵¹ See for example Nicola Towfigh in Schaefer et al., *Making the Crooked Straight* 504.

⁵² There is no historical data to suggest that Azal made a claim to be the *Man Yuḏhiruhu'llāh* (Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest) in the Baghdad period (1853-63). In all, more than twenty individuals had put forth such a claim during this period, but not Azal. The number of claimants indicates that there was a perceived vacancy for, if Azal's appointment was as overt and well-known as the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* suggests, then there would not have been as many claimants.

⁵³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. ed. 1974) 167.

⁵⁴ Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe* 154, 165 and Khan Malik Sasani, *Siyāsatgarān-i Dawrih-yi Qājār* (Tehran: Hedayat, n.d.) 1:2, 12.

⁵⁵ Two important manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* have been identified in the past year, bearing colophon dates of 1268 (1851-2) and 1327 (1909), by William McCants and the present author. These manuscripts are being

Durriyyih.⁵⁶ While on a trip in Iran in 1909 (one year before the publication of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*) he came across a manuscript attributed to Mirza Jani which included passages of exaggeration (*quluww*) concerning Quddus (as does the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*) but apparently did not have the sections concerning Yahya Azal. The copy he inspected in Naraq may have been a version of the common progenitor text upon which both the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and the *Tarikh-i Jadid* are based. Avarih's comments and critique of the text are important for a variety of reasons. First, from his description it appears that the manuscript had significant similarities to both the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* in form and content. Second, it was also inspected by Avarih in 1909, one year before the publication of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, and many years before the publication of the *Kashf al-Ghita*. Avarih does not mention Browne, the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, 'Abdu'l-Baha's tablets on the matter, or any specific reference to an Azali forgery, so we can assume his assessment is actually of a manuscript other than the published *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*. The possible discovery of this manuscript at some point in the future should help future historians trace the manuscript tradition and its redactions with more accurate and verifiable results.

Conclusion

This article examines the stay of the Bab in Kashan through the primary data provided by nine different sources. The synoptic examination of such a small and limited pericope is a useful way of bringing out some of the hidden traits of each manuscript author or manuscript tradition. The Babi manuscripts (like the early Christian and Islamic ones) were generally developed and written to respond to the needs of a community of faith. A study of the Kashan event shows that neither Mirza Jani nor Dhabih could have been involved in the writing of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, given its highly deficient treatment of the one significant episode in which they would have been most directly involved. Once the historically unnecessary tie to Jani (speculated by Azal for unknown reasons) is loosened, the book can then be properly placed without needing to ground it in Kashan in 1851-2. Nevertheless, a great deal of the material in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* may indeed be early and useful (despite the redaction hypothesis), as these may have been part and parcel of an earlier oral tradition, developing alongside the changing theological and apologetic needs of the Babi community before it became increasingly polarized in the 1860s, and accordingly may reflect the confusion and mayhem of that earlier period. The above is complicated by the fact that the manuscript used by Browne bears neither the name of a scribe nor a transcription date, adding to the problems of authenticity and reliability of the text. Given the limitations in available manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, all conclusions must be regarded as speculative pending further research and the detailed examination of discovered manuscripts.

closely interrogated at this time, and once the provenance and status of these manuscripts are established, some of the century-old problems related to manuscript edition may be solved, and, inevitably, new problems will be introduced.

⁵⁶ *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* 91-3.

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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.

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Mark Tobey, His Art, and the Seattle Baha'i Community

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'Preserve us from popular "success". One's own standard is the touchstone.'
Lyonel Feininger¹

Abstract

Mark Tobey achieved international recognition as one of the foremost artists of the twentieth century. Born in Wisconsin, he attended classes at the Chicago Art Institute and then moved to New York, where he worked as an illustrator for McCall's Magazine and did freelance illustrations. In 1918 Mark Tobey became a member of the Baha'i Faith. He moved to Seattle in 1923, 16 years after the establishment of the Baha'i community in Seattle. Over the next 40 years he considered Seattle his home and between frequent travels, Mark Tobey participated in Seattle Baha'i activities. He attended meetings, spoke at events, played the piano at the Nineteen Day Feast and gave firesides (introductory Baha'i meetings) at his home in Seattle's university district. He served on committees and on the Seattle Spiritual Assembly. He invited artist friends to attend Baha'i events. His years of service, friendliness and active participation in Baha'i activities endeared him to the Seattle Baha'is.

Mark Tobey quickly aligned himself with young Northwest artists. A school of art consisting of common ideas resulting in a unique style grew around these younger artists. It was sometimes called the 'Pacific Northwest School of Mystics', or 'The Northwest School'. Mark Tobey brought a vision of the world into this school. He was the first, if not the only, Seattle artist from the Pacific Northwest to have visited Europe, the Middle East, China and Japan. His impressions of cities, the people he saw and the art, both contemporary and historical, found their way into his paintings, not as objective statements but often as symbols. In Seattle, Tobey gained an appreciation of Asian calligraphy. In 1934, on a trip to China and Japan with the English potter Bernard Leach, Tobey lived in a Zen temple in Kyoto where he studied calligraphy and Buddhism. The abstract expressionist movement flourishing in New York was influenced by Tobey's work through his exhibitions in New York at the Willard Gallery, and in the 1940s and 1950s at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum. Mark Tobey received international recognition through major exhibitions of his work, most notably the Venice XXIV Biennale and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France.

The ideas of universality and oneness expressed in the Baha'i Faith, with its emphasis on the unity of humanity, the oneness of religion and that the earth is one country, formed the philosophical basis of Tobey's work. This belief played out in a lifetime of paintings that explored symbolism using calligraphic loops of light breaking form into a symbolic personal

¹ Stephen E. Hauser, *Feininger and Tobey, Years of Friendship 1944-1956: The Complete Correspondence* (New York: Achim Moeller Fine Art, 1991), 101; from a letter from Lyonel Feininger to Mark Tobey, 10 September 1952.

language, religious symbolism, Zen Sumi painting and masterful drawings of the human figure.

There are few painters today who successfully express religious ideas in contemporary art. Paul Klee, whose planes, colours and textures indicated latent worlds beyond the objective world; Wassily Kandinski, who explored the spiritual in art; and Georges Rouault, successfully defining Christian sentiment with passion and nobility, are a few. The aura of spirituality that surrounds many of Mark Tobey's paintings and the beauty and profundity he achieved make him a lasting and major voice, one of the greatest painters of the last century.

That Mark Tobey left his footsteps in Seattle, yet was a citizen of the world, has immeasurably enriched the Pacific Northwest. Besides the richness of his intellect, brilliant conversation on just about any subject, and sense of leadership, Tobey brought to the Pacific Northwest knowledge of contemporary European and New York art. His sense of heightened awareness fused vision into a loosely collaborative group of Northwest artists. This group, consisting of Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan and Guy Anderson, along with lesser known but important painters such as Paul Horiuchi, Fay Chong, George Tsutakawa, James Washington Jr., Malcolm Roberts and Helmi, enriched the Pacific Northwest with paintings diffused with opalescent light, bounding shapes, haunted birds and beasts, and mystical references to transcendental themes. This 'school' of artists was loosely called the 'Northwest Mystics'.

Mark Tobey stated, 'It is alas hard to carry within one two powers like Baha'i and Art,'² while it was stated of him that 'during his years of productivity Tobey was continually faced with the problem of how to divide his time and energy between his art and direct service to the Baha'i Faith.'³ Only in retrospect do we see how successful he was in expressing both of these powers, frequently blending them into one coherent statement. Tobey spoke passionately about art and Baha'i. He spoke with passion about the importance of art to the individual and to civilization, the high place of art in the scheme of things, and the transforming power of religion – a transformation at work not once a millennium, but in daily life. Commenting about his painting *Arena of Civilization* (1947), Tobey boldly stated, 'The draped forms of the East symbolize the spirit of Baha'i which I believe to be the religion of our time and of the future, even if it is little known at the moment . . .'⁴

Tobey's ideas magnetized those with whom he came into contact. It is no wonder, then, that he influenced the young artists of his day in the Pacific Northwest. 'The major formative influence upon Graves – at least among painters – was Mark Tobey.'⁵

Mark Tobey was a generation older than the next oldest of this group of Northwest painters. When Tobey arrived in Seattle in 1923, on the heels of a broken marriage, in a part of the country removed from all contemporary art movements, his knowledge and experience were welcomed. He made friends easily, and many of his students and admirers became lifelong supporters and friends.

² *Mark Tobey: Paintings from the Collection of Joyce and Arthur Dahl* (sponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Roosevelt University, Department of Art and Architecture, Stanford University 1967) 15.

³ Arthur L. Dahl, *Mark Tobey: Art and Belief* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984) 9.

⁴ *ibid* 38.

⁵ Frederick S. Wight, *Morris Graves* (University of California Press, 1956) 16.

Mark Tobey and the Baha'i Faith

Mark Tobey became a Baha'i in 1918 and describes the event in his own words:

One night after an evening at a party at Marcel Duchamp's studio [in New York City], while waiting for a train I kept wondering if by chance there might be something else greater than art. This idea remained with me for several days – during which I thought considerably about the expression 'the love of God,' what it is, what it could mean to one like myself. This led to prayer to know about this profound state. After a short period of days I was called up by Mrs. Sterner, who . . . asked me to dinner . . . That night in her beautiful house I sat beside a portrait painter named Juliet Thompson. After the evening was over we found we lived in the same direction. Fortunately, when we reached Fifth Avenue she said, 'Let's walk.' Since I didn't have ten cents in my pocket I couldn't have taken her on the bus very well. And so we walked, and before we parted she asked me to pose for her. Well, I had no money, nothing to do in particular, I owed my landlady forty dollars, so why not go and pose? . . .

Upon a wall near where I was seated there was a photograph of a man with a white beard, wearing a white turban – a remarkable face, but I had no curiosity about him. During this period of posing I had a very strange and powerful dream which concerned this person in the photograph, or seemed to. When I told Miss Thompson about the dream she grew quite excited, but didn't say anything.

After a while she decided to go to Green Acre. I took her to the train and upon leaving she said, 'I have a plan for you; you will hear from me.' After a week or so there came a letter from a man called Harry Randall, living in Little Boar's Head on the Maine coast. It contained \$25 and an invitation to visit them, as they were friends of Miss Thompson. In Green Acre nearby there was a small group of Baha'is speaking of a new religion, claiming that the Day of Judgement was upon us and all the prophecies were now fulfilled. Also, I found out that Miss Thompson was a Baha'i and had met the man in the photograph while he was in New York in 1912. Gradually it dawned on me that this little group of people with their prayers, their smiling faces and their unbounded enthusiasm regarding this new religion really had new spirit, anyway something I couldn't exactly put into words, but convinced me that what they believed was the truth.⁶

After becoming a member of the Baha'i Faith, Tobey attended Baha'i study classes in New York with such Baha'i notables as Lillian Randall, Juliet Thompson, Mountfort Mills and Horace and Doris Holley. He continued his job as an illustrator at *McCall's Magazine* and became known for his caricatures of theatrical people. In 1922, after a failed marriage, a friend of Tobey's, returning home to Seattle, invited Tobey to accompany him. Wishing to get away from New York for a while, Tobey agreed, arriving in Seattle in 1923.

Mark Tobey felt at home in the Pacific Northwest. No doubt the atmosphere there, with muted, rain-soaked colours and the soft, fog-choked forests, influenced his art and the art of

⁶ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 2-4.

the other ‘Northwest Mystic’ painters. For most of the year, pale light covers everything. The sun, even at noon, is more silver than gold, and there are no shadows. But it was essentially Mark Tobey that gave the disparate modernist painters in the Northwest, at this critical time, vision and purpose.

Seattle had no art museum or gallery that championed contemporary art. Tobey supported himself solely by painting and teaching art. He assiduously sought for greater understanding of his work, locally and abroad, by nurturing relationships with gallery owners, museums and collectors. He also taught art by giving private lessons. Tobey and the other Northwest artists of the time were almost solo artistic voices in a cultural climate that offered few outlets for remuneration. In his formative years Tobey fought hard against poverty. His first residence in Seattle was a small rented cabin on Summit Avenue near Tenth Avenue and Broadway, which was within walking distance of the Cornish School, where he taught art, downtown Seattle and the Pike Place Market. Years later the Pike Place Market, an open farmers’ market, would become the source for many of Mark Tobey’s drawings and paintings. ‘One of Tobey’s pleasures was sketching in the Public Market in downtown Seattle, and a number of newspaper articles and photographs attest to this activity bringing him some public recognition.’⁷

As an art teacher Tobey was exceptional. ‘Many of his students from both the Cornish School and his private classes have testified that he was a masterful teacher.’⁸ He encouraged the development of his students’ vision, their sense of aesthetics. He had them look and observe. He took his classes into Seattle’s Volunteer Park and had his students collect leaves, twigs, moss and other verdure they thought were interesting. He encouraged them to pay particular attention to the veins in leaves, a patch of matted grass, a stone or wet



Mark Tobey sketching at the Pike Place Market, Seattle, Seattle Times 1946

bark. He discussed drawing the microcosm.⁹ He was gentle and thoughtful in his criticism of student work, looking for the good and promising results and helping the student identify and redefine the weak or rougher parts of a painting. In every studio he had, and later in his house in the university district of Seattle, Mark Tobey proudly hung the drawings and paintings of his students alongside his own paintings and those of his established peers.

⁷ Sheryl Conkelton and Laura Landau, *Northwest Mythologies* (Seattle: Tacoma Art Museum and the University of Washington Press, 2003) 64.

⁸ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 4.

⁹ From notes taken at an interview with Anne Gould Hauberg, 24 June 2002.

Tobey said,

My sources of inspiration have gone from those of my native Middle West to those of microscopic worlds. I have discovered many a universe on paving stones and tree barks. I know very little about what is generally called 'abstract' painting. Pure abstraction would mean a type of painting completely unrelated to life, which is unacceptable to me.¹⁰

The Early Baha'i Faith in Seattle

The first Baha'i in the Pacific Northwest was Nathan Ward Fitzgerald. Colonel Fitzgerald became a Baha'i in Washington, DC, in 1902. On 29 April 1902, he received a letter from 'Abdu'l-Baha that encouraged him to teach the Baha'i Faith. In late 1904 Nathan Fitzgerald went on pilgrimage to visit 'Abdu'l-Baha. He received a second letter from 'Abdu'l-Baha, again telling him to travel and teach. In 1905, after returning from pilgrimage and settling his affairs in Washington, DC, he moved to Tacoma, Washington, becoming the first Baha'i in Washington. At this time, before World War I, Tacoma and Seattle were about equal in population. Both were important port cities for the Pacific Northwest. The Alaska-Yukon Exposition held in Seattle in 1906 and the arrival of the United States naval shipyards helped to make Seattle the predominant port city.

Colonel Fitzgerald had been an officer in the Union army during the Civil War. His mother was one of the original followers of the Millerites, a Christian sect that believed that Christ would physically return, on 23 May 1844, to Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania. Miller's followers, including Fitzgerald's mother, donned ascension robes, gave away all earthly possessions, and waited all night on Mount Carmel for their Lord to appear. The newspapers of the time called this event the 'Great Disappointment'.

As soon as Colonel Fitzgerald arrived in Tacoma he asked to address the Tacoma Ministers' Alliance. In April 1905, before about seventy ministers, he was allowed exactly fifteen minutes to speak on 'the great and glorious news of the fulfilment of Prophecy'. His remarks were immediately struck from the minutes of that meeting, and he was asked to leave.

Not discouraged by the cold reception of the Tacoma ministers, Colonel Fitzgerald quit his job. He devoted himself full-time to teaching the Baha'i Faith in Washington, visiting Spokane, Walla Walla and Seattle. He also published a book called *The New Revelation: Its Marvelous Message*.¹¹

In January 1907, in Seattle, Nathan Fitzgerald held a well-attended and rather sensationally advertised public meeting titled 'The Second Coming of Christ'. He sold copies of his book in the back of the meeting hall after his talk. The hall was packed. There was standing room only.

Seattle resident Wallace Busselle, who was to become one of the founding members of the Seattle Baha'i community, attended Nathan Fitzgerald's lecture. After the meeting Busselle worked his way through the crowd to the front of the room and asked Colonel Fitzgerald how he could become a Baha'i. As a lecturer, author and former Millerite minister, Colonel Fitzgerald probably viewed himself more as a presenter of the Baha'i

¹⁰ Wesley Wehr, *The Eighth Lively Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000) 38.

¹¹ Nathan Ward Fitzgerald, *The New Revelation: Its Marvelous Message* (Tacoma, Washington, 1905).

message than as one who enlisted new members. He did not know how people became Baha'is.

As a result of Wallace Busselle's request, however, Colonel Fitzgerald arranged, in March 1907, for a visit by Mrs Isabella Davis Brittingham, who was an illustrious and articulate Baha'i author, teacher and lecturer. She was later given the title 'Disciple of 'Abdu'l-Baha' by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith. She was one of the few people to become a Baha'i before 1900, and one of the first women Baha'is in the United States. She was an active and ardent travelling Baha'i teacher and author of the respected book, *The Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh in a Sequence of Four Lessons*. Her husband, James Brittingham, was the first person to become a Baha'i in New York City. As a travelling Baha'i teacher Isabella Brittingham had already achieved remarkable success. She was known to have 'converted' many people in her church in New Jersey to the Baha'i Faith. When souls expressed sincere interest in Baha'u'llah, Isabella Brittingham sent their names to 'Abdu'l-Baha.

The first talks Mrs Brittingham gave in Seattle were in the homes of Wallace Busselle, Mrs Loue Bush, and Mrs Ida A. Finch, who was the first Seattle Baha'i. The talks became so popular and well attended that they were moved to the Theosophical hall in Seattle and then to the Hotel Potter. Ada Finch had become a Baha'i in New York in 1906, while on a visit to her mother, and she moved back to her home-town of Seattle while Mrs. Brittingham was there. Mrs Finch was also elected delegate from Seattle to the Baha'i National Convention in Chicago, Illinois, in 1912, which was attended by 'Abdu'l-Baha. At the National Convention she was introduced as the 'Mother of the Pacific Northwest'.

On 15 April 1907, just before Mrs Brittingham had to leave Seattle, at the last meeting she attended there, held in Ida Finch's home at 2916 Beacon Avenue South, the first Baha'i assembly in Seattle was formed, at 3.15 pm.

Mark Tobey and the Seattle Baha'i Community

Mark Tobey first arrived in Seattle in 1923, penniless but determined. He procured a job as an art teacher at the fashionable Cornish Art School and taught individual art lessons for a dollar a lesson. 'He evolved a unique method of teaching, concentrating more on stimulating the imagination of the student, encouraging a love for art and overcoming the barrier of lack of confidence, than on following structured procedures and principles.'¹² Teaching at Cornish gave Tobey access to many of Seattle's more prominent families, and he nurtured those relationships. Although his later career would glisten with awards, recognition, honours and accomplishments that spanned continents, it was not until late in life that he had financial security. This was partly due to his restlessness. He travelled frequently and extensively – England, Italy, Switzerland, Israel, the Middle East, China, Japan, Mexico – and back and forth across the United States. He incorporated images from many of the cities he visited into each of his cityscapes.

He was particularly fond of the Pike Place Market in Seattle. Some of the market's imagery found its way into Tobey's paintings of other cities – fish, noisy crowds, racks of fruit and vegetables, graphic signs, caricatures of nomadic humanity, disjointed architectural roof-lines and alleys meandering into gentle perspective. 'In Seattle, Tobey was himself a fixture of such a teeming environment, between 1940 and 1943, in the Pike Place Public Market. Here, he constantly observed hawking merchants and grotesque shoppers; auctioneers, seamen and cowpunchers; and vagrants who resembled birds and animals, and

¹² Dahl, *Art and Belief* 4.

rolled themselves into balls to sleep.’¹³ Regarding the Pike Place Market, Tobey said, ‘The Market will always be within me. Established back in 1907 by the farmers themselves – not for the tourist trade, but as a protest against the high prices paid to commission men – it has been for me a refuge, an oasis, a most human growth, the heart and soul of Seattle.’¹⁴

Mark Tobey maintained correspondence with hundreds of students and fellow artists – such as Lionel Feininger and Morris Graves – and with Baha’i friends. On his travels, Tobey visited museums and galleries, kept in touch with the latest artistic movements and ideas throughout Europe and America, and visited Baha’is.

Tobey’s involvement with the Seattle Baha’i community took place mostly between the late 1930s and mid 1950s, beginning immediately after his return from living in a Zen monastery in Kyoto, Japan. As a Baha’i, Tobey not only struggled to introduce a new artistic vision into a sceptical and largely unresponsive local climate, but was also an active participant in a religion no one knew about.

Tobey made two visits to the Baha’i World Centre in Haifa, Israel, where he visited Baha’i holy places on Mount Carmel and met with the Guardian of the Baha’i Faith, Shoghi Effendi. Locally he involved himself with the Seattle Baha’i community and served on the Seattle Baha’i assembly from 1939 into the early 1940s. A Baha’i community is comprised of individuals who come together because they recognize Baha’u’llah’s claim to be the Manifestation of God for this age, to establish certain patterns of personal and social behaviour and to build the institutions that promote the unity and safeguard the interests of mankind.

‘Baha’i provided Tobey with aesthetic as well as social and religious principles,’ wrote William C. Seitz, curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, at the time of the Museum’s 1962-63 exhibition of Tobey’s work. ‘He has often stated that there can be no break between nature, art, science, religion, and personal life . . . Few religions have given the concept of *oneness* such pointed emphasis, and few modern artists have dealt with it as explicitly as has Tobey.’¹⁵

In his lectures about art or Baha’i, when he was teaching art and in conversations with artists, collectors and gallery owners, Tobey mentioned the effect the Baha’i Faith had on his art. ‘I believe that a considerable amount of what might be called my better work is derived from Baha’i love. That, I think, has had the strongest effect on me.’¹⁶ At times, his enthusiasm for the Baha’i Faith created suspicions among some of his students and resulted in more than a few withdrawing from his classes.¹⁷

Tobey was continually faced with the challenge of how to divide his time and energy between his art and direct service to the Baha’i Faith. While he lived in Devonshire, England, at Dartington Hall, he served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles. He once moved briefly to Victoria, in British Columbia, Canada, to prevent the membership of the local spiritual assembly there from falling below the prescribed minimum of nine members. While in Switzerland he was chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Basel for sixteen years. During his years in Seattle, Tobey frequently attended the Geyserville Baha’i School in California, which he loved. Tobey also gave generous financial support to Baha’i pioneers – Baha’is who moved from their homes to live in faraway countries to teach the Baha’i Faith.

¹³ William C. Seitz, *Mark Tobey* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962) 36.

¹⁴ Introduction to *Mark Tobey: The World Of A Market* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964) .

¹⁵ Seitz, *Mark Tobey* 10.

¹⁶ Chisaburoh Yamada, *Dialogue in Art: Japan and the West* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1976) 304.

¹⁷ From notes taken at an interview with Anne Gould Hauberg, June 2002.

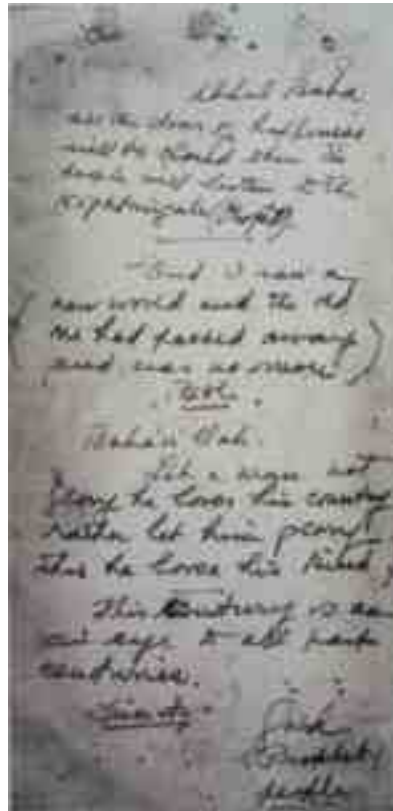
Tobey taught the Baha'i Faith to his friends, often coaxing them into philosophical dialogue. He frequently discussed topics that were at variance with the common thought of the time, such as equality of women and men, world unity, elimination of racial and class prejudice, and the unity of the human race. As an example, one Northwest artist writes in his memoirs how he attempted to passionately discuss the importance of collectivism and socialism with Tobey. At the time, the Spanish civil war was the favoured political topic. Tobey, on the other hand, listened politely but never commented. Instead, at a pause in the one-sided conversation, Tobey began to discuss cosmic order, the importance of unity, and the three internal powers: imagination, inspiration and intuition. This frustrated the young artist. He was seeking a political discussion. Tobey was not trying to avoid a discussion, but to put the discussion into a grander context – a higher vision of the great forces moving in the world today. Years later, as an older man, the artist wrote that he finally understood the importance of what Tobey had said.¹⁸

Tobey had a studio on Brooklyn Avenue, in Seattle, near the University of Washington. He later moved his studio to a large house at 52nd and University Way. Whenever he was in town – and he travelled frequently, often without notice – he was actively engaged with the Seattle Baha'i community, attending Baha'i gatherings, such as the Nineteen Day Feast and Holy Day events, and giving talks.

One of Tobey's most noteworthy contributions to the development of the Baha'i Faith in the Northwest was the daily 'open house' meetings, or 'firesides', he held at his studio during the late 1940s and through the 1950s. He informed the Baha'is, his artist friends and students, that his studio was always open for conversation every evening at 7 pm. He encouraged Baha'is to bring their friends to these evening gatherings at his studio but warned them, as he did his artist friends and students, not to show up before 7 pm as this was his time to work. Some Baha'is took advantage of his generous offer. Many of Tobey's artist associates, students and admirers, were frequent visitors at these popular evening gatherings.

A Baha'i who frequently attended the evening 'firesides' recounted the following:

There were always a number of people present. It was a very casual yet chaotic place. Sometimes Mark just started playing the piano, either one of his own compositions, or a nice classical piece that he liked. I was always concerned because his studio was very, very messy. Piles of papers were everywhere. I tried to clean up a little once but he scolded me, telling me to sit



Note by Mark Tobey for a Baha'i talk

¹⁸ William Cumming, *Sketchbook: A Memoir of the '30s and the Northwest School* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984) 108-9. Also from notes taken in an interview with the painter Windsor Utley at his gallery and studio on Second Avenue and Lenora in Seattle, February 1974.

down and not touch anything. I once shared the big overstuffed couch with a wet painting taped to glass. There were unfinished paintings scattered about the room. He also had primitive artefacts, Indian baskets, and clay pieces on the bookshelves. A few of the papers he would help me move at times so people could sit down. Papers and books were on the piano, under the piano, on the large table behind the couch, everywhere. Paintings were taped to the wall, not only his own, but works by his students and friends, as well. Yet there was a certain energy in the room, a hush of expectation, as you sometimes get in a theatre just before the curtain opens. Depending on who was present, Mark would usually give a short talk. He almost always talked about the Baha'i Faith, or some Baha'i principle, usually about something he had just read or understood. But sometimes he talked about art, as well.¹⁹

A favourite local visiting place of Tobey's was the small Baha'i centre, which until 1962, when it was sold, was a cabin surrounded by tall cedars and pine trees, just north of Seattle on Aurora Avenue. It contained a stone fireplace, a piano, tables, pine panelling, a small kitchen and a large library. Tobey visited whenever he had the chance, and many local Baha'is met Tobey there for the first time. One Baha'i recounted that Tobey would sit at a favourite table by the window, reading a book and conversing with anyone who would sit and talk with him. He often did drawings while sitting at the table and frequently gave the drawings to appreciative Baha'i friends.²⁰

Elizabeth Johnson, who had a small home in Tacoma, Washington, had collected Tobey's drawings and many small watercolours over the years, besides being the recipient of his handmade greeting cards. She kept the drawings in a large photo album and proudly displayed them to those who were interested. The only reason Mark gave them to her, she insisted, was because she liked to watch him draw and asked for them when he had finished.²¹

Mark Tobey spoke frequently about the Baha'i Faith. He was not always easy to listen to, if you judge public speaking by dynamics and clear, linear presentation. His voice was soft. He often sat, rather than stood. He talked, rather than pontificated. Tobey's gentle and thoughtful speaking style may have prompted him to comment 'Today they (the people) want not only the gift but the giver,'²² implying that subject matter seemed to take second place to skilful presentation. Tobey was frequently asked by the Seattle Baha'i community to be a fireside speaker or give a public presentation, and he always accepted.

Mark Tobey not only achieved international fame as an artist, but also wrote essays, published poetry, and, of course, expressed his love of music through his own compositions. When he spoke at the University of Washington in the spring of 1966 – one of his last visits to Seattle from his home in Switzerland – at a programme that was part of the distinguished visiting lecturer series, Tobey mostly spoke about the Baha'i Faith. His subject was advertised by the university as being about art. Several people complained because they came to hear an art lecture, not a religious lecture.²³ When Tobey was asked by Baha'is to

¹⁹ From notes taken at an interview with Florence Winship, who served with Mark Tobey on the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Seattle, at her home in Shoreline, Washington, August 1978.

²⁰ From notes taken at an interview with Elizabeth Johnson at her home south of Tacoma, Washington, April 1972.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Paintings from the collection of Joyce and Arthur Dahl* 15.

²³ From notes taken immediately after the lecture, interviewing several artists who had attended the lecture.

speak about the Baha'i Faith, he often spoke about art. When asked by a Baha'i why he did that, he replied with a shrug, 'I tell people what they need to hear.'²⁴

Art and Baha'i

Mark Tobey's experience as a Baha'i enriched his art with religious symbolism, a fusion of occidental and oriental art motifs, and low-key, unobtrusive mysticism. His paintings are quiet and unpretentious. They communicate an aura of reverence. They speak of profundity. While chaos, materialism, World War II and the explosive energy of abstract expressionism all screeched for attention, Mark Tobey offered the world small paintings that seem great in size. They are loud only in that they give voice to the spirit.

Tobey was the first artist to successfully incorporate Japanese Sumi, Far Eastern designs, Arabic calligraphy, African motifs, Byzantine, Greek and Renaissance images into his work. He was an older brother to the younger Northwest artists, well travelled and wise. Northwest artist William Cumming says, when recalling years later the founders of the Northwest school,

Mark, I never saw as wedded to this earth. He had a cosmopolitan's eager awareness of the unique qualities and tone of the region and this is refracted in his paintings. Mark is surely of the [Northwest] school, and how do I see him? Perhaps as a much-travelled older brother of us all, a sensei, one who was here first, who has seen much if not just about all, who returns and passes through us and leaves clinging to each of us some bit of his awareness. Without his touch, we should have all lacked the true beginner's mind, which in a sense is one of the primary qualities of our stance toward art and the world.²⁵

Mark Tobey's intense and thoughtful paintings were studied by Jackson Pollock and other New York abstract expressionists. At an exhibition of Tobey's 'white writing' paintings at the Willard Gallery in New York, Marian Willard, the gallery's owner, told Tobey that Jackson Pollock came to her gallery twice to view Tobey's work and spent the whole afternoon there on both occasions.²⁶

Tobey gave visual representation to spiritual imagery using a variety of metaphorical techniques, 'white writing' being one of his major artistic innovations and the style for which he is perhaps best known. Most of Tobey's 'white writing' paintings were done between 1935 and the late 1940s. This style was partly derived from his calligraphic studies in Japan and China and his exposure to Persian and Arabic calligraphy during sojourns in the Middle East. He attributed 'white writing' to light, stating, 'the addition of white describes form as if in light'.²⁷ This light could be considered to reflect the word of God, or divine knowledge, expressed by Tobey in many of his paintings with Baha'i themes. Baha'u'llah wrote: 'Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.'²⁸ For Tobey, 'The teachings of Baha'u'llah are themselves light with which we

²⁴ From notes taken in an interview with Anne Gould Hauberg, June 2002.

²⁵ Cumming, *Sketchbook* 135.

²⁶ From notes taken in an interview with Anne Gould Hauberg, June 2002.

²⁷ Conkelton and Landau, *Northwest Mythologies* 48.

²⁸ Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-i-Iqān, the Book of Certitude* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2nd edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974) 46.

can see how to move forward on the road to evolution.’²⁹ Tobey confirms his intention of his white lines being consciously fused with spiritual characteristics: ‘The multiple space bounded by involved white lines symbolizes higher states of consciousness or dimensions spoken of in the Father’s Kingdom.’³⁰

Tobey used light, or ‘white writing’, to create objects framed with shimmering planes that emerge from deep within a picture. The eye travels easily through a new perspective and into depths of hidden colour. The viewer’s vision touches a maze of shapes at the moment of creation. Images, symbols, logos, and hieroglyphs emerge where none had been before. Look at any Tobey painting from his ‘white writing’ period and let the eye follow a line – any line. The line takes you on an adventure. It was also a personal explosive revelation for Tobey, at the age of 44, when he ‘discovered’ ‘white writing’ and recognized its importance to his work. He said, ‘I’ve painted *Broadway* like Watteau³¹ in spirit . . . It astonished me. Such a feeling of Hell under lacy design – delicate as Watteau in spirit but madness.’³²

Tobey’s discovery of ‘white writing’ occurred at Dartington Hall in Devonshire, England, where he taught art for about eight years. Far from the clamour of New York and the provincialism of Seattle, Devonshire offered Tobey a place to meditate and experiment. He said, ‘The nights were so silent you could hear the horses breathing.’³³

In this ideal setting, among the oak trees, Mark Tobey ‘began to improvise a little picture very different from his others, a mesh of whitish lines on a brown background criss-crossing in a jumble of movement . . . With sudden intuition he realized that he had been using the Chinese calligraphic impulse with a vision of the energy of the city, but that the result was occidental and was, in fact, New York.’³⁴

William Seitz relates,

To anyone who has followed the pattern of Tobey’s thinking and feeling, it will be evident that categories of subject must break down: Broadway is a river; cultures are separated by canals; a photograph of a crowd is a flower garden; a city is a crystal . . . As Gorky³⁵ did Tobey sees in visual metaphors. Because of this Tobey is a symbolist, a series of intangible themes runs through his art that is independent of overt subject matter. *Light*, following its traditional symbolism, is associated with divinity, enlightenment, and spirituality.

And Seitz then quotes Tobey as asserting that ‘Turner is greater than the Impressionists’ because ‘he dissolved everything into light.’³⁶

²⁹ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 33.

³⁰ Mark Tobey, ‘Mark Tobey Writes of His Painting on the Cover’, in *Artnews* 44 (1-14 January 1946) 22.

³¹ Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) was an 18th-century French romantic artist. His distinctive, naturalistic but airy style evoked grace, enchantment and poetic fantasy during decades of war and social change. The ‘spirit’ Tobey refers to here possibly represents the artist’s ability to transcend with style the underlying turmoil of social upheaval.

³² Conkelton and Landau, *Northwest Mythologies* 48.

³³ Seitz, *Mark Tobey* 49.

³⁴ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 6.

³⁵ Arshile Gorky (1904-1948) was an abstract expressionist painter, who was born in Armenia, immigrated to the United States in 1920 and moved to New York City in 1925. Gorky painted linear abstractions representing dark moods of disassociation and alienation.

³⁶ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 22.

In commenting on his use of ‘white writing’, Tobey wrote, ‘White lines in movement symbolize light as a unifying idea which flows through the compartmented units of life bringing a dynamic to men’s minds, ever expanding their energies toward a larger relativity.’³⁷ These compartmented units of life reflect three levels, or spheres, where human activity takes place. On the lowest level – the natural, or animalistic, level – there is fear, power, anger, hatred, war, revenge and destruction. On the middle – or human – plane, there is philosophy, art, science, aesthetics, civilization, law, fellowship, technology and education. On the highest level – the divine plane – there is justice, humility, kindness, mercy, love, compassion, wisdom and understanding. According to the Baha’i teachings, man’s spiritual journey is ever upward – away from the limitations of the natural, which is the realm of chaos and imperfection, and toward the divine, which is wholly spiritual, and where the attributes of God are reflected in pure splendour: dominion, glory, perfection, might, power, forgiveness, majesty, kindness, and mercy. Even though ‘white writing’ was a major breakthrough for Mark Tobey, propelling him forward as a major American artist, he said, ‘I must say I don’t see much future for the white-writing . . .’³⁸

Above all Mark Tobey considered himself an explorer, an innovator, someone who always broke new ground, like a scientist in a laboratory moving forward with his discoveries. He once wrote, ‘Artists don’t repeat but always change as nature does.’³⁹ He warned his students not to become locked into a style, idiom or innovation that made their work – and consequently themselves – suddenly popular. This could be their artistic death – keeping them from what they might eventually discover.⁴⁰ Tobey himself went on to explore many other styles and dramatically succeeded at each. From the 1940s to the early 1950s, when Tobey was in his 60s, he painted works with Baha’i themes and titles. The Sumi paintings, very different from his other works, but in Tobey’s judgement among his most significant paintings, were created in 1957, when he was 66 years old. His experimentation with monotypes, which went on for more than ten years, began just before the Louvre exhibition in 1961. Tobey was never content to stay with a popular or saleable style. During every stylistic development, however, he returned to the human figure. Tobey built the human figure. He sketched and drew the human figure constantly.

Mark Tobey’s early art dealer in Seattle, Zoe Dusanne, was well connected to international artists and collectors, such as Peggy Guggenheim. In an interview, she said, ‘Good drawing is the basis of art. No matter how abstract the painting, or contemporary the style, you can tell with just a glance at the painting if the artist has the basics down. And the basic of drawing is the human figure.’⁴¹ She then pulled from her desk drawer an unframed painting by the Californian abstractionist artist Sam Francis who was influenced by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock and other New York abstract expressionists. It was composed of floating blue orbs, yellow lines, and red explosions. ‘See,’ she said, ‘here’s a man who can draw. Notice the careful placement of his forms, attention to detail, the sense of completion. He left nothing to chance. He created chance.’⁴²

Tobey insisted that the best way to learn to paint was to study art.

³⁷ Cited in *ibid* 34.

³⁸ Conkelton and Landau, *Northwest Mythologies* 72.

³⁹ Cited in Dahl, *Art and Belief* 8.

⁴⁰ From notes taken at an interview with Wesley Wehr, January 1961.

⁴¹ From notes taken in an interview with Zoe Dusanne at her gallery on Broadway on Capitol Hill in Seattle, Spring 1962.

⁴² *Ibid*.

Art comes from Art, as men come from men and flowers from flowers, and there is a Pacific Art which seems to be rising, although first noticed in Paris, and myself named as originator, which I feel is true. Art, if Pacific, must have roots either in the Orient or the American Indian as no environment per se gives 'Art'. The language of Art comes from man and migrates as man does.⁴³

Mark Tobey developed profound understanding of the artistic styles he explored. George Tsutakawa, a sculptor, painter and University of Washington art professor, internationally known for his fountain sculptures, commented about Morris Graves' and Mark Tobey's ability to adapt sumi expressions into their work:

They don't rely, mainly, on these sweeping gestures. But they rely on their manipulation of the brush in bringing out certain peculiarity of nature – it doesn't matter whether it's animal, or bird, or plant form, or just a cloud form, or just the atmosphere. They, I think, had the uncanny ability to differentiate between big sweeping lines and delicate expression that the Chinese and Japanese did so well for a thousand years.⁴⁴

Tsutakawa also offers a glimpse into Tobey's involvement with Asian artists and his understanding of technique:

And about that time [early 1950s] we used to have small dinner parties for some of these artists, especially Mark Tobey. And he came to this house, had dinner with us, and usually when we had these evenings, Paul Horiuchi joined us, and John Matsudaira, and then we had some visitors from Japan like Kiyoshi Saito, and some of the printmakers, who happened to be around. And at those sessions, after dinner, I would clear this table here, and then bring in a thick pile of rice paper, mulberry paper, and sumi for everyone. And we all sat and painted. And Tobey did most of these sumi paintings right here on this table. We have quite a collection of those things he did here. And when he got excited he painted people, just abstract, just everything. One after another; he would do maybe twenty or thirty in the evening, during the evening, while we were just sitting and talking. And of course everybody else got drawn in to this state of mind, and we all tried to paint each other or something. Well, I used to sit next to Tobey and watch him and he would, if he liked something, he would sign it and give it to us.⁴⁵

Mark Tobey poured into his paintings microscopic life, birds, animals, human beings and their thoughts, artefacts, art and architecture of religions and cultures, graphics, symbols modern and ancient, and calligraphic writings drawn from every age and culture. His paintbox was universal – the collected symbols of mankind.

⁴³ *Paintings from the Collection of Joyce and Arthur Dahl* 12 .

⁴⁴ Martha Kingsbury, oral history transcript of an interview with George Tsutakawa in Seattle, Washington, 8, 12, 14 & 19 September 1983, from the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, 100.

⁴⁵ *ibid* 101.

Seattle Farewell

In 1960 Mark Tobey left Seattle to live in Basel, Switzerland, though he kept his studio in Seattle and visited it during summer months. He left Seattle with some bitterness, and made his feelings known. He was particularly incensed at the young Seattle artists in the late 1950s and early 1960s who tried hard *not* to paint like Mark Tobey – to the point of deprecating Tobey’s achievements and reaching out into the broader areas of pure abstractionism which Tobey considered to be the dehumanization of art. The younger artists tended to do everything possible to avoid the ‘mystical’, or to be associated with the fabled ‘Northwest School’.

Mark Tobey never considered himself an abstract painter. He said, ‘Pure abstraction for me would be a painting where one finds no correspondence to life – an impossibility for me. I have sought a unified world in my work and use a movable vortex to achieve it.’⁴⁶ While viewing an exhibition of contemporary art at the Seattle Art Museum, Mark Tobey announced to his companion, ‘Modern art is the graveyard of the centuries.’⁴⁷

Mark Tobey’s work is not about modernism or abstractionism. His work is the unification of form and symbol into a progressive whole. He is a romantic and an idealist, who paints in symbols and metaphors. Each of his paintings is a thoughtful expression of a personal discovery, deeply understood, deeply felt. The clamour and in-your-face confrontation of so much contemporary art, the overt striving for originality to the point of sacrificing beauty and reason, create a graveyard of unpolished ideas.

Tobey’s inspiration for paintings often came from studying crystals, rock formations and patterns in minerals – the minutiae of cosmic order. He often made daily visits to the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, attracted by certain displays of minerals.⁴⁸

Tobey did, however, paint the noise and excitement of his times. In paintings like *Broadway* (1936), *Forms Follow Man* (1941) and *The Void Devouring the Gadget Era* (1942), he was often motivated by, and successfully expressed, elements of concern and dissatisfaction with the tearing down of the old and its replacement with a sub-standard new. This romantic undercurrent in his art led one observer to comment, ‘Mark Tobey often paints what he most professes to dislike.’⁴⁹

Some of his [Tobey’s] most recognizable derivations are from Near Eastern, medieval, and Oriental calligraphy and ornament, and from those primitive styles having graphic signs compatible with twentieth-century form. A list of such instances, some confined to a single work, would include Egyptian pictographs, cuneiform, Coptic and Peruvian textiles, Australian bark painting, Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew script, and Celtic illumination. This list could be augmented with another from contemporary environment of billboards, street signs, scientific symbols, punctuation and other graphic devices, unexpected effects in picture-magazine photographs, the end papers of old books, and an endless inventory of markings, patterns, and structures in nature. More revealing, perhaps, than to ferret out the scattered sources of

⁴⁶ Deloris Tarzan Ament, *Iridescent Light: The Emergence of Northwest Art* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2002) 41.

⁴⁷ Cumming, *Sketchbook* 108.

⁴⁸ Wehr, *The Eighth Lively Art* 43.

⁴⁹ Seitz, citing ‘a friend’ in *Mark Tobey* 15.

Tobey's graphic language is to indicate the ideology that explains its diversity: 'when I was a young man, I never heard of Byzantine art . . . now, above the horizon has come the beauty of Byzantine art – not only that, but the art the coloured people have, and the art of the Coptics, and all of the Orient and everything that has flooded the world.'⁵⁰

In the struggle between the spiritual and the material, the United States, and especially New York, is a major battlefield. Tobey said,

No doubt I did them [his paintings of cities] because I am an American painter. I cannot be indifferent to the swarming crowds, multitudes, neon signs, movie theatres, to the noises that I hate of modern cities . . . Of course when I did *Broadway* I did it because I loved it, because I had experienced it. It was in my bones, but I could paint it best when I was farthest from it.⁵¹

Tobey expressed once that there were three distinct motivations that drove society: romanticism, the return to classical ideals, or conquest by religion.⁵² Within this context Tobey was perhaps a romantic in character. Dahl comments,

In New York, as elsewhere in America, however, Tobey sees the colour, individuality, camaraderie, fantasy, and tradition that pleased him disappearing. Double-decked buses on Fifth Avenue are gone, and fine old buildings are being callously demolished: 'These city planners and these boxes have killed all that. There isn't any roof line any more. The new glass buildings rising overnight from gutted sites are for Tobey not an international style – they are international death.'⁵³

Mark Tobey was acutely aware of the dangers of change undertaken without a spiritual or visionary basis. Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, stated,

Indeed the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is the lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind that people in general do no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence . . . The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook on life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit . . . The Baha'i Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man which has first to be fed.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Seitz, *Mark Tobey* 18.

⁵¹ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 18.

⁵² From notes taken by the author about a talk given by Mark Tobey in spring 1964, at the Fischer Studio Building, 1515 3rd Avenue, Seattle.

⁵³ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 18.

⁵⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1972) 84.



The Void Devouring the Gadget Era (1942). Mark Tobey painted this the same year he painted Broadway Boogie. Filled with action and mystery, the eye actively seeks structure and coherency in the chaos quickly overtaking every shape and design. There's not much time left in this painting . . . it's a snapshot moments before the end.

Tobey painted paradoxes. He was a futurist who looked favourably toward, and anticipated, the eventual spiritualization of humanity. At the same time he lamented the tragic disregard sometimes held toward the wonders of the past – an old coat on a shivering man in a doorway, a challenging roof-line in an old city, lichen and stain discolouring a cathedral, worn stepping-stones.

The void in this painting actively blurring and refurbishing intricate and prized gadgets may be benign, as opposed to a void that obliterates and renders all extinct. This void, a spiritual void, is the void of oneness, where the spirit is freed from materialism and embraces the inevitability of its divine nature. The gadgetry and paraphernalia presently occupying humanity's attention will soon lose its glamour and be devoured by a new age.

Note the cuneiform designs and the intricate, puzzling shapes that easily represent the curious workings of larger machinery. The gadgets of this era dance. They are attractive and interesting. One would like to reach into the picture and pick one out. And the void isn't solid darkness or nothingness. It is a variable hued curtain, or veil of mysterious colour that transforms rather than obscures.

Seattle held other disappointments for Mark Tobey. By 1960 most of his friends had left the city, or had died. By the mid-1960s the Seattle galleries were disinclined to champion the ‘Northwest School’ artists of the 1930s and 1940s. And the city itself did not afford Tobey the respect his international reputation deserved.

One instance is the magnificent mural Tobey painted for the Seattle Opera House. Titled *Journey of the Opera Star*, it is the largest painting he ever did, at 12 feet by 7 feet. The mural was commissioned by John and Anne Hauberg. The Haubergs helped support Mark Tobey for many years. Anne Gould Hauberg’s father, Charles F. Gould, was a prominent Seattle architect. One of his achievements was designing the outstanding art-deco-style Seattle Art Museum in Volunteer Park. Anne is one of the founders of the Pilchuck Glass School. She was the only one of Mark Tobey’s art students to become a Baha’i and continues to hold Baha’i meetings in her home in Seattle.

Tobey was distressed that his mural was placed high above the main doors in the entryway to the opera house. This may seem petty, but the mural is an intricate weave of logos, glyphs, graphics, and symbols – impossible to view and appreciate from the distance and location from which one was forced to view it. The painting shouts with an intense voice, as though it has something to sing. There is movement in the spiral and vortex of its imagery. To look at the mural, one has to crane the neck upwards while standing in front of the main doors as people stream through the open doors.

At this point in his career Mark Tobey had achieved immense artistic stature. William Seitz, of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, writes,

After his retrospective exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1961 [at the Louvre Museum, Paris] an English critic wrote that ‘Tobey is considered by the prominent painters of the School of Paris, as well as by established European art dealers, to be the foremost living American artist.’ A critic of France – that country which in the past has occasionally been less than hospitable to the art of outsiders – wrote that ‘Tobey is perhaps the most important painter of our epoch.’⁵⁵

Otto Seligman, Tobey’s long-time friend and art dealer in Seattle, commented, ‘Mark called me from Paris – collect, of course – during his exhibition at the Louvre Museum. He said, “Otto, add a zero at the end of the price to each one of my paintings.” So I did. That’s how well his career has taken off. Europeans really appreciate Tobey’s paintings.’⁵⁶

Mark Tobey’s closeness to the Seattle Baha’is, however, only grew. He was always welcome at Baha’i functions and enjoyed seeing old friends and making new friends. He spoke often at the Baha’i Centre on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Union Street, in the Eagles Auditorium. Often when he was the honoured speaker for the Baha’i Faith, people from the University of Washington attended, as well as former students and old friends. Tobey said, ‘Baha’i crowds are the only crowds I can bear.’⁵⁷

Tobey believed there would never be a ‘Baha’i’ art, but rather an evolution towards, and acceptance of, all art and a universality of expression.

⁵⁵ Seitz, *Mark Tobey* 7.

⁵⁶ From notes taken in an interview with Otto Seligman at his gallery in the Wilsonian Hotel on University Way in November 1962.

⁵⁷ *Paintings from the Collection of Joyce and Arthur Dahl* 15.

Of course we talk about international styles today, but I think later on we'll talk about universal styles . . . the future of the world must be this realization of its oneness, which is the basic teaching as I understand it in the Baha'i Faith, and from that oneness will naturally develop a new spirit in art, because that's what it is. It's a spirit and it's not new words and it's not new ideas only. It's a different spirit. And that spirit of oneness will be reflected through painting.⁵⁸

Mark Tobey always insisted that he was not a 'Baha'i artist,' but an artist who was also a Baha'i. He let the Baha'is in Seattle know they should never introduce him as a 'Baha'i artist', but that he should be introduced as a Baha'i or as an artist who was a Baha'i.⁵⁹ Tobey wrote, 'You know the Guardian freed art before his death,' and he cited Shoghi Effendi's words: 'There is no official Baha'i Art, as this is not a new religion but religion renewed.'⁶⁰

The art of Mark Tobey paves the way for rich artistic themes expressing an abundance of spirit. More than an artist – teacher, friend, and sage – he affected everyone he met. He enjoyed people and people liked him. An art school did blossom around him – the 'Northwest School' in the Pacific Northwest. His work – and his thought – had a significant influence upon the artists of that short-lived group.

To the Baha'is, however, he was Mark – a member of the Seattle assembly for a time, a committee member, a helper at the Baha'i Nineteen Day Feasts, teacher of Baha'i adult classes and public speaker. He opened his home for discussions about art and religion and played the piano at Baha'i gatherings. His life of creativity and service reflected the two powers in his life, art and Baha'i.

⁵⁸ Dahl, *Art and Belief* 15.

⁵⁹ From notes taken in an interview with Florence Winship, August 1972.

⁶⁰ *Paintings from the Collection of Joyce and Arthur Dahl* 15.

Biographical Zoning and Baha'i Biographical Writing: The Case of Rose Henderson

WILL C. VAN DEN HOONAARD

Abstract

This paper explores biographical zoning as a phenomenon of Baha'i biographical writing. It draws on a number of Baha'i vignettes and, in particular, on the life of an early Canadian Baha'i, Rose Henderson, to illustrate the phenomenon. Biographical zoning refers to the process whereby the individual or the affiliated group claims exclusive privilege of particular biographical information at the expense of other biographical data. Although autobiographical accounts understandably undergo biographical zoning, the process also applies to other biographical writing and brief biographies in particular.

The act of biographical zoning seems to be particularly prevalent when the individual shares memberships, informal or formal, with a variety of groups. In that case, the individual chooses which membership activities to highlight, or the biographer, by dint of partisan enthusiasm, stresses the subject's total involvement in merely one group. If the biographer's context of membership is the same as that of the subject, there is often an unwitting urge to follow the group's claim on that person and the group's disavowal of that person's affiliation with other groups.

The paper also explores the existence of four Baha'i world views that may account for the practice of biographical zoning. The four world views can be described as the embryonic view, the integrative view, the oasis view, and the composite view. Each of these views underscores a particular relationship to the world at large; some views are more likely to engage in biographical zoning than others.

Cathy Freeman, Dizzie Gillespie, Alain Locke, Carole Lombard, Lydia Zamenhof, the Dowager Queen Marie of Romania: What do these prominent athletes, musicians, intellectuals, actors, and royalty share? They were, or are, part of the Baha'i community. They also share a distinctive feature of their lives: they occupy biographical zones with strict boundaries.¹

¹ I presented earlier versions of this paper at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Baha'i Studies Seminar and the Baha'i Biography Conference at Landegg International University (Switzerland), both held in December 2002. The present form follows more closely the paper I presented at the Annual Meetings of the Canadian Historical Association, held at the University of Toronto in May 2002. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Mr Daniel Dubé, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa. I am grateful to Dr Peter Campbell, Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, Ms Deirdre Bonnycastle of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Dr Tamara Myers of the University of Winnipeg for their generous help. Dr Linda Kealey of the University of New Brunswick kindly offered her papers on Rose Henderson for photocopying. Dr Deborah K. van den Hoonaard, St Thomas University in Fredericton, offered helpful comments in the further development of this paper, as has Ms Marlene Macke of St Marys, Ontario. I also thank Mrs Farzaneh Bastan for undertaking some Persian-English

Biographical zoning refers to the process whereby the individual or the affiliated group claims exclusive privilege of particular biographical information at the expense of other biographical data. Although autobiographical accounts understandably undergo biographical zoning, the process also occurs in other biographical writing, and in brief biographies in particular. As a Baha'i biographer in the making, I am a particular suspect in the 'crime' of biographical zoning.

The act of biographical zoning seems to be particularly prevalent when the individual shares informal or formal memberships with a variety of groups. In that case, the individual chooses which membership activities to highlight, or the biographer by dint of partisan enthusiasm, stresses the subject's involvement in merely one group. If the biographer's context of membership is the same as that of the subject, there is often an unwitting urge to follow the group's claim on that person and the group's disavowal of that person's affiliation with other groups.

The disavowal can be unintentional or intentional. When the disavowal is unintentional, as it usually is, the act of zoning entails a complete lack of familiarity or knowledge of the individual's other associations or memberships. Aside from the partisan enthusiasm I referred to above, the most profound reason lies in the dearth of historical records. Moreover, the fact that not all groups are equally interested in producing biographies of the same person produces an unevenness and can lead to zoning. It is quite unusual to have a cadre of biographers who would tackle biographies from a variety of perspectives and memberships. The community of Baha'i scholars is small and the number of non-Baha'i scholars interested in writing about Baha'is is even smaller. We do have a few examples, however, where the Baha'i affiliation of particular individuals is gradually being recognized, not by the general public, but by writers on the lives of such people as Lydia Zamenhof, Mark Tobey, the Dowager Queen of Romania, W. Sutherland Maxwell, Bernard Leach, Richard St Barbe Baker, Auguste Forel and Dizzie Gillespie. In several of these cases, however, there is no in-depth consideration of their involvement with the Baha'i Faith or its community.

If the disavowal is intentional, there are much greater issues at stake – the kind that are not easily resolved by 'more research'. When biographical zoning occurs there is a clear background and foreground. The background – usually ignored by the group who claims biographical privilege – constitutes that person's other memberships and/or associations. The foreground is, from the perspective of the relevant group, the only biography that is visible and meaningful. From a scholarly perspective, biographical zoning becomes problematic when one relies only on documentary sources vested in one of the affiliated groups. Turning to those sources of information is much like relying on the one side of a coin that perpetually faces upwards, so that the other side of the coin is relegated to invisible status.

There are parallels in other areas, as in, for example, medical staff-patient relationships. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss² developed the idea of 'awareness contexts' to characterize the relationship between terminally ill hospital patients, their families, and

translations. Ms Sarah Li of Kingston University was helpful in securing relevant information in London. I thank my daughter, Cheryl, for having read out my paper at Landegg International University when I had laryngitis. I also wish to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers of *Baha'i Studies Review*.

² Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, 'Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction', *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964) 669-679.

medical staff.³ The distribution of knowledge about the dying person's condition is quite uneven, ranging from 'closed awareness', when knowledge is withheld from the patient, to 'open awareness', when there are no secrets among all the parties:

An *open awareness* context obtains when each interactant is aware of the other's true identity and his own identity in the eyes of the other. A *closed awareness* context obtains when one interactant does not know either the other's identity or the other's view of his identity. A *suspicion awareness* context is a modification of the closed one: one interactant suspects the true identity of the other or the other's view of his own identity, or both. A *pretence awareness* context is a modification of the open one: both interactants are fully aware but pretend not to be.⁴ [*emphasis mine*]

Before coming to the main example of biographical zoning, it is useful to draw briefly on a number of historical examples – all of which demonstrate either the invisible Baha'i identity of the featured person from the perspective of the larger society, or the invisible social significance of that person from the Baha'i standpoint.⁵ Biographical zoning can go in various directions, as the next vignettes will demonstrate.

Alain Locke represents a good case of closed awareness, for both 'parties' (i.e. the Baha'i community and the larger society) were unaware of his activities in the other party. Alain Locke (1885-1954), the African-American philosopher and aesthete, was the 'ideological mastermind behind the Harlem Renaissance'⁶ and a Baha'i. He embraced the Baha'i Faith in 1918, the same year he graduated from Howard University. At least one leading authority doubted Locke's affiliation with the Baha'i Faith,⁷ although the Baha'i Faith was well known among the circle of African-American intelligentsia at that time.⁸ Locke is always listed as an Episcopalian in his biographies.⁹

A striking form of biographical zoning, the equivalent of pretence awareness according to the typology developed by Glaser and Strauss, belongs to Aboriginal activist 'Burnam Burnam', aka Harry Penrith. Burnam/Penrith (1933 or 1936-1997), one of the first Aboriginal Baha'is in Australia, was at one time a charismatic figure in the Baha'i community.¹⁰ What was less known to the Baha'is was his 'fierce individualism or his confrontations with other Aboriginal leaders'.¹¹ His flamboyant behaviour included his

³ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (London: Tavistock, 1983) 182.

⁴ Glaser and Strauss, 'Awareness Contexts' 669.

⁵ Biographical zoning in the Baha'i community is the obverse of what David Piff, *Bahā'ī Lore* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) has found in terms of the informal Baha'i lore claiming Baha'i membership of celebrities. Piff lists nearly 80 of them, from Captain Kangaroo to Cher and the Archbishop of Canterbury..

⁶ Christopher Buck, 'Alain Locke: Baha'i Philosopher', *Baha'i Studies Review* 10 (2001) 19.

⁷ Buck, 'Alain Locke' 21.

⁸ In the 1920s, for example, there were considerable contacts made by Baha'is with W. E. B. Du Bois, Franz Boas, James Weldon Johnson, and Jane Addams – all vitally interested in the steps taken by the Baha'is in promoting racial unity.

⁹ Buck, 'Alain Locke' 47.

¹⁰ Graham Hassall, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 28 February 2002.

¹¹ Fiona Capp, 'Review of Marlene J. Norst, [1999] *Burnam Burnam: A Warrior for Peace*' in *The Age* at <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/991120/books/books/0.htm> (2002).

planting of the Aboriginal flag on England's soil during the Australian bicentenary.¹² None of his activities in the other biographical zones were featured (as far as I know) in Baha'i publications, where he was regarded as an icon of a tribal person who had entered the Baha'i community.

One group's background becomes another group's foreground. Carole Lombard (1908-1942) provides an interesting example of biographical zoning. Baha'is were aware of her role as an actor, but one wonders to what extent the world at large knew she was a Baha'i. A contemporary fan of Carole Lombard describes her as an 'icon of the Golden Age of Hollywood'¹³ who died in a plane crash in 1942. Lombard was introduced to the Baha'i Faith by Lorol Schopflocher, a young New Yorker who married Hand of the Cause of God Siegfried ('Freddie') Schopflocher. Lorol Schopflocher was herself introduced to the Baha'i Faith by Rose Henderson, an early Baha'i and leading social activist. There is, however, no record that the 'larger' society outside the Baha'i community knew Lombard as a Baha'i.

Another Australian Aboriginal, Cathy Freeman, achieved considerable fame in recent years as an Olympian athlete who at the age of 27 had already won over 30 international races as a runner.¹⁴ Worldwide, few Baha'is know she was raised in a Baha'i family. In her case, biographical zoning also represents the type of pretence awareness. A major work on sport heroines has an extensive biographical account on Cathy Freeman, but her Baha'i background is not in evidence at all.¹⁵

The Canadian Context

Turning now to the lives and biographies of a number of early Baha'is in Canada, many of my findings in this area come from my historical research on the Canadian Baha'i community.¹⁶ Focussing more narrowly on the Baha'i community, a number of authors¹⁷ observed that many early Baha'is were also social activists. While from its earliest days the Baha'i teachings encouraged social and economic development,¹⁸ they brought special attention to the plight of the poor, the status of women, illiteracy, orphans, health, women's suffrage, racism and education, to varying degrees in Britain, the United States, France, Iran and Canada. As Weinberg suggests, for 'some of them, the Baha'i movement was simply another organisation they belonged to alongside other cherished causes.'¹⁹ Biographical zoning was easily maintained even in those years of social activism outside the Baha'i community. Following the example of 'Abdu'l-Baha, one expressed one's Baha'i identity

¹² Marlene J. Norst, *Burnam Burnam: A Warrior for Peace* (East Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 1999).

¹³ Anonymous, 'Great for Research', 2002, a customer review of Robert D. Matzen's *Carole Lombard*, Amazon.Com website, 1 January 2002.

¹⁴ Nike Melbourne Track Club, 'Profiles: Cathy Freeman', at <http://www.melbournetrackclub.com.au/freemanprofile.html> (2002).

¹⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 91-101. Dr Hargreaves confirmed that she remembered reading somewhere that Ms Freeman's family was Baha'i (email from J. Hargreaves to author, 19 July 2004).

¹⁶ Will C. van den Hoonaard, *The Origins of the Bahā'ī Community of Canada, 1898-1948* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ See, for example, Robert Weinberg, 'Sounding: Early European Baha'i Involvement in Social Activism', *Baha'i Studies Review* 10 (2001); van den Hoonaard, *Origins* 29-42.

¹⁸ Will C. van den Hoonaard, 'A Pattern of Development: An Historical Study of Baha'i Communities in Development', *Bahā'ī Studies Notebook* (1984) 3 (3-4) 107-27.

¹⁹ Weinberg, 'Sounding' 129.

through social action, rather than through verbal assertion. Any non-Baha'is involved in the zoning process were, however, often unaware of the religious identity of the person who also happened to be a Baha'i.

Conversely, Baha'is normally did not (and are still reluctant to) assert their occupational or professional interests within the Baha'i community. Nathalie and Steven Thirlwall, veteran Baha'is in the Baha'i community of Ottawa, claim that Baha'is 'deliberately downplay these interests'.²⁰ 'It is dangerous territory,' says one, 'when giving praise about things that are not directly related to the Baha'i Faith.' By downplaying external involvements, the Baha'i community is informally stating that there is 'no rank'.²¹ Marlene Macke²² claims that as primacy is given to spiritual equality, individual rank based on other criteria is considered less important.²³ Such an attitude prevailed even more so during the 1920s and 1930s when the Baha'i subculture 'did not emphasize knowledge of fellow Baha'is outside their role as participating believers'.²⁴ There are a myriad additional explanations, such as the fact that Baha'i communities have been so small that there were no other members with the same particular external interest or that no other members could appreciate the significance of an individual's prominence in his or her own field.²⁵ However, there are times today when particular talents are showcased, such as in the case of music (e.g. Dan Seals and Dash Croft, Dizzy Gillespie) although in these cases it is probably because they themselves were quick to acknowledge publicly their Baha'i affiliation.²⁶ Nevertheless, as David Piff points out in *Baha'i Lore*, celebrity status is a 'mixed blessing, attractive, yet dangerous'.²⁷ On one hand, testimonies about the Baha'i Faith coming from those with 'fame, great learning, power . . .' serve to underscore the truth claims of the new religion. On the other hand, being a celebrity 'may lead to unhealthy growth of pride at one's status or accomplishments and result in personal disaster'.²⁸

Within the early days of the Canadian Baha'i community there were a relatively large number of adherents whose work 'outside' the Baha'i community was zoned biographically, whose professional and other interests were muted inside the Baha'i community and whose Baha'i identity remained unknown to the larger society. Biographical zoning thus worked both ways. Honoré Jaxon (1861-1952) was the secretary of Louis Riel, and his later affiliation with the Baha'i community (as Canada's first Baha'i) was largely ignored by his

²⁰ Nathalie Thirlwall and Steven Thirlwall, interview by W. C. van den Hoonaard, Ottawa, 25 January 2002.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Marlene Macke is a biographer of Laura Davis – a close associate of Rose Henderson.

²³ Marlene Macke, letter to W. C. van den Hoonaard, St Marys, ON, 16 April 2002.

²⁴ van den Hoonaard, *Origins* 288.

²⁵ I thank Reviewer 1 for this particular insight.

²⁶ Macke, letter, 16 April 2002.

²⁷ Piff, *Bahā'ī Lore* 139; the reader should bear in mind that inasmuch as biographical zoning may apply to biographical writing in many cultures, the notion of fame and the like does vary across cultures. This paper represents a western perspective on these matters simply because it is a case study of Rose Henderson, a Canadian.

²⁸ Piff, *Bahā'ī Lore* 140.

peers. Ironically, it took a non-Baha'i historian, Donald Smith,²⁹ to bring Jaxon's Baha'i affiliation to the attention of Baha'is themselves.³⁰

A second Canadian case will suffice as a good example of biographical zoning. It involves the life of Albert Durrant Watson (1859-1927), known widely in intellectual circles in Toronto as an astronomer, mystic and poet.³¹ He was the main promoter of the 'Twentieth Planers' who believed that refined souls such as Plato, major composers and others, inhabit the 'Twentieth Plane' in the afterlife.³² The Twentieth Planers practised communion with them during rather startling, highly publicized seances.³³ Watson's Baha'i affiliation has only very recently come to the attention of such scholars as Walter Meyer zu Erpen, who is authoring an entry on Watson for the *Canadian Biographical Dictionary*. Even within the contemporary Baha'i community, there is virtually no knowledge of either Watson's Baha'i membership or his extensive involvement in the literary and intellectual circles of Toronto.

We will now consider in detail one of Canada's earliest Baha'is, Rose Henderson, as a telling case of a suspicion awareness context whereby one party suspects the true identity of the other or the other's view of his or her own identity.

Rose Henderson

Rose Henderson is a captivating research subject for a number of reasons. Long forgotten, Rose was part of the early Baha'i community in Canada during the first two decades of the 20th century, but seems to have disappeared after that. She is, however, resurfacing in this paper, being brought into the Baha'i community through the contemporary back door, as it were. A study of Rose's engagement with the earlier Baha'i community says something about the condition of that community and, indeed, what it was like to be a Baha'i. A study of Rose's Baha'i involvement makes the case of how this particular Baha'i and others have contributed to the wider society. I strongly suspect that every national Baha'i community has a 'Rose' in its historical lapel. No less important, Rose Henderson represents a case of biographical zoning.

Rose's contributions to society, let alone her Baha'i involvement, have never been systematically studied, but one finds scattered references to them. Tamara Myers, at the University of Winnipeg, came upon Rose in her research on girls who came before the Montreal Juvenile Delinquents' Court in the 1910s, while Peter Campbell, at Queen's University, is exploring her life as a social activist.³⁴ Biographical zoning in Rose's case reveals the complexity of zoning: do we, as Baha'is, have enough material about her to be

²⁹ Donald B. Smith, 'William Henry Jackson: Riel's Secretary', *The Beaver* (Spring 1981) 10-19; 'Honoré Joseph Jaxon: A Man Who Lived for others', *Saskatchewan History* 34/3 (1981) 81-101; 'Right Dream, Wrong Time', *Globe and Mail* 15 December (2001) F 6-7.

³⁰ Robert Stockman, *The Bahā'ī Faith in America: Origins, 1892-1900*, vol. 1 (Wilmette, IL.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1985); van den Hoonaard, *Origins*.

³¹ See, for example, Albert Durrant Watson, *The Poetical Works of Albert Durant Watson* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1924).

³² Albert Durrant Watson, *The Twentieth Plane: A Psychic Revelation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1918).

³³ Such seances were, and are, not part of Baha'i beliefs.

³⁴ Peter Campbell at Queen's University is exploring her life as a social activist ("Working-Class Hero" Rose Henderson and the Canadian Left, 1919-1920', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, University of Toronto, 29 May 2002). Sadly, regarding Rose's papers, Scott Young, the husband of Rose's granddaughter, Anne, 'got rid of everything' after Anne's death (Deirdre Bonnycastle, interview by W. C. van den Hoonaard, Saskatoon, 6 June 2000).

able to ignore her 'non-Baha'i' activities, or (as the case may likely be) was Rose herself responsible for her own biographical zoning?

Rose Henderson, née Wills, was born in Ireland³⁵ in 1868 or 1869 and came to Canada in 1893 when she was about 24 years old. Rose married an American accountant³⁶ and in 1889 she had given birth to Ida Rose, who ran off, at a young age, to British Columbia where, in 1908, she married W. R. Bonnycastle, nine years her senior.³⁷ In 1912, Rose had become a young widow and took in boarders from McGill University.³⁸

Many of Rose's interests spanned her whole life, while a number of others seem more concentrated in particular periods. Rose had long-term interests in promoting health. She succeeded in getting Parliament to amend the 1912 Drug Act to prevent the sale of medications except by doctor's prescription,³⁹ and was in touch with Dr. John Esslemont, a British Baha'i, who was a member of the executive committee of the State Medical Service Association, a body set up to promote the concept of a national medical service.⁴⁰ The Association provided evidence to the government committee that produced the Dawson Report, a report that is acclaimed by medical historians as one of the most important and far-sighted documents of the modern age and as one of the foundations of the British National Health Service.

While always interested in the affairs of humanity, her career spans at least six different periods of activities. Although these periods overlap, one can divide them up into the following interests: mothers and children, peace and the status of women, juveniles, labour, politics and public office, and education, to name just a few of her involvements. She was also a prolific writer and poet.⁴¹ One hundred years ago, early in her career, she published a little book of stories and poetry about poor children, *Kids What I Knows*.⁴² Her foreword states that 'Man through his love of power and greed for gold has created poverty (the worst of all crimes) and through the unequal distribution of wealth he has compelled unequal opportunity.' In an interview with the *Montreal Daily Star* (11 September 1912), Rose is already alerting her readers to the fact that the country's legislators have dealt only with the production and protection of wealth and with the adult – 'mostly with the male adult'. According to her, society had imposed immense responsibilities on mothers without enabling them to fulfil these obligations; she spoke against 'good advice, gifts, and doles', miscalled charity.

More important, she argued against the separation of children from mothers when society used poverty as an excuse, saying institutional care could not replace the nurturing love received at home. Finally, she reminded her readers in the above interview that in 1912 a Member of Parliament had suggested that some \$10 million of the \$39 million surplus be spent on the navy; 'Would we not better spend a little money in defence of mothers and

³⁵ *Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1937.

³⁶ There is some uncertainty about her husband's name.

³⁷ Bonnycastle founded BC Electric and named a lake and a mountain after Ida Rose (Bonnycastle, interview, 6 June 2000).

³⁸ Deirdre Bonnycastle, emails to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 10 January 2002 and 31 January 2000; interview, 6 June 2000.

³⁹ Sir Charles G. D. Roberts and Arthur L. Tunnell, eds., *A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 2, (Toronto: Times Publications, 1936) 497.

⁴⁰ Moojan Momen, *Dr J. E. Esslemont* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1975) 6-7.

⁴¹ Peter Campbell has collected some 150-200 of Rose Henderson's writings.

⁴² Montreal: W. H. Eaton and Son, 1902.

children?’ She also appeared before a parliamentary committee advocating the establishment of an old-age and mothers’ pension, at the invitation of Prime Minister William L. Mackenzie King. Widely-travelled, she moulded public opinion in favour of these pensions. By 1927 six provinces in Canada were operating ‘mothers’ pensions’.⁴³

As a maternal feminist, she not only spoke of the economic causes of war, but also of women’s ‘maternal aversion to violence and war’.⁴⁴ Rose ‘was a unique blend of socialist and feminist ideas’ which were brought to bear on the establishment of peace.⁴⁵ In 1920, she published ‘Women and War’.⁴⁶ According to Sangster,⁴⁷ Rose believed that because of ‘women’s mothering experiences they better understood the value and sanctity of human life’. Thus peace was seen as both a socialist and a women’s issue. She was the sole Canadian delegate to the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom at The Hague Conference in 1922.⁴⁸

After two years of voluntary service helping children who appeared in the police courts, she had gathered enough facts to assist the federal government to establish juvenile courts; this service was followed by eight years as assistant to the judge of the juvenile court in Montreal,⁴⁹ possibly from 1924 to 1931.⁵⁰ She was also an early advocate of the ‘Big Sister and Big Brother’ movement. She was an opponent to cadet training in schools.⁵¹

As was the case with another early Baha’i, Honoré Jaxon, Rose championed socialist causes and the Labour movement. She was portrayed as a working-class hero in the Labour press during the years 1919-1920,⁵² as evidenced by the extensive press notices that have appeared about her. A proponent of the rights of the working class, she saw middle-class rule as a ‘tragedy’.⁵³ The *Toronto Star*⁵⁴ stated that she was ‘the best known speaker in the Labour movement’. The *Windsor Tribune* described her as a speaker of ‘rare ability, marshalling her facts clearly and delivering them with a force that carries conviction’.⁵⁵ In an interview with the *Montreal Daily Star*, Rose made the following statement: ‘We have established bureaux for the investigation of agriculture, forestry, mines, astronomy, bees, hogs and insects, but the human race, the most wonderful and sacred of all God’s creatures

⁴³ Anonymous, *A Thinker with a Stirring Message: Rose Henderson* [a brochure describing the life and interests of Rose Henderson], Montreal. (Available at the Baha’i World Centre Archives, Haifa, Israel, No. GA001/084/00193, 1927).

⁴⁴ Joan Sangster, ‘The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940’, in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*, eds. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 121-2.

⁴⁵ *ibid* 121-2.

⁴⁶ *ibid* 121-2.

⁴⁷ *ibid* 121-2.

⁴⁸ Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 109. Jameson Bond, a Baha’i since World War II, mentions that his ‘mother knew Rose Henderson in Toronto in the ‘30s when she was [also] active in the League of Nations Association of Canada’. (Letter to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 27 April 1997) .

⁴⁹ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

⁵⁰ *Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1937.

⁵¹ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

⁵² Peter Campbell, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 18 October 2001.

⁵³ Gerald L. Caplan, *The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism: The CCF in Ontario* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) 25.

⁵⁴ Cited in Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497; Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

⁵⁵ Also cited in Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497; Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

has been the last thing to receive attention.⁵⁶ Desiring first-hand information, Rose worked in 'factories and sweat-shops, laundries, restaurants and private homes' and lived in the homes of miners in Canada and Great Britain.⁵⁷ Rose maintained contact with William MacKenzie King, Canada's prime minister. In July 1926, for example, she wrote to him, urging him to take on reforms 'in the interests of justice, fair play and Constitutionalism'.⁵⁸

According to some, from 1926 to autumn 1930 she travelled to Germany and the Soviet Union to study political and social conditions. Rose's granddaughter, Anne, told the story that Rose Henderson wanted to travel to Russia 'to see what happened' after the Revolution of 1917.⁵⁹ In Britain she studied sociology and economics for two years at London University under Professor Laski (1893-1950) and others.⁶⁰ Laski was a celebrated scholar and socialist at the London School of Economics from 1920 to 1934, and author of 31 books. A 'public intellectual', he was active in the Labour Party and the Socialist League.⁶¹ Like Henderson, Laski undertook a visit to the Soviet Union (in 1934). As it turns out, it was at the height of Rose's involvement with the Labour movement, at the cusp of her becoming involved in partisan politics, that her support of the Baha'i Faith waned.

In the early 1930s she became a member of the executive of the Ontario Labour Party,⁶² and in 1934 she was successful in defending her Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)⁶³ candidacy to the Ontario legislature for Toronto-Dovercourt in the general elections.⁶⁴ In 1935 she was the Parkdale, Ontario, candidate for parliament, the same year that she was present at the Congress of the Canadian League against War and Fascism (CLWF).⁶⁵ In 1936 she became a 'leading figure' in the Toronto CCF Women's Joint Committee, while at the same time serving on the executive of the Ontario Labour Party at a time when there was a 'brief flowering of feminist support for the radical left'.⁶⁶ In 1934 she was an active member of the Toronto Board of Education (ward 5).⁶⁷ In 1936 Rose organized a peace-poster contest in Toronto's technical schools, in which Arthur Lismer (of the famed 'Group of Seven' painters in Canada) exhibited.

⁵⁶ 11 September 1912.

⁵⁷ Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

⁵⁸ MacKenzie King Papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, MG 26 J1, Vol. 132 (112399-112408); Microfilm Reel C2289, 8 July 1926.

⁵⁹ Rose's granddaughter, Anne, became right-wing and moved to Hollywood to become an actor. Anne's niece, Deirdre, always knew her as a set-designer (Bonnycastle, interview, 6 June 2000).

⁶⁰ Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, memorandum to the House of Justice, 16 November 1999 (enclosed in a letter from the Department of the Secretariat of the House of Justice to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 16 November 1999).

⁶¹ Isaac Kramnick and Barry Sheerman, 'Laski on the Left', *LSE Magazine* (Autumn 1993) 4-7.

⁶² Socknat, *Witness* 132.

⁶³ A socialist political party, which was transformed into the New Democratic Party (NDP) well after World War II.

⁶⁴ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

⁶⁵ Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, *No Easy Road: Women in Canada, 1920s to 1960s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990) 348.

⁶⁶ Socknat, *Witness* 107, 132-134, 325.

⁶⁷ *Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1937.

Henderson's Baha'i Involvement

Already in the first decade of the 1900s Rose Henderson appears as a Baha'i in Montreal,⁶⁸ probably becoming a Baha'i in 1909.⁶⁹ Her Baha'i teacher, May Maxwell, championed a number of social causes herself, but was particularly devoted to racial amity work.⁷⁰ Rose was also a friend of many Baha'is, including Juliet Thompson.⁷¹ Although information about her specific involvements in the Baha'i community is rather meagre, there are a number of characteristics of the Baha'i community we can draw on that explain the nature of her involvement. Although it is hard to speculate on the precise nature of her involvement with the Baha'i community – given the paucity of scattered information – one can describe three phases in her involvement in it.

Incipient Involvement: 1909-1912

Her involvement in the Baha'i community until 1912 largely corresponds to her interests in the welfare of mothers and children. Until 1912 membership in the Baha'i community was largely undefined by formal membership. May Maxwell, the foremost Baha'i teacher in Canada, attracted a number of leading Montreal citizens who became devoted to the Baha'i Cause. However, because there were not many authorized translations of the Baha'i sacred writings in existence, the Baha'i teaching was largely based on oral traditions. The group of new Baha'is gathered around May Maxwell did not constitute a distinct Baha'i community in the same sense as those of today. Individuals found in 'Abdu'l-Baha a person of enormous charisma, a Christ-like figure whose 56 or so years of imprisonment, charitable work, and exemplary life attracted considerable attention in the Western world. This connection, however, was primarily through May Maxwell. With perhaps an exception or two, the new believers in the new religion were apt to distinguish themselves in good works, keeping their religious faith as a personal matter rather than as a force to organize a group or community. This situation changed in 1912 with the visit to Montreal of 'Abdu'l-Baha, whom Rose met.⁷² His meetings with striking garment workers in Montreal, his talks on economic justice, and his presentations on the need to establish international peace and arbitration (where women would play a particularly significant role) must have confirmed Rose's identity as a Baha'i.

Acquiescent Phase: 1912-1927

'Abdu'l-Baha's visit received extensive press coverage in Montreal, in both English-language and French-language newspapers (in fact, at least 38 articles). By one estimate, some 2,500 people heard presentations by 'Abdu'l-Baha.⁷³ The visit was a keystone in the development of the Baha'i community of Canada for it allowed individual Baha'is to see themselves as a community, rather than as an aggregate of individuals. This process caused individuals to align more closely their 'outside' aspirations and their Baha'i interests: they were now asking themselves how to connect more forcefully these outside interests with their Baha'i interests. It was therefore not uncommon for Baha'is to correspond with

⁶⁸ *Bahā'ī World* (vols 1-12, 1925-54, rpt. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980) 8: 636.

⁶⁹ Rose herself explains in a letter dated 14 July 1927 that she heard of the Baha'i Faith for the first time 18 years previously (i.e. 1909) (Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999).

⁷⁰ van den Hoonaard, *Origins*, 88.

⁷¹ Peter Campbell, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 9 September 2002.

⁷² Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999.

⁷³ van den Hoonaard *Origins* 46.

‘Abdu’l-Baha on these matters. Rose Henderson was no exception. She, in fact, received two letters from him, instructing her how to serve humanity:

O Handmaid of God. Your letter arrived. We have supplicated the Lord of Hosts and begged His favour on behalf of the new believers so that they will remain firm. The infinite grace surrounds the weak and the poor. From the infinite favours of the Merciful One, I hope that you will spend your life in the service of God and I beg God’s confirmations and blessings for the maid servant of God.⁷⁴

and,

O Attractor to the Truth, your letter arrived. Its content was agreeably accepted, because it was proof of the attraction of the heart and the gladness of the spirit, joy, and rejoicing. Thank God that you obtained new confirmation and found intense strength. You had stated that your aim was to write a treatise regarding the education of the children of the poor. Now limit your thoughts in teaching the Cause of God so that confirmations will be showered upon you and become the cause of guidance to others.⁷⁵

One gleans, from the response of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, that she believed she was facing a difficult decision: whether to pursue her ‘outside’ interests (such as educating ‘the children of the poor’) or to place her energies in ‘teaching the Cause of God’. As we shall see later, this struggle characterized the remainder of her Baha’i life until she gradually shifted her attention from the Baha’i Faith to other causes, probably no later than 1930.

Denouement: 1927

The last-known indication we have of Rose Henderson’s involvement with the Baha’i community came in 1927. For the Baha’is around the world, including North America, it was a watershed year. A year earlier, fanatical elements within Shi’a Islam had undertaken fresh attacks against the Baha’is in Iran, this time in the village of Jahrum, killing 12 Baha’is and pillaging 20 homes.⁷⁶ Shoghi Effendi called upon the North American Baha’i community, however small, to intervene and make representations to the Shah of Iran. There were other setbacks: the Iraqi authorities summarily confiscated the house of Baha’u’llah in Baghdad, which is a point of pilgrimage for the Baha’i world.⁷⁷ Offsetting these ominous developments, the Queen of Romania expressed publicly and in no uncertain terms her allegiance to the new religion. Shoghi Effendi widely circulated the news of her acceptance. It was also in 1927 that the North American Baha’i community embarked on a process of legal incorporation by adopting a ‘Declaration of Trust’ and its by-laws in April.⁷⁸ In conjunction with this Declaration, moreover, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States and Canada adopted, at its 19th national convention, held in Montreal, a set of membership requirements for all believers. For many, the requirements did not alter their convictions and beliefs, but others found themselves in a position of having to choose

⁷⁴ Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999 (provisional translation by F. Bastan).

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Bahā’ī News*, 17 (April 1927) 4.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Bahā’ī News*, Special Issue (May 1927) 1-3

among their religious and political allegiances, Baha'i and others. The outbursts of attacks against the Eastern Baha'i communities together with the formalization of its constitution and membership brought the Baha'i community in North America to a heightened sense of awareness of itself as a community, an awareness that would dramatically change its criteria of membership and method of propagation.

There appears to have been at least one issue that may have contributed to Rose's irrevocable withdrawal from the Baha'i community: her political interests and activities (and perhaps her reluctance to publicly identify herself as a Baha'i). Rose must have been profoundly aware of the gulf between her desire to become politically involved and the fact that the Baha'i teachings forbade political involvement, as she ventured with her social activism into areas that were now defined by the Baha'i community as 'political' or 'partisan'. In 1932 Shoghi Effendi elaborated on this principle when he wrote, 'Let them [the Baha'is] refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.'⁷⁹

There was, however, another issue that loomed large in the renewed efforts of the Baha'is to bring their teachings to the attention of the larger public, namely the 'direct and indirect' methods of teaching the Baha'i Faith. The former entailed bringing the Baha'i message to the public, clearly pronouncing the source of the ideas, namely the founder of the Baha'i Faith, while the latter approach would indirectly bring the Baha'i teachings to the attention of selected audiences without mentioning either 'Baha'i' or the founder of the religion. Rose chose to employ the indirect method, which she believed was important in addressing educated and socially concerned audiences.⁸⁰

In 1927 she presented a number of issues to Shoghi Effendi that were relevant to her as a social activist. It was necessary, she believed, for the Baha'is to study and to be able to explain the events that were taking place in the world so that they could better correlate the Baha'i teachings with the social changes and attract those people who were longing for social change.⁸¹ She offered to make a tour visiting Baha'i communities to inform the Baha'is about the 'present-day movements' so that they might 'understand what the masses are longing for'.⁸² In her letters to 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, Rose raised issues that would for many years define the relationship between the Baha'is, individually and collectively, and the larger world. On one hand, do Baha'is best promote solutions to the world's problems by directly teaching the Baha'i Faith or by tackling the problems head-on, so to speak? On the other hand, what is the extent to which Baha'is should be informed about the larger world?

A number of her public talks directly reflected Baha'i beliefs and even a usage of words distinctive of the Baha'i teachings. In all of her public utterances and declarations she never referred to the Baha'i Faith. In some sense, then, it is her topics that are the only public evidence that she was a Baha'i. A brochure describing her lectures during 1927 and 1928 reveals Baha'i wording in the following titles of some of her talks: 'The People's Challenge to the Present Social Order', 'The Religion of the New Democracy', 'Woman – The Keystone to a New Civilization', 'The International Web of Economic Forces', 'What is

⁷⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahā'u'llāh* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, [1938] 1955), 64.

⁸⁰ Shoghi Effendi addressed the issue of direct and indirect teaching very thoroughly in a letter dated 20 February 1927; *Bahā'ī Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974), 124-7.

⁸¹ Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999.

⁸² *ibid* – there is no record of Shoghi Effendi's reply to Rose Henderson..

True Education?’ and ‘Is Peace Possible?’⁸³ These talks correlate with both the topics and expressions of Baha’i beliefs.

‘The People’s Challenge to the Present Social Order’ mirrors the Baha’i view that ‘Never have there been so many and varied sources of danger as those that now threaten the structure of society.’⁸⁴ The Baha’is were well acquainted with Shoghi Effendi’s understanding of developments in the wider society. With respect to nations, he described them as ‘exhausted and disillusioned’, cherishing ‘anew the spirit of revenge, of domination, and strife’. He described the lives of people as ‘convulsed by economic upheavals, . . . slowly drifting into two great opposing camps with all their menace of social chaos, class hatreds, and worldwide ruin’. He explored the condition of the races as ‘filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear’. Creeds, according to him, were ‘caught in this whirlpool of conflict and passion, [and] appear[ed] to gaze with impotence and despair at this spectacle of unceasing turmoil’.⁸⁵

‘The Religion of the New Democracy’ highlights the democratic principles of some aspects of the Baha’i governance system, which rejects partisan politics. The implications of the Baha’i Faith, according to the Baha’i texts, constitute ‘a challenge . . . to outworn shibboleths of national creeds – creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived’.⁸⁶ The Baha’i Faith is thus seen as the religion of the future. A prominent Baha’i, Hooper Harris, spoke on ‘Spiritual Modernism’.⁸⁷ Comparative religion, science and religion, and other similar topics were regular features at the Green Acre Baha’i School in 1927.⁸⁸ The word ‘democracy’ was a pervasive one in Baha’i circles.⁸⁹

‘Woman – The Keystone to a New Civilization’ conveys an essential message from the Baha’i teachings: that the future civilization will become less masculine and more feminine.⁹⁰ There are numerous references in the Baha’i teachings to the particular role of women in bringing peace, and it was a topic that held the attention of the Baha’is in 1927. For example, the Montreal governing body of the Baha’is (where Rose resided) published a list of 14 topics for its public meetings that included ‘Women’s Station in this Age’.⁹¹ In that year, as well, a compilation of the words of ‘Abdu’l-Baha on the subject was published under the title, *Equality of Man and Woman*⁹² and a national Baha’i magazine included a ‘Hymn of Marching Women’.⁹³ ‘Abdu’l-Baha asserted that ‘assuredly women will abolish warfare’.⁹⁴

The phrase ‘true education’ – as shown in the title of one of her talks, ‘What is True Education?’ – is a distinctive term that frequently occurs in the Baha’i writings. For

⁸³ Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

⁸⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 32.

⁸⁵ *Bahā’ī News*, Special Issue (May 1927) 8.

⁸⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 43.

⁸⁷ *Bahā’ī News*, 9 (December 1925-1926) 5.

⁸⁸ *Bahā’ī News*, Special Issue (May 1927) 16.

⁸⁹ e.g. *Bahā’ī News*, 19 (August 1927) 5.

⁹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Baha in *Star of the West*, 9/7 (13 July 1918, rpt Oxford: George Ronald, 1982) 87.

⁹¹ *Bahā’ī News*, 13 (September 1926) 7.

⁹² *Bahā’ī News*, 19 (August 1927) 5.

⁹³ *Bahā’ī News*, 20 (November 1927) 4.

⁹⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1943) 1:104.

example, Baha'u'llah, in *Ishrāqāt*, links the idea of a 'true education' to spiritual education: 'The hope is cherished that ye may obtain true education in the shelter of the tree of His [God's] tender mercies and act in accordance with that which God desireth. Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean.'⁹⁵ The word 'true' appears in many Baha'i expressions, as well as the idea of 'education'. We find such phrases as the 'true' principles of human progress,⁹⁶ and there were talks on 'Spiritual and Material Education',⁹⁷ the 'new' education,⁹⁸ and 'New Ideals of Education'.⁹⁹

Her talk 'The International Web of Economic Forces' portrays an image of globalization that was far ahead of its time, but ever-present in the Baha'i teachings. Her 'economics' talk is vested in the Baha'i 'Ideal of World Unity' and the 'New Internationalism'.¹⁰⁰

As a final illustration of how the Baha'i teachings permeated her presentations, one finds the topic of her talk 'Is Peace Possible?' a constant Baha'i theme. A search through *Bahā'ī News*, the major national Baha'i news organ of the time, reveals very many references to world peace: 'The Ideals of Peace',¹⁰¹ 'Peace and the World Court',¹⁰² 'A Practical Effort Towards World Peace',¹⁰³ 'Creation of a Peace Psychology',¹⁰⁴ and 'From Chaos to World Peace'.¹⁰⁵ In 1927 *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* was released, consisting of all the talks given by 'Abdu'l-Baha during his sojourn in North America.

Rose, a powerful influence, pulled other Baha'is into her work. In her earlier years she was responsible for attracting such stellar Baha'is as Lorol Schopflocher into the Baha'i Faith, but as time went on Rose also inadvertently exercised a threat to some members of the Baha'i community:

But Lorol [Schopflocher] was always hunting, seeking [new movements]. She went through the . . . movements of the New Thought, and of the authenticity of Rosicrucianism and was never satisfied. And Freddy [Lorol's husband] was always tolerant of all of these interests of his beautiful wife knowing that she would shake them off because there was no real value to them. So she heard of the Baha'i Faith from Rose Henderson. Rose Henderson became a believer in Montreal and later she moved to Toronto. And she was socialist. And of course being a socialist was not exactly what would enter into a realm of interest that fitted into Freddy's scheme of life being naturally a wealthy man, of capitalist background. But she told Lorol about the Baha'i Faith and Lorol became interested.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁵ *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh Revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978) 129.

⁹⁶ *Bahā'ī News*, 13 (September 1926) 7.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Bahā'ī News*, 14 (November 1926) 4.

⁹⁹ *Bahā'ī News*, 20 (November 1927) 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Bahā'ī News*, 18 (June 1927) 7.

¹⁰¹ *Bahā'ī News*, 10 (February 1926) 7.

¹⁰² *Bahā'ī News*, 13 (September 1926) 5.

¹⁰³ *Bahā'ī News*, 15 (February 1927) 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Bahā'ī News*, 18 (June 1927) 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Bahā'ī News*, 19 (August 1927) 5.

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Sala, interview by Evelyn Raynor, Toronto, ON, undated, 4.

The devotion of other people to Rose was unqualified and represents the kind of extensive influence that she might have exercised over a number of Baha'is, of whom Laura Davis was one. Laura would later become the foremost member of the Baha'i community in the Toronto area and secretary of the Canadian national spiritual assembly. It is evident that Laura was very fond of Rose from 'the prominence given to the clippings in Laura's scrapbook'.¹⁰⁷ It was especially Davis who, according to one interview participant, was initially diverted from her Baha'i work by Rose: 'Laura [Davis] was preoccupied with the social groups which were very aware of the social needs in Rose Henderson's socialistic activities and lectures. So this was a phase she went through which I think has proved very valuable for the [Baha'i] Faith now.'¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, Laura Davis became an 'active' Baha'i only after Rose's death in 1937.

Though formally still a member at least until 1930, Rose's involvement with the Baha'i community may have already been declining by the mid-1920s. After this period, according to Ernest V. Harrison, a long-standing Baha'i, Rose had no further contact with the Baha'i community.¹⁰⁹ On public occasions, Rose had difficulty in separating her personal opinion from the Baha'i teachings, which distanced her from the Baha'i community. One early Baha'i, Rosemary Sala, offered this comment on Rose Henderson:

She was a socialist, leftist, and therefore out of place in a way, in that [Baha'i] community. She gave many lectures, no Baha'i lectures, socialist. I liked her and I really liked her lectures, but she had difficulties with the Baha'i community. So she left in a way, she disappeared later. I never heard of her [again], I don't know what happened to her. But she was not an active Baha'i, she became less and less [active].¹¹⁰

While Rosemary Sala's husband, Emeric, commented:

She was a well known speaker in Montreal. She spoke on many platforms, mostly socialist or leftist orientation. And her statements were often, well, occasionally, in clash with the Baha'i point of view. It was at the end of her life she lost physical contact with the Baha'i community.¹¹¹

Rose Henderson died on 30 January 1937, at the age of 68.¹¹² She died as a 'result of a chill which she caught while speaking from an open truck on a cold autumn night'.¹¹³ Apparently, she was pleading for improvements in the operation of schools. The auditorium of the

¹⁰⁷ Marlene Macke, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 27 March 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Sala, interview, 15. Jameson Bond, another early Baha'i, confirmed in a letter Rose's contact with Laura Davis and the Baha'i Faith.

¹⁰⁹ EVH (Ernest V. Harrison) Papers, Baha'i National Archives, Thornhill, ON, Canada.

¹¹⁰ Sala, interview, 36.

¹¹¹ Rowland Estall and Emeric Sala, interview by Michael G. Rochester, Toronto, ON, 24 August 1987, 1-2.

¹¹² Two of Rose's great-grandchildren continue the family tradition of service. Colin Bonnycastle is director of an Aboriginal social work programme in Manitoba, while Deirdre Bonnycastle is specializing in developing curricula for equity students in Saskatoon. The head of the Communist Party, according to one of Rose's great-granddaughters, attended the funeral and sent Ida Rose (Rose's daughter) a bill for the taxi fare to the funeral (Bonnycastle, interview 6 June 2000).

¹¹³ I am deeply indebted to Marlene Macke who found several items related to Rose Henderson in the papers of Laura Davis. (LDP [Laura Davis Papers], Baha'i National Archives, Thornhill, ON, 157-017-6.)

Harbor Collegiate Institute, where the funeral service was held, was filled to capacity, with many waiting on the street. A guard of honour of Boy Scouts kept vigil all day. The service ended with a prayer by Laura Davis.

Rose completely lost contact with the Baha'i community,¹¹⁴ and the Baha'i community with her. By the time of her death, she had become a Quaker¹¹⁵ and had apparently been previously involved in the work of Theosophists. A *Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography* mentions, as late as 1936, that she was 'Protestant'.¹¹⁶ Rose's involvement with the Baha'i Faith was, until recently, unknown even to members of her own family, as one of her great-granddaughters testified: 'I had no idea she was a Baha'i. Somehow she became couched with shame in my family's history because it was rumoured that she was a communist.'¹¹⁷

The purpose of my pointing out these discrepant accounts is not to demonstrate whether or not Rose Henderson participated in these general social and Baha'i activities, but rather to indicate the problematic nature of biographical information. We can take many steps in resolving the dilemma of biographical zoning. Our research can, and should, be more exhaustive. However, if we are trying to contextualize research in the wider Baha'i culture, then there is something that should be found in that culture, namely the existence of divergent world views, some of which might promote biographical zoning, while others do not.

Baha'i World Views

Elsewhere, I have noted that there is a widely held notion that Baha'is share a common world view.¹¹⁸ The Baha'i sacred writings exhibit a powerful consistency and unity in explaining both spiritual and social realities. The elected and appointed institutions of the Faith follow in primary matters the guiding impulses flowing from the Faith's supreme administrative body, the Universal House of Justice. Upon closer inspection, however, it seems that Baha'is are guided by at least four world views that seem to be at variance with one another.

Such considerations have led me to seek the existence of these world views as the source of the Baha'i tendency to engage in biographical zoning. The four world views can be described as the embryonic view, the integrative view, the oasis view and the composite view. The following is a brief description of these world views.

In the embryonic view, Baha'is do not see their relationship to society as either antagonistic or competitive.¹¹⁹ They see the Baha'i community in its embryonic stage of development. The world offers much in the way of resources and opportunities. The integrative view encourages the participation of Baha'is in the wider society.¹²⁰ There are signs of the convergence of the Baha'i and the larger world, as expressed in the progressive developments in many fields, from politics to the social sciences. By contrast, the oasis view highlights the destructive forces in the world as a whole.¹²¹ The Baha'i community is an

¹¹⁴ Estall and Sala, interview, 24 August 1987.

¹¹⁵ Peter Campbell, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 13 March 2002.

¹¹⁶ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

¹¹⁷ Bonnycastle, interview, 10 January 2000.

¹¹⁸ Will C. van den Hoonaard, 'World Views and the Shape of Communities,' *World Order* 18 (3) (1984) 35-41.

¹¹⁹ van den Hoonaard, 'World Views' 36.

¹²⁰ *ibid* 36-7.

¹²¹ *ibid* 37.

oasis, a refuge for all humanity. The 'outside' world is barren; the Baha'i world is life-giving. From the perspective of the composite view, however, the Baha'i community sees itself as a subset of the fresh wind of the new revelation which affects all humankind. Baha'is perceive no difference in contributing one's talents to the world as a whole or to the Baha'i community: they serve the same end in promoting unity.¹²²

In the life of the Baha'i world, these four distinctions are rather arbitrary. First, an individual will sway among these perspectives over the course of his or her life. Second, an individual may exhibit more than one of these four perspectives at the same time, depending upon the nature of the phenomenon in question. For example, he or she sees family relations from the oasis perspective, but in the world of work may be more inclined to adopt the integrative view and attempt to bring in Baha'i consultative techniques.

Matters become complex when Baha'is collectively are involved. The Baha'i community as a whole experiences these shifts among the world views, creating its own context for biographical work and research. I am inclined to believe that a community with its gaze fixed on the oasis perspective is more likely to engage in biographical zoning (and closed awareness contexts) than a community that advocates the integrative perspective. In the final analysis, matters are not that simple. Not all Baha'i communities share the same world view at the same time, and each Baha'i biographer carries within him or her the social context of the prevailing world view.

¹²² *ibid* 38.

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‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Commentary on the Qur’anic Verses concerning the Overthrow of the Byzantines: The Stages of the Soul

MOOJAN MOMEN

Abstract

This paper is a provisional translation and commentary upon a work of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in which he gives a mystical commentary upon the first few words of the 30th Surah of the Qur’an, the Surah of Rūm. These words refer to the overthrow of the Byzantines. ‘Abdu’l-Baha gives the standard Muslim commentary upon these verses. Despite the fact that these verses have an obvious outward meaning, ‘Abdu’l-Baha goes on to give nine esoteric or mystical interpretations of the word ‘ar-Rūm’ and of the phrase ‘The Byzantines have been overthrown.’ In the last of these interpretations, ‘Abdu’l-Baha delineates the different types of soul: mineral, vegetable, animal, human and the soul of Lāhūt, the realm of the Primal Manifestation. With regard to the human soul, ‘Abdu’l-Baha also lists the nine stages in its ascent. These consist of the commanding soul, the blaming soul, the inspired soul, the assured soul, the accepting soul, the accepted soul, the perfect soul, the soul of the Kingdom of God (Malakūt) and the soul of the Realm of Divine Command (Jabarūt). This last is the ultimate goal in the world of creation. ‘Abdu’l-Baha describes these stages in the ascent of the human soul and how progress may be made from one to the other. This work of ‘Abdu’l-Baha thus performs two functions. It confirms the principle that the word of God has many meanings, some of which are external and obvious, while others are hidden and mystical. It is also a manual or guide to Baha’i mysticism in that it lays out the pathway or stages for the ascent of the soul from its lowest state of abasement and preoccupation with the things of the world to its highest state, where the human qualities are effaced and only the divine attributes are manifest in the individual, the state where it becomes aware of the secrets of hidden and invisible realities.

The work that is the subject of this provisional translation is a lengthy tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in which he gives an extensive commentary on the opening words of the 30th Surah of the Qur’an, the Surah of Rūm. Indeed most of the tablet is taken up with various interpretations of a single word in this Surah, the word that also forms the title of the Surah: ar-Rūm. While the word is obviously derived from the word ‘Rome’, in the context of the Arabia of the time of the Prophet Muhammad ‘Rome’ meant the new Rome established by the Emperor Constantine on the Bosphorus, Byzantium or Constantinople, the city that he made his capital, which at this time was prospering even as the old Rome on the Tiber was struggling for survival under wave after wave of the barbarian tribes that had brought the Dark Ages to Europe. Thus the word ‘ar-Rūm’ is best translated as ‘Byzantium’ or ‘the Byzantines’.

The opening two verses and one phrase upon which ‘Abdu’l-Baha comments in this tablet begin immediately after the disconnected letters ‘Alif Lām Mīm’:

2. The Byzantines have been overthrown
Ghulibat ar-Rūm
3. In a land close by; but they (even) after (this) defeat of theirs will be victorious
Fī adnā al-'arḍ. Wa-hum min ba'di ghalabihim sa-yaghlibūn
4. Within a few years . . .
Fī bid' sinīn

These verses refer to certain historical events that occurred during the ministry of Muhammad. In about the year 614, the Persian King Khusraw Parviz (Khusraw II) attacked the Byzantines in Syria and took Damascus. By 616, he had occupied Egypt and most of Asia Minor. He even besieged Constantinople for a time. News of these events reached Mecca where Muhammad was under great pressure from his adversaries, the idolators of Mecca. What then occurred is recounted in Islamic Traditions thus:

The Muslims were wanting the Byzantines, because they were people of the Book, to defeat the Persians and the unbelievers were wanting the Persians, because they were idol-worshippers, to defeat the Byzantines.¹

It is related that, after the revelation of this verse, Abu Bakr even laid a bet with the unbelievers that the Persians would in turn be defeated, but he said that it would be in five years. When this did not occur, he questioned the Prophet about this, and Muhammad replied that the word '*bid'*' means between three and ten. A few years later, in 622, the victory of the Byzantines occurred.

Similarly, a Shi'i account gives the same story:

The Persians overthrew the Byzantines and were victorious over them in the time of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him). The unbelievers of Mecca were happy at this in that the Persians were not people of the Book; and the Muslims were unhappy about this. Jerusalem was for the Byzantines like Mecca is for Muslims and the Persians had driven them back from it.²

This tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha can be dated to the period before the passing of Baha'u'llah, since Baha'u'llah mentions it in a tablet dating from the 'Akka period addressed to a certain 'Abd al-Ghanī. Baha'u'llah states that a question about these verses had been asked and that although a commentary on these verses had already been revealed by the Bab, Baha'u'llah commanded 'Abdu'l-Baha to answer the questioner.³

It is not, however, certain from reading the tablet that 'Abdu'l-Baha's correspondent was a Baha'i. He may well have been from among Baha'u'llah's and 'Abdu'l-Baha's wide circle of Muslim acquaintances. There are no overt references to the Baha'i Faith or the Baha'i teachings in the tablet. Although there are a few references to the greatness of 'this

¹ At-Tabarī, Abu Ja'far Muhammad, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 30 vols., Cairo: Matba'ah al-Maymaniyyah, 1321/1903, 21:11. cf. similar accounts in *ibid*, 10-14 and in Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 4 vols. Cairo: Dar at-Turath al-'Arabi, 1385/1965, 3:422-7.

² Fadl ibn Hasan at-Tabrisi [Tabarsi], *Majma' al-Bayān* (Qumm: Manshurat Maktabah Ayat Allah al-'Uzma al-Mar'ashi an-Najafi, 1403, 5 vols.), 4:295.

³ *Athār Qalam A'lā* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 131BE/1974) 5:47. I am grateful to Dr Khazeh Fananapazir for this reference.

day’, these are vague enough that they could well have been written to a Muslim correspondent without occasioning comment. If this speculation is correct then it is also possible to say that ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s correspondent was probably a Sunni, rather than a Shi‘i, and therefore also probably non-Iranian. This is clear from the lack of the usual Shi‘i references and honorifics that would otherwise have been within the text if it had been written to a Shi‘i. Thus, in summary, it is possible that this tablet belongs, along with *The Traveller’s Narrative* and *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, among those works written by ‘Abdu’l-Baha during Baha’u’llah’s lifetime and intended primarily for a non-Baha’i audience, and, in this case, a Sunni audience.

In this Arabic tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Baha gives some ten meanings in all for the word ‘ar-Rum’ and for the phrase ‘Ghulibat ar-Rum’ (the Byzantines have been overthrown), while in a few of these ten meanings, he extends the commentary to the remaining words: ‘in a land close by; but they (even) after (this) defeat of theirs will be victorious within a few years.’

As most people are aware, the Qur’an itself lays down the parameters for the writing of commentaries upon it. It states that the text of the Qur’an is divided into two parts, those verses that are clear in meaning and those about which there is doubt.

He it is that hath sent down unto thee the Book. In it are verses with firm meaning (*muḥkamāt*) – they are the foundation of the Book (literally the Mother of the Book, *umm al-kitāb*) – and other verses that are of uncertain meaning (*mutashābihāt*). Those in whose hearts there is a crookedness follow that part which is uncertain seeking to cause dissension and trying to explain it. But none knows its explanation except God and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. (Qur’an 3:7)

Of course the identity of ‘those who are firmly grounded in knowledge’ has been a matter of debate. For Shi‘is, it is the Imams who fill this role,⁴ while for Sufis it may be their shaykh who is regarded in this light (orthodox Sunnis punctuate the whole verse differently, such that the phrase ‘those who are firmly grounded in knowledge’ becomes the beginning of the next sentence).

It is of some considerable interest that ‘Abdu’l-Baha has chosen to write a highly mystical commentary on a text which refers to a clear historical event. In other words, it is not a verse that would ordinarily be regarded as one of the verses that are of uncertain meaning (*mutashābihāt*), but rather as one of the verses with firm meaning (*muḥkamāt*). Although some doubt has been expressed in the traditional commentaries about the voice of the verb in 30:2 (see below), this is expressed as a minority view and there is, in any case, no doubt that the verse refers to a specific historical event.

‘Abdu’l-Baha then gives ten interpretations of these verses, the first being the outward historical circumstances as described above. The next nine are esoteric or mystical interpretations. Esoteric interpretations of this text are not unknown. The following, for example, is from the *Tafsīr* of ‘Abd ar-Razzaq al-Qashani (Kashani; this work is often attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabi):

It is the Primal Essence with the attributes of knowledge and primacy, just as He hath said. It requires that the ‘Rum’ of spiritual power be overthrown in the nearest of places to the earth of the soul (*naḥs*), which is the breast (*ṣadr*), for the

⁴ *Tafsīr* of al-Qummi quoted in Majlisi, *Bihār al-Anwār* 23:191, no. 12, see Moojan Momen, *Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) 151-2.

outpourings (*fayḍ*) of the Primal Source necessitate the appearance of creation, and through this conceal the Absolute Reality. And all that is closest to the Absolute is overthrown by that which is closest to creation. And this is the effect of the name of the Originator in the manifestation of the origins [of creation] and the effulgences of the All-High upon it, and also of His name the Manifest (*ẓāhir*) and of His name the Creator, and, in summary, of whatever names are in His Primal Presence. And ‘they will afterwards’ – after their being overthrown, ‘they will overthrow’ the Persians of the human, veiled, foreign powers by returning to God and manifesting victory.⁵

Although there are such examples of mystical commentary on this passage, the present author is not aware of any mystical commentary of the length and depth of this work of ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

‘Abdu’l-Baha has nine mystical or esoteric interpretations of these verses. The following is a summary of these:

1. ‘Rum’ signifies the existent realities and those veils that issue forth as a result of the specifications of existence. ‘Overthrown’ refers to the overcoming and vanishing of these with the coming of the Manifestation of God.
2. ‘Rum’ signifies the forces of self and passion and the peoples of ignorance and blindness, who, however, assist the Manifestation of God when he appears and, in doing this, are ‘overthrown’ and overwhelmed, which then becomes the source of their spiritual growth.
3. ‘Rum’ signifies those souls who turn their faces in a search for enlightenment when the Manifestation of God appears. They purify the mirrors of their hearts and draw near to the rays of that noble light. They look to their Lord with radiant, snow-white, rejoicing countenances (for the Byzantines were considered by the Arabs to have white complexions and reddish hair). ‘Overthrown’ refers to the fact that God sends them trials and difficulties at the hands of the enemies of God. They in turn will overcome these tests and difficulties.
4. ‘Rum’ signifies the divine ordinances, laws and decrees. In the days of the interval between Messengers of God, the people tend to cast the laws of God aside and establish a rule of ignorance. Thus are the holy and divine laws ‘overthrown’ among the people. But after a time, a new Manifestation of God appears and the law of God is re-established.
5. ‘Rum’ signifies the realities of things and their essences (*māhiyyāt*) and the capacity of created things and their potentialities. And the meaning of ‘overthrown’ is that the divine outpourings and effulgences pervade these realities, fill them, and surround them from all directions, both inwardly and outwardly, on the Day when the Manifestation of God appears. For on that day, God does not look at the capacity of souls and their preparedness. Rather, He pours forth upon them His grace and beneficence even if they have no capacity.

⁵ *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Yaqazah, 1387/1968) 2:255-6.

6. ‘Rum’ signifies speculative opinion and logical proofs, which in the days prior to the appearance of the Manifestation of God are the only proofs available for the existence of God. When, however, the Manifestation of God appears, the veils of such speculative thought and reasoning are rent asunder and the banners of proofs and intimations are unfurled. ‘Ar-Rum was defeated’: that is to say the drops of the waters of speculative opinion and reasoning vanished in the face of the billowing oceans of the revelations and testimonies of the Manifestation of God himself.
7. ‘Rum’ signifies the bodily stages and realities of this earthly realm, together with their contingencies and specificities. And ‘Ar-Rum was overthrown’ means that the bodily stages pass away with the manifestation of the Word of God. Thus are the bodily things overthrown and dominion belongs to the things of the spirit.
8. ‘Rum’ signifies the idle fancies and vain imaginings in the hearts of ordinary people for these have supreme sovereignty among the people during the days of the absence of the Manifestation of God. When the Manifestation comes, however, he causes the darkness of idle fancies and vain imaginings to disappear.
9. ‘Rum’ signifies the stages of the soul and the states thereof, its degrees, its elevation and diminution, its ascent and its fall.

These stages are described by ‘Abdu’l-Baha as consisting of the following:

- i. Mineral soul – which is static in nature and does not develop
- ii. Vegetative soul – the features of which are that it grows and develops
- iii. Animal soul – which senses its environment
- iv. Human soul – the rational soul within which arise the powers of the human being, the outer and inner senses, knowledge, sciences, arts, and wisdom. It is also the place where dark passions and earthly failings appear. The human soul has the following stages:
 - a. The commanding soul – the soul that commands to evil – is preoccupied with the trivialities of this world, and is infatuated with evil and ephemeral desires.
 - b. The blaming soul – which becomes aware of the depths of its degradation and of its remoteness from its true goal. It awakes to a perception of its state, is filled with regret and blames itself for the depths of perversity and error to which it has sunk.
 - c. The inspired soul – as it rises from its lowly condition, the soul comes to understand those things that kept it abased and those that will lead to its elevation. It becomes averse to those things that perish and inclines towards those that endure. It is termed the ‘inspired soul’ for it is inspired as to that which, on the one hand, leads to depravation and, on the other, to righteousness.
 - d. The assured soul – this is the stage at which the soul is in remembrance of its

Lord and sees the signs of God in creation. As a result it is assured in its faith, its turmoil and unrest are calmed, it has quenched its thirst and soothed its torment; it has changed its darkness to light and unloaded its burdens.

- e. The accepting soul – reaches a station of submission and contentment, leaving behind its searching and neediness. It entrusts its affairs to God and is content with whatever God may decree for it. This is a happiness that is not followed by sadness. There remains no will, no rest, no motion, no destiny nor any fate except in God.
- f. The accepted soul – in this state all-encompassing blessings and mercy reach it. Insofar as it has risen and left behind its passions and accepted the decree of its Lord, it becomes accepted in the sight of God, and, in its state of nothingness, it is approved by its Creator
- g. The perfect soul – here it is characterized by divine perfections and comprised of godly attributes. It thus becomes the focal point of inspiration and the dawning-place for the divine effulgences.
- h. The soul of the Kingdom of God (Malakūt, the angelic soul) – here the soul confirms in its reality the profession of divine unity and establishes in its essence the sign of detachment. It attains to everlasting life and eternal living. It takes pleasure from delights the like of which no eye has seen nor any ear heard.
- i. The soul of the Realm of Divine Command (Jabarūt) - this is a station far above the understanding of the minds of men, for this station is created out of the elements of power, authority, sovereignty, omnipotence and freedom, and nothing that has limitations or pluralities has any resemblance to it. Here the soul becomes aware of the secrets of hidden and invisible realities. This is the ultimate goal in the world of creation.
- v. The Divine Soul, the soul of the realm of Primal Manifestation (Lāhūt) – it is the Universal Reality which brings together all of the revealed divine realities, the Primal Point from which appear all things and to which they revert. From it there appears plurality through manifestation and illumination, and it becomes divided, dispersed and manifold, and radiates. This station and this soul are completely and forever beyond the reach of human beings.

In relation to his commentary on the overthrow of 'Rum', 'Abdu'l-Baha says that it means, in this context, that as the human soul ascends stage by stage, it overthrows the conditions of the lower stage in order to attain the higher stage.

It can thus be seen that not only has 'Abdu'l-Baha given nine spiritual or esoteric interpretations of this sentence of the Qur'an but he has done so in relation to only one event – the coming of the Manifestation of God. Presumably 'Abdu'l-Baha could have given further interpretations of this verse relating to other aspects of spiritual reality.

With regard to the stages of the human soul, the first three or four (the commanding soul, the blaming soul, the inspired soul and the assured soul) are fairly commonly repeated

among Sufi authors and those in the tradition of mystical philosophy in Islam.⁶ The remaining ones are rarely found although not unknown.⁷

At the end of this tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Baha refers briefly to an alternative reading of this Qur’anic passage that would put the first verb into the active voice and the second verb into the passive. The passage would then read:

The Byzantines have been victorious (*ghalibat*, have overthrown [the Persians]), but they, after this victory (overthrow) of theirs, will be defeated within a few years.

The commentaries give this as an alternative reading and state that the circumstances in which this reading would have occurred refer to the time of the Battle of Badr. When referring to the victory that had by then occurred of the Romans over the Persians, the Qur’an predicts that the Romans too will be defeated by the Muslim armies within a few years.

The text of the tablet that has been used for this translation is to be found in *Makātib ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* (Tehran: Mu’assisih Milli Matbu’at Amri), volume 1, pages 62-102 (page numbers from this text are indicated below in square brackets).

Provisional Translation

He is the All-Glorious!

Praise be to Thee, O Lord! O my God! Out of Thy bounty and mercy Thou hast caused the waters of existence to descend from the heaven of Thy unity and Thou hast caused the showers of Thine eternal bounties to rain down from the clouds of the heaven of Thy mighty oneness until, through this most mighty beneficence, the rivers of Thy most wondrous grace flowed forth upon the soil of all possible existent realities in Thine act of creation. All lands and regions were watered by these streaming, heavenly rivers. Every hill and city was inundated by these torrential celestial floods. And then there shone forth [63] upon them the sun of Thy mercy from the horizon of Thy holy might. And the grains, O my God, of Thine exalted word and Thy most mighty verses were sown in the earth of human capacity by Thy great grace and favour.

These existent realities, however, became differentiated and diverged through the effulgences of the sun of Thy most great name. Some of them, O my God, just as Thou hast reckoned according to Thy secret knowledge, are pure and refined hearts upon which that sun imprinted its signs and from which there appeared traces of its effulgence. It hath stirred up and fertilized their soil, and there hath grown forth from them the myrtles of love and knowledge of Thee. They have been adorned by the sacred blossoms of yearning for, and attraction towards, Thee like a blessed and fertile land. Some, however, O my God, were soiled hearts obscured by the rust of their vain imaginings, veiled from their Lord by the veils of darkness. No trace appears among them of the effulgences of that sun, or of the signs of the One who hath created and ordained it. Upon their soil, the grain of the mention

⁶ See for example the definitions of three of these from ‘Abd ar-Razzaq al-Qashani given in footnotes 12-14 below.

⁷ Massignon, for example, gives a similar list of seven stages, which he states is to be found in the Tafsir of al-Qashani (presumably the *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*). This list is the same, except that it ends after *an-nafs al-mardīyyah* with *an-nafs aṣ-ṣāfiyyah* (the pure soul). See Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj*, (trans. Herbert Mason), vol. 2 (Bollingen series 98, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 277 and n.

of their Lord is as upon desolate and barren land. Thou art not, however, O my God, neglectful in sending down Thine effulgences upon creation and causing Thy signs to appear among existent realities, as Thou hast said, and Thy word is the truth: 'No fault canst thou see in the creation of the All-Merciful,' (67:3) and 'Your creation and your resurrection is but as a single soul.' (31:28)

At this time, I ask of Thee by Thy name, through which, were it to be cast upon the mountains, they would crumble into dust and flow away, [64] were it to be scattered upon the seas, they would overflow, were it to be thrown upon shrivelled branches, they would turn green and flower, and upon the blind, they would see, and upon the dumb, they would speak, and upon the deaf, they would hear, and upon the dead, they would arise, that Thou mayest lift the veils which intervene between Thee and Thy creatures and which prevent them from immersing themselves in the wellspring of Thy mercy, from setting out on the pathway of Thy mighty oneness, from hearkening to the melodies of the birds of Thy throne, and from drinking from the chalice of Thy love and knowledge. Verily, they are the lowly at Thy gate and the needy before the manifestation of Thy wealth. For themselves they seek to acquire neither benefit nor harm, neither life nor resurrection. Raise then, O my God, these pure souls to Thee and cause them to ascend with the wings of divine unity into the clouds of the highest heaven (*'amā'*) of the glory (*bahā'*) of Thy singleness. Shine forth upon them at every instant with what Thou wishest to bestow upon these compounded realities and these sacred hearts, for there is neither beginning nor end to Thy signs, nor a first or last to Thy tokens. Wert Thou to shed Thy splendour upon the sincere ones among Thy creatures at every instant, in all of Thy manifold ways, no reduction would there be in Thine ancient riches, nor any diminution in Thy hidden treasures.

And so, O my God, be merciful to Thy needy servants. Cause them to be seated beneath the tree of [65] Thy mercy and feed them from the table that Thou hast sent down from the heaven of Thy glorious oneness. For, verily, Thou art the true giver and Thou art the forgiving, the merciful.

Thou knowest, O my God, that this servant is the neediest of all the servants in Thy realm and is the lowliest of Thy creatures in Thy lands. How then, with such absolute poverty, is it possible for me to explain the meanings contained and hidden within the realities of Thy words and the secrets that Thou hast hidden from the eyes of the mystic knowers behind the tabernacle of Thy word. Since, however, Thou hast commanded me, I take up my pen, trusting in Thee and relying upon Thy bounty and mercy. For Thou hast willed, O my God, that there flow forth from this ephemeral pen the seas of Thy knowledge and the oceans of Thy secrets. Thou dost not wish that the tongue of the Supreme Pen be silent amidst the concourse of Thy creatures nor that the outflowing bounties of the Ancient Beauty be cut off from the peoples. The command is Thine. Thou doest as Thou desirest and Thou ordainest what Thou pleasest and the limit Thou hast set is: No God is there but Thee, the powerful, the mighty, the all-bountiful.

O distinguished and excellent questioner! Know thou that from within every one of the words of God, there surge forth oceans of hidden meanings, without number, and that from within every letter of the verses of thy Lord there shine forth the suns of secrets, heavenly signs and truths, that none can number except God, thy Lord and the Lord of thy fathers before thee. [66] That being the case how is it possible for ink to flow forth with these hidden meanings, even were there to be oceans of it, and how would sheets of paper suffice, even were they to be as extensive as the horizon? There is no end to this most great gift and no beginning to this most great mercy for it to be exhausted. Just as [God] says, and His word is the truth: 'Were the ocean to be ink for the words of my Lord, verily that ink would be exhausted ere the words of my Lord were exhausted, even were a similar amount of ink added to it.' (Qur'an 18:109) However, even if all of it cannot be mentioned, all of it need

not be left out either. Therefore I can mention some of the hidden and secret meanings streaming from the torrents of the words of thy Lord, the exalted, the mighty.

Know thou that these holy verses and heavenly sounds have meanings that are outer (*ẓāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*), and also the inner of the inner (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) and so forth, endlessly. For the words of God are mirrors encompassing (*muḥīṭatun*) the forms (*ṣuwar*) of all things. Thus is it that [God] says: ‘There is nothing dry nor wet but that it is [inscribed] in a perspicuous Book.’ (Qur’an 6:59)

And as for the outer meaning, God hath announced [in this surah] the destruction of the might of the Persians and the victory and triumph of Byzantium (Rome), after the Byzantines had been defeated and brought to naught at the hands of the Persians – their unity had been sundered and their alliances dispersed. The explanation of this is that in the days when the sun of divine oneness was shining from the Muhammadan point and the banners of guidance were raised over the notables of Yathrib (Medina) and Baṭḥa (Mecca), and the dove was warbling upon the twigs of the Sadrat al-Muntaha [67] and the peacock singing in the heavenly sanctuary, the idolaters said that Khusraw the king of the Persians, who were not people of the book, had defeated and was victorious over the Emperor of Byzantium, who was of the people of the book. Similarly, they said, we will destroy the might (*kalimah*) of Muhammad the messenger of God on account of his being of the people of the book, as is the emperor of Byzantium, whereas we, like the king of the Persians, are not people of the book. And so God caused these heavenly (*lāhūtiyyah*) verses to descend and announced that Byzantium would defeat its enemy the Persians within a few (*biḍ’*) years. And a few (*biḍ’*) means between three and nine. And after seven of those years, God caused to appear that which had been announced by His most mighty companion (Muhammad). The Byzantines were victorious over the Persians and their ascendancy was established. Thus was it confirmed to the sincere ones that the God’s knowledge precedes all things and embraces all that is in existence, whether of the seen or unseen.

This is that which the hearts of those who write the commentaries hath sung in the gardens of the mighty Qur’an. But other than this they have not penetrated to the secrets deposited therein nor to the stored and hidden mysteries flowing within the streams of the words of thy Lord, the all-knowing, the all-wise. And with this they cannot satisfy those who are sore athirst for the living waters (Kawthar) of the spirit from the hands of grace and beneficence. And this is nothing for those whom God has endowed with a penetrating vision and whom He has taught the meaning of His word [68] and whom He has informed of the true interpretation of His verses. It is therefore necessary that I mention some of the things that God has intended by these hidden verses, these heavenly melodies.

- 1] I say that ‘Rum’ signifies that station which refers to, and relates to, the existent realities, to pure being (*ṣarf al-āniyyah*) and to the concealing veils and the woes which issue forth from the determinants of existence. And these are overcome and vanish with the rise of the rays shining forth from the Sun of Truth. And so when the cycle of the spirit has come to an end and the lamps of guidance have been extinguished, and the breezes of righteousness have been stilled, and the winds of faithfulness have died down, and the voices of the nightingales of oneness in the gardens of faithfulness have become fatigued, and the heaven of wealth and the garden of victories have been transformed into a barren wasteland and the owl hoots balefully from the tree of Zaqqum (Qur’an 37:62, 44:43, 56:52), then does the breeze of the springtime of the All-Merciful waft from the Valley of Ayman,⁸ the blessed spot, and the sun of divine

⁸ The valley of the right-hand side, the place from which the Burning Bush called out to Moses, Qur’an 28:30.

oneness rise from the dawning-place of the will of thy Lord, the all-merciful, the compassionate, and the clouds of divine bounty arise and pour out upon the hearts, souls and inner realities, causing the soils of capacity and receptivity to become verdant and the earth of knowledge to sprout forth. Then does the blessed tree become verdant, from which can be heard the call: [69] ‘O Moses! Thou art in the holy vale of Tuwa’ (Qur’an 20:11-12) and the fire of reality appears in that ‘olive tree which is neither of the east nor of the west. And its oil almost catches fire even though no fire has touched it. It is light upon light. God guides to His light whomsoever He wills.’ (Qur’an 24:35) Then doth the nightingale of inner meanings (*ma’ānī*) sing upon the branches with the most lofty melodies.

And it says ‘The Byzantines have been defeated in the nearest of lands.’ What land is nearer than the realities of things and their determinants? Then the tongue of the Ancient of Days announces, and it is indeed a mighty word, that the King of the living, the eternal, has decreed that every affair should have a prescribed and fixed term. And so, at the end of this cycle, there will come days when this shining sun will set and be followed by billowing clouds, and this spiritual springtime will be ended by darksome autumn, and this lofty garden will be transformed and its trees uprooted, and its leaves scattered, and its breezes stilled, and its rivers blocked up and their limpidity (clarity) defiled. ‘This is the way of God and thou wilt not find any change or alteration in His way.’ (cf. Qur’an 48:23, 17:77)

And so, O questioner! See thou with an insight which God created following upon thy outer vision. Is any just person able to say that the all-encompassing meanings of the words of God are in the possession of those who cannot distinguish their left hands from their right? No! By the one whom the dove doth mention when it doth speak forth between [70] heaven and earth. On the contrary, it is certain that the meanings will inspire those hearts that are pure and turned towards the kingdom. Were God to desire it, He would cause one of His lovers to arise and stand upon the centre of guidance amidst the concourse of creation and to explicate, with His assistance and power, upon the realities within His verses, giving such meanings as are known only to God and to those who are firmly established in His knowledge. (cf. Qur’an 3:7)

Approach thou then thy Lord with radiant face and seeing eye and say: O Lord! Make firm my steps in Thy cause and teach me Thy hidden knowledge and Thy treasured secrets, and raise me up to Thy lofty kingdom and Thy most glorious company (*rafīqika’l-abhā*). Cause me to understand the meanings of Thy verses so that I may shine forth upon the horizon of Thy will with Thy knowledge, like unto the morning star, and may show unto the people Thine eternal path and Thy straight way, upon which whosoever doth tread will reach the orient of Thy signs and the dawning-place of lights. For this is what will favour me as I contemplate Thy most great verses and gaze upon the signs of Thine exalted effulgences. O Lord! Favour me with this most great gift and this most mighty mercy. For this is what I hope from Thee, and it is my goal and my desire, O my king and my desire at every stage, and the joy of my heart and the solace of my soul in the daytime and in the night season! Thou art the giver, the generous, the compassionate, the merciful.

- 2] And in the station of [71] souls, thou seest that these divine verses have holy and heavenly meanings. Among these are that God has intended by the word ‘Byzantium’ the forces of self and passion and the peoples of ignorance and blindness, in that it [Byzantium = forces of self, etc.] assisted, at the appearance of His Friend (Muhammad), the forces of reason and intelligence with great power, until it saw the signs of its mighty Lord and heard the most sweet call from the lofty horizon and drank

the sealed wine from the hand of the faithful cup-bearer. The sweetness of the wine of the mention of its Lord, the all-high, captivated it to the extent that it became drowned in the oceans of the love of God. At this time the reality of self and passion passed away, with its conditions and powers, at the appearance of the signs of the absolute divine Reality, and it was defeated and vanished before the authority of the verses of its Creator. However, its state of defeat was the very source of its power, its ability, its loftiness and its might. For it grew and found reassurance in the remembrance of its Lord, and through this it was enabled to overcome everything and to encompass, through the power of its Creator and Origin, the realities of the kingdom, in accordance with its capacity, and to understand the secrets of its Creator and Fashioner. And what conquest could be greater than this, were people able to see with the eye of God? Indeed were they able to soar with the wings of the spirit in the heavens of knowledge they would bear witness that this is the all-conquering power and overwhelming might and triumphant sovereignty. However, [72] when they are concealed behind the veils of neglectfulness and have forgotten what they used to bring to mind, God doth smite their eyes with a veil and their ears with deafness. (cf. Qur’an 41:44)

Rise then with power, O revered questioner, and mention thy Lord among the concourse of the earth and say: ‘How long will you be satisfied with a brackish and malodorous drop and deny yourselves the almighty, all-glorious Ocean which billows forth on account of, and by means of, His essence, and from a sprinkling (*rashh*) of which God hath created all existence, living and enduring, just as He hath said, and His word is the truth: “And We made from water every living thing”?’ (Qur’an 21:30)

- 3] And on one level, God intended, by the word ‘Rum,’ those souls who turn their faces seeking enlightenment when the sun of the Ancient of Days doth shine forth from the dawning-place of the Greatest Name. They purify the mirrors of their hearts and draw near to the rays of that noble light. For the noun ‘Rum’ according to linguistic usage is connected with fine, white [complexions] and people of reddish [hair] and pure souls who look to their Lord with radiant, snow-white, rejoicing countenances. In this way is the similarity and correspondence attained.

And as for the meaning of His words, magnified be He: ‘The Byzantines were overcome,’ that is to say that those blameless souls who have effaced their designations and limitations at the appearance of their Revealer, so that they have become designated by the attributes of the All-Merciful and have appeared with heavenly signs – they are overcome in the physical world. God has sent them the winds of tests and difficulties and has thrown them into the clutches of those who have repudiated His truth, [73] those who have not inhaled the breezes of life, have renounced their intellect and clung to their passions. But when they [those blameless souls] have overcome with respect to the spirit, they will, similarly, physically overcome their enemies through the power of their Creator. For God has assigned all good for His loved ones in every one of His worlds, even the world of the physical body and utterance. Thou dost witness that mention of them dost fill the horizons and their name raises the standards of harmony, and through them the world is set aflame, and the potentialities of all things are illuminated by the light of existence emerging from nothingness. Through them the stones have been shattered, rivers have gushed forth and the oceans billowed; through them the holy laws have been established, the waters have become clear, the outspread tables have been sent down, (cf. Qur’an 5:113) the diseases remedied, the dead brought to life, the earth has been made to shake, the heavens have been cleft asunder, the mountains split in two, paradise has been brought close, the trees have given forth fruit,

the secret things have been made known, the veils rent asunder, the lights have shone forth, and the divine footsteps (*al-āthār*) have been followed.

Then say: Praise be to God, the Creator of these burning meteors, these brilliant stars, these consummate words, these lofty souls, these singular minds, and these spirits enraptured by God, their Lord.

And say: O Lord! Cause me to enter under the shade of the tree of Thy mercy. Immerse me in the deep ocean of the might of Thy oneness. Sanctify me from all else save Thee. Deliver me from [74] the floods of self and passion, so that I may arise just as Thou hast caused them to arise in service of Thee and may stand ready to obey Thy command by Thy might and power. Verily Thou art the giver to whomsoever Thou willest by Thy gracious hand, and Thou art powerful over all things.

- 4] And in another sense, God has intended, by this word of the Qur'an, the divine ordinances (*sharā'i'*) and prescriptions (*sunan*) and the laws (*hudūd*) of God and His decrees (*hikam*). For the people, in the days of the interval [between Messengers of God] have cast the laws of God behind their backs. They have forgotten the decrees of God to such an extent that they replaced them and established a rule of ignorance (*siyāsatan jahaliyyatan*) and made laws according to custom. They raised the banner of arbitrary and tyrannical decrees to such an extent that they forsook all [spiritual] knowledge and guidance and clung instead to the basest of fancies and passions. They fell from the heaven of reason and [divine] prohibitions and took up their residence in the abyss of error and blindness. They chose the highway of the corrupt and imagined it to be a straight path (*sirāṭun mustaqīmun*). They applied themselves to the idols of luxurious living and did not know the corrupt from the wholesome. Thus were the lamps of justice and fairness extinguished and the storms of error intensified. The sign of tyranny seized power and the traces of illumination were obliterated. The people were afflicted by disasters by night and by predators during the day to such an extent that they forsook the commands and prescriptions of God and abrogated the divine decrees and laws. Thus were the holy and divine laws overthrown (*ghulibat*) [75] among the people.

Through the power and might of God, however, at the time of the dawning of the morn of guidance from the horizon of eternity, the clouds of doubt and error were dispersed and the heaven of knowledge and righteousness restored. The wondrous light shone forth and the gloomy darkness vanished. The Straight Path was manifested and the Scales set. The Sure Handle, which cannot be rent, was extended, and the seeds of the spring of justice and wisdom were carried from the direction of the bounty of the Pre-existent Lord. The trees of the human form became clothed with the leaves of knowledge and divine wisdom, and the Goodly Tree, the roots of which are firmly in the earth and the branches of which are in heaven, was planted. Its fruit came in every season, its twigs and branches stretched forth as far as the horizons. The birds of faithfulness sought refuge and built their nests within the tree. The nightingales of awareness warbled upon it in remembrance of the Friend, and the doves of love sang out from its twigs with the psalms of the House of David to such an extent that spirits trembled, hearts were rent asunder, eyes were consoled, souls were rejoiced and this existence became the garden of paradise.

However, thou dost see that there appeared a wild and evil folk and an ignorant and detestable group among the people; their ignorance was so great that they were unable to distinguish right from left, and they wrote upon sheets of water. They performed every [76] abomination and committed that which even the animals eschew, and so how can they be called human beings? But when there appeared among them the most great

Friend (Muhammad), the most magnificent light, the sign of the Ancient of Days, the most joyful morn, they took refuge in the cave of his teaching for a certain number of days and years, until this ignorant people ascended from the depths of ignorance to the summit of knowledge and wisdom and became proficient in the arts and sciences and outstripped the most noted scholars and learned men. They became famous among God’s creatures for the specific qualities of humanity and for their divine attributes, such that they became a mine of perfections and knowledge and the pivot of the circle of praiseworthy deeds and beneficence. Thus were they victorious as far as the horizons and gained sovereignty over every tribe and people in creation. And so people began to come from every direction to their lands in order to learn knowledge and wisdom. They became adorned with the vestments of excellence and perfections. And all this was only out of the grace and mercy of God, who sent to be among them the best of creatures with a power that no creature possesses.

- 5] And in another sense, God intended by the word ‘ar-Rum’ the existent realities, which are revealed by the divine names and attributes, are warmed by the flame of oneness, are kindled in the blessed spot within the delights of paradise, appear and are seen upon [77] four ancient pillars,⁹ are established through the divine and heavenly scriptures, and arise out of the essence of singleness.

O would that the All-Merciful might break the seals of caution and concealment from the mouth of this servant so that I could explain to you, O friend, the stations of the fire of oneness and the blessed tree and its branches and leaves and the state of the place of paradise which God has concealed from the eyes of all save those who soar with the wings of victory in the atmosphere, bringing joy to the souls. And so inhale the fragrance of faithfulness from the shirt of Bahā’ which hath been smattered with bright red blood on account of what the idolaters have done to His effulgent, illumined beauty – and this after God hath established a covenant with them in every holy book, scripture and psalm, that at the time of each effulgence of one of His lights and the dawning of each sun upon His horizons, they would recognize His power and sovereignty and prostrate themselves before Him on the Day when He comes to them in the shadow of His clouds, and that they should sacrifice themselves at the time of His appearance in order to attain His presence. What a pity, and what a cause of regret for them, that they have neglected nearness to God. And so there will come to them an announcement of what they have neglected. Then will their skins shiver, their livers bleed, their hearts melt, their souls mourn and their innermost selves lament. And they will bite their fingertips out of grief and remorse at what they have done and that they have debarred themselves from the table [78] of life sent down from the heaven of the mercy of their Lord, the mighty, the forgiving.

We will now return to what we were mentioning in explanation of the word ‘Rum’. We said that its meaning was the realities of things and their essences (*māhiyyāt*) and the capacity of created things and their potentialities. And the meaning of ‘were overcome’ is that the outpourings of the All-Merciful and the eternal effulgences pervaded the potential realities pouring forth from the pre-existent light, filled them, overcame (*ghalabat*) them, and surrounded them from all directions, both inwardly and

⁹ This may be a reference to the four pillars or supports upon which religion is based. The Shi‘is believed in five pillars (see Momen, *Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* 176-8) but the Shaykhis reduced this to four (*ibid* 226). The Bab also refers to four pillars: *Tawhīd* (Divine Unity), *Nubuwwa* (Prophethood), *Walaya* (Guardianship), and the *Shi‘a* (see the Bab’s *Risāla as-Sulūk* – provisional translation by Todd Lawson in *The Bahā’ī Faith and Other Religions*, (Oxford: George Ronald, [2005], 231-41) p. 231).

outwardly, on the day when the sun of the Ancient of Days shone forth from the horizon. For on such a blessed and promised day, God does not look at the capacity of existent realities and their preparedness. No, He pours forth upon them from the oceans of His grace and beneficence even if they have not the capacity for a single drop of its rivers, such that you will see the poor man clothed in the robe of His wealth and the destitute beggar wearing the garments of His might and loftiness. Just as He hath said, and His word is the truth: 'We desire to show favour unto the weak upon the earth, and We make them leaders and inheritors.' (Qur'an 28:5)

O thou who art soaring in the atmosphere of the love of God and voyaging upon the sea of Bounty! Arise from the torpor of idle fancies and open thine eyes to witness how the Ancient Beauty doth shine forth upon thee and upon the whole of creation from the horizon of bounty. [79] His countenance doth shine forth between earth and heaven. Thou wilt observe the comprehensiveness of the bounty of thy Lord and the generality of His beneficence towards those who draw nigh unto Him. Thou wilt see how the ocean of His most great mercy billows forth out of the right hand of His will and thou wilt experience the fragrance of His most mighty mercy wafting from the direction of His providence, so that thou wilt know that, in this day, should a gnat desire to become an eagle or a drop to become an ocean in the shadow of this Beauty, then it would be able to do so, with the assistance of God and His power. He hath said, and His word is the Truth: 'Were an ant to desire to have full mastery over the Qur'an and its inner meaning, and the inner meaning of the inner meaning, down to the minutest detail (*fī hukmi sawād 'ayni hā*), it would undoubtedly be able to do so, for the secrets of eternity vibrate within the realities of all created things.'¹⁰ Therefore say: Blessed be He who causeth His might, His sovereignty, His mercy and His beneficence to appear in these days within all created things.

And as for His saying, exalted be He, 'And they will afterwards overturn their defeat': that is to say that there will come a day in which the sun of divine oneness will set in the occident of eternity, the winds of the spirit blowing from the direction of faithfulness will be stilled, the lamp of love in the breasts of those possessed of understanding will be put out, the fires of longing in the hearts of the wise will be extinguished, the table of divine knowledge that hath descended from the heaven of certitude will be withdrawn, the clouds of holiness will be prevented from yielding rains and the seas of divine oneness from surrendering the pearls of mysteries. Thus doth this most abundant favour and most great bounty come to an end, [80] and this day of lights is turned into darksome night. And if thou shouldst find creation in such a state, then be certain that the morn of certitude and the daybreak of the All-Merciful from the dawning-place of creation is nigh, and the coming of thy Lord in the shadow of clouds approaches.

Then raise thy hands towards thy Lord and say: Unto Thee be praise and gratitude, O my most glorious Lord, in that Thou hast created me and sent me forth in this day when Thy countenance doth shine forth, Thy beauty hath appeared, Thy visage shineth forth, Thy mercy hath preceded all things, Thy bounty is abundant, Thy power doth encompass all, Thy signs appear (Thy verses are revealed), Thy word is exalted and Thy proof is established. By Thy might! Were I to praise Thee for as long as Thy sovereignty endureth, I would not be able to produce a single word in praise of Thee.

¹⁰ This statement made by the Bab is quoted by 'Abdu'l-Baha in several places; see translation in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1990) 46 and *World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991) 126-7.

However, on account of what I have seen of the universality of Thy bounty and greatness of Thy generosity, a drop from among Thy servants would be enabled to approach the station of oceans, and an atom would be equivalent to the station of suns. Therefore have I stepped before Thee offering my thanks, which are [as insignificant] as the buzzing of mosquitoes in the valley or the crawling of an ant along a chain. Verily Thou art the forgiving, the all-merciful.

- 6] And among the meanings intended by God in this Qur’anic word is the station of opinion (speculative thought) and reasoning and the setting up of decisive evidences and logical proofs of the oneness, the singleness, the might, the power and the sovereignty of God [81] just as thou hast seen and observed in the days prior to the appearance of the most mighty light from the dawning-place of His name, the generous, to such an extent that no one had any pathway or any guide to Him except the appearance of those signs and evidences that the intellect and opinion (speculative thought) indicated. And the people inferred from these His existence and steered clear of anything other than this. When, however, the sun of the horizons dawned from the dawning-place of the Ancient of Days in the most noble of forms and all existence was illumined by the rays radiating over all creation, the veils of speculative thought and reasoning were rent asunder, and the banners of proofs and intimations were unfurled, and the standards of revelations (*mukāshafāt*) and testimonies were raised over the signs of hearts and perceptions. Then were the pure souls (*ahrār*) able to enter into the presence of their Lord on the day when the earth shook and mountains were cleft.

Then say: blessed be God, the king, the mighty, the omnipotent who hath annihilated the darkness with light with a mighty sovereignty.

‘Ar-Rum was defeated’: that is to say the drops of the waters of speculative opinion and reasoning vanished in the face of the billowing oceans of the revelations (*mukāshafāt*) and testimonies of Him who is a coolness on the brow of those who seek Him with ardour and is sweet water for their thirst and healing for their ill. He destroyed and brought to naught that which is nothing but idle fancies, vain thoughts, false inferences and empty speculations – for the likeness of these proofs before the face of thy Lord is as the likeness of a shadow before the dawning of the sun. For even were there to be logical proofs for it [the sun], [82] they cannot be held to exist in the face of its effulgences, nor can they be said to endure before its radiating rays. Indeed, they are veiled from it, even were they to be given proof of it. In the opinion of them who have drunk a draught of sealed wine from the hands of the bounty of His name the eternal, the most mighty of the veils of His servants is that they rely on the ephemeral shadow for knowledge of the sun of the Ancient of Days and depend upon mere traces and seek to give proofs in this way for that which is the origin of all lights. And despite this, they consider that they have reached the very centre of guidance and are riding upon the highest of the celestial spheres. Whereas, on the contrary, they are plunged in the depths of idle fancies and are wandering lost in the wildernesses of vain imaginings.

Arise then with power from God and strength from His sovereignty and call out to the negligent: How long will you gallop in the deserts of ignorance? The flashes of inner meanings lighten the heaven of the spirit and ignite the horizons with the fire of God, which hath appeared from the Sinaitic Tree upon the mount of eternity. Verily, O concourse of lovers, draw near to it so that you may be warmed by it, be guided by it, be ignited by a glowing brand from it and may hear its sighing. (cf. Qur’an 20:10)

Say: The eyes of all things have been consoled by entering into the presence of their Lord, while you do not perceive. All created things have been aroused, while you remain negligent. All existence has arisen, while you slumber upon the cushions of

negligence. The tongues of all things are speaking forth in mention of the King of Heaven, [83] while you are silent.

If you do not turn towards this beauty, then to which beauty will you look? If you are not aroused by this call, then by what call will you be aroused? If you are not stirred by this spirit, by what spirit will you be stirred? Do you count yourselves as being alive? Nay, ye are among the companions of the graves. Do you maintain that you are among those that perceive and hear? Deaf are you and blind, neither do you understand. Has not the divine mercy anticipated [all], the divine bounty not abounded, the proof not been perfected, the evidences not made clear, the verses not descended or the word not been completed? Have the doves of paradise not sung and has heaven not been brought near? Has the blessed tree not given fruit and the oceans of mystery not billowed forth? Nay, the mighty inevitable event (*al-wāqī'ah*, cf. Qur'an 56:1-2) has occurred, and the most great calamity (*at-tāmah*, cf. Qur'an 79:34) has appeared, and all things have been gathered (resurrected, *hushira*, cf. Qur'an 46:6) in the presence of God, the protector, the everlasting, even as the unbelievers are wandering astray in their drunkenness (Qur'an 15:72).

- 7] And among the things that God has intended by these consummate words are the bodily stages and physical (*nāsūtiyyah*) realities, together with their accidents and specifications in their realm and domain. And the meaning of His words, may His station be exalted: 'Ar-Rum was overcome' is that the bodily stages pass away with the manifestation of the spiritual verses, and the rivers of reality inundate the earths of the pure hearts when the All-Merciful is mounted upon His most mighty throne in the midst of all beings. For [84] the armies of the spirit fall upon and attack the troops upon the Day of the Return with the power of the Lord of Lords. Thus are the bodily things overthrown and dominion belongs to the things of the spirit. And in this are signs for those who discern.
- 8] And among what God has intended by these firm and enduring words is that which concerns the idle fancies and vain imaginings in the hearts of ordinary people. For during the days when the sun of knowledge and wisdom has set, thou dost witness that idle fancies and vain imaginings have supreme sovereignty among the concourse of created things. Thou dost observe that all are depending upon idle fancies for knowledge and to solve problems, even for matters of the holy law and ordinances. They have no capacity to swim in the oceans of knowledge nor to plunge into the depths of wisdom. When the sun of certitude doth shine forth from the clear horizon, however, the rays of the divine beauty cause the darkness of idle fancies and vain imaginings to disappear. Then doth the tongue of creation speak forth saying: 'The truth hath come and error hath disappeared. Verily error was bound to vanish.' (Qur'an 17:81)
- O friend! speak forth with a wondrous tongue: Thine is the bounty, the grace, the mercy, and the beneficence upon this servant who is not worthy of anything in Thy kingdom, in that Thou hast saved me from the wilderness of idle fancies and hast caused me to seek shelter amidst the twigs of the tree of knowledge. O Lord! Cause me to be firm in Thy love and to arise to assist Thy cause and to establish Thy rule. Make me [85] one of Thy banners among Thy servants that I may be a focal point for Thine inspiration and may be assisted by Thy signs. Verily, Thou art powerful over all things by Thy might and sovereignty, O Thou beloved of the worlds.
- 9] And among what God has intended by these comprehensive words are the stages of the soul and the states thereof, its degrees, its elevation and diminution, its ascent and its

fall, out of the bounty of its Creator, the generosity of its Originator and the power of its Source. Know thou that the soul has various stages and innumerable degrees. But its totality in the stages of existence is confined and limited to: the static (non-developing) mineral soul, the growing vegetative soul, the sensing animal soul, the earthly (*nāsūtiyyah*) human soul, the commanding soul, the blaming soul, the inspired soul, the contented soul, the accepting soul, the accepted soul,¹¹ the perfect soul, the angelic (*malakūtiyyah*) soul [of the Kingdom of God], the soul of the Realm of Divine Command (*jabarūtiyyah*) and the soul of the sanctified realm of the Primal Manifestation (*lāhūtiyyah*).

As for ‘**the mineral soul**’ (*an-nafs al-ma’daniyyah*), it consists of intrinsic matter in the form of minerals, and this is its perfection, its purity and the effects that appear from it. And so observe the precious stones that are mined: how they are heated within the bowels of the earth until they reach their perfection and beauty through the appearance of this soul within them and the emergence of their essential qualities through this process.

And as for ‘**the growing vegetable soul**’ (*an-nafs an-nāmiyyah an-nabātiyyah*), [86] it consists of an essence within which arises the vegetative power through which seeds, leaves, branches and trees grow and develop, in that it takes matter and elements and gives these to the trees and plants so that they grow and mature. They grow and extend their branches and give forth their fruits, their flowers and their leaves.

And as for ‘**the animal soul**’ (*an-nafs al-ḥaywāniyyah*), it consists of an essence within which arises the powers of sensing those physical things that can be sensed.

And as for ‘**the human soul**’ (*an-nafs al-insāniyyah*), it consists of the rational soul, that is to say an essence within which arises the powers of the human being, the outer and inner senses, the divine perfections and knowledge, the heavenly sciences, the eternal arts and the hidden wisdom. Likewise, it is the place where dark passions and earthly (*nāsūtiyyah*) failings appear.

Praise be to God for this astonishing sign, this mighty matter, this comprehensive word on the scroll of existence. For thou dost observe that it has various stations, diverse stages of ascent and manifold degrees to which there is no end. It has the capacity to be the mirror for the manifestation of the realities of the realm of the Primal Will (*lāhūtiyyah*) and the place wherein the divine and perfect attributes are revealed and appear. It is also capable of descending into existential darkness, where it is veiled with thick veils arising from [87] its limitations and its specific qualities, which prevent it from attaining to its origin and point of return and hide from it the signs of its Creator that have been deposited within it through the grace of its Maker. On account of its progression to the stages of nearness and reunion and its descent into the regions of perdition and error, it is clothed in each stage and station in clothes that are different from the previous. Therefore it is known in each stage by a particular term. For example, in its descent into the lowest stations of animal passions, its preoccupation with the trivialities of this vile world, its infatuation with evil and ephemeral desires, its congealment from the coldness of the contingent world, its extinguishing of the heat of the love of its Lord, the mighty, the generous, its fall and its descent into the turmoil of error and its excessive preoccupation with reprehensible and brutish actions, it is known

¹¹ Shoghi Effendi translates these last six terms in a passage from the writings of Baha’u’llah thus: ‘Much hath been written in the books of old concerning the various stages in the development of the soul, such as concupiscence, irascibility, inspiration, benevolence, contentment, Divine good-pleasure, and the like; the Pen of the Most High, however, is disinclined to dwell upon them.’ (*Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1983, no. 82, p. 159).

as ‘**the commanding soul**’ (*nafs al-ammāratin*, the soul that commands to evil) as He hath said, and His word is the truth: ‘Verily, the soul commands to evil unless My Lord hath mercy upon it.’ (Qur’an 12:53)¹²

Then it progresses from this dire state and this base level to a station wherein there comes to it from time to time an awareness of the depths of its embroilment in danger, of its descent into the abyss of heedlessness, its treading such pathways, its self-concealment from its Lord God, its neglect of its Creator, its bewilderment in the wilderness of error and passion, and its forgetfulness of the mention of God the king, the mighty, the all-high. On occasions, there passes over it the breeze of the perception of its state [88] and it is awoken to a slight extent. It then blames itself for the depths that it perceives of its immersion in the tribulations of heedlessness and transgression and reproaches itself when it sees itself bewildered in the deserts of perversity and error. It regrets its baseness and its vile state in the lowest degrees of error and ruinous passions and its concealment behind the accumulated veils that prevent it from ascending to lofty spiritual stations and distract it from the remembrance of God through the evil whisperings of Satan. And so, on account of its regret and remorse concerning its station, and its blaming itself, it is called ‘**the blaming soul**’ (*an-nafs al-lawwāmah*) – as He hath said, may His name be magnified: ‘No, I will swear by the blaming soul.’ (Qur’an 75:2)¹³

And when the soul progressed from this lowly, brutish and abased state and ascended to a more noble, more fortunate, nearer, concealed location, it was assisted by the confirmations of God and inspired by the contents of its own book – as it is said: ‘Read thou thy book, sufficient is it for thy soul as an account against thee on this day.’ (Qur’an 17:14) Then there came to it the signs of inspiration, and the reality of day became apparent to it from that of night, and it was summoned to the shore of the ocean of mystic knowledge (*‘irfān*), was sustained by holy foods from the gardens of paradise, harvested the fruits of the tree of beneficence, drank from the streams of bounty and grace, benefited from the eternal bounty, [89] and tasted the sweetness of blessings. It came to understand the cause of its elevation and degradation, its ascent and descent, and its rising and setting as it ought to be. It reflected upon its state, its plight became clear to it, and this led it to become averse to those things that perish (*al-fāniyyāt*) and to incline towards those things that endure (*al-bāqiyāt*). It closes its eyes to those things that exist and turns instead to the court of the almighty, the all-compelling. It listens attentively for the call of the Concourse on High and turns its attention to those things that will cause it to ascend until it reaches the throne of assurance and the seat of gratitude. It becomes the focal point of inspiration among humanity. It discovers as a result of its efforts and strivings those beneficial things that will lead it to its purpose and goal. Then it is termed the ‘**the inspired soul**’ (*an-nafs al-mulhamah*) for it is inspired as to that which leads it to depravation or to righteousness – as He hath said,

¹² An example of the standard Sufi description of the commanding soul can be found in ‘Abd ar-Razzaq al-Qashani, *Iṣtilāḥāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyyah* (trans. Nabil Safwat, London: Octagon Press), no. 245, p. 56: ‘The Self which inclines towards bodily nature, and commands one to sensual delights and lusts, pulling the Heart downwards. Thus it is the abode of evil, the fountainhead of reprehensible morals and wicked deeds.’

¹³ Al-Qashani’s description of this state of soul (*ibid*, no. 246, p. 56) is: ‘The Self which has been illuminated by the light of the Heart, to the extent that it becomes aware of its habitual heedlessness. Thus it awakens and begins to improve its condition, vacillating between Godliness and its natural state; so that whenever a misdeed occurs through its natural propensity towards evil, it is corrected by the divine admonitory light, and it starts to blame itself and turn in repentance to the door of the Forgiving, the Merciful.’

blessed and glorified be He: ‘By the soul and what is like unto it, He inspired it as to that which leads it to depravation or to righteousness.’ (Qur’an 91:7-8)

And in a station which awakens it to the mention of its Lord and arouses it to the call of its Creator from the slumber of vain imaginings, and brings its attention to the remembrance of God, the almighty, the all-knowing, to its arising and ascent to the stations of love and assurance, its immersion in the ocean of certitude, its recognition of the signs of God in the dawning-places of contingent being, the horizons of existence and the breaths of the All-Merciful, the appearance of the evidence of divine oneness from the dayspring of heaven, its entrance into, and remaining in, the heart of paradise, its simmering in [90] the heat of the love of its Lord, the almighty, the beneficent, its pathway and passage to God, the all-powerful, the ruler of paradise, its setting on the throne of calmness and repose, and its drinking from the chalice of firmness and constancy at all times. Then it is termed ‘**the assured soul**’ (*an-nafs al-mutma’innah*) because it is assured in its faith, its turmoil and unrest is calmed, it has quenched its thirst and soothed its torment, it has thinned and removed its veils, it has changed its darkness to light, it has ended its futility, its shortcomings have turned to perfection, it has pierced its veils, torn its coverings, revealed its secrets, shaken its foundations and unloaded its burdens. It has reported the tidings that your Lord has revealed to it. Exalted is God, its guide and its saviour, the One Who illumines it and forms it, above all that the ignorant have said.¹⁴

And when it has reached this most mighty and perfect station, this most pleasant, most pure, most sweet destination, and has drunk from these clear spring waters of Sabā,¹⁵ it will attain to the station of submission and contentment, it will leave behind its searching and neediness and will entrust its affairs to God, the mighty and eternal king. It will rely upon Him and recline against the cushion of His bounty and beneficence. It will not see in this station anything that is inconsistent with its contentment (*riqā*), and it does not prefer the greatest ease over the most mighty calamity. Indeed it is content with (accepts, *rādiyah*) whatever God may decree for it, [91] and thou wilt observe it joyful and happy when troubles descend, and grateful and thankful when the oceans of misfortunes and disaster billow forth. Even were the arrows of misfortune and grief to issue forth from the clouds of destiny and the rains of sorrow and adversity to descend upon it, thou wouldst observe it wetting its tongue with praise of its Lord, the help in peril, and eloquently expounding in mention of the generous King.

This is a station in which, wert thou to attain unto it, thou wouldst arrive at a happiness which would not be followed by sadness, a joy which is not succeeded by grief, an ease and comfort that does not end in distress and hardship, a prosperity that does not turn to destitution and misfortune, for the might of thy Lord has grasped firmly the reins of affairs. ‘The earth is His handful on the Day of Resurrection, while the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. Praise be to Him and exalted is He above everything that they ascribe as partner unto Him.’ (Qur’an 39:67) Thus is it that not a

¹⁴ Al-Qashani describes this state of the self thus (*ibid*, no. 247, p. 56): ‘The Self whose enlightenment has been completed by the light of the Heart, so that it has divested itself of base qualities and has been moulded by laudable moral conduct and orientated toward the way of the Heart, generally following it closely and progressively rising to the sacred world – free from sin, assiduous in its devotions, rising step by step . . .’

¹⁵ *Aṣ-Ṣabā*, the East Wind. According to al-Qashani (*ibid*, no. 422, translating from the Arabic on pp. 124-5): ‘It is the breezes of the All-Merciful coming from the direction of the East of Spirituality and summoning and rousing one to the good.’

leaf stirs upon a tree nor does a fruit fall except by the will of thy Lord, the merciful, the compassionate.

For the seeker in this exalted station there remains no will, no rest, no motion, no destiny nor any fate except in God. Indeed, his essence, his attributes, his being, his very sense of self, all fade away, overwhelmed by the signs of divine oneness, just as the shadows disappear when the pre-existent sun shines forth.

And when his will has faded away and vanished in the will of the true God, and his will has become identical to His will, and his pleasure is the same as His pleasure, and the veils have been lifted, the coverings have disappeared, and idolatry (*shirk*) has vanished from the reality of his heart, [92] then does there appear in the soul the sign of acceptance. Then on account of its acceptance of the decree of its Creator and its submission to the command of its Maker, it is known as ‘**an accepting soul**’ (*nafsin rāḍiyyatin*).

Insofar as all-encompassing blessings and mercy reach it [the soul], bounties and favours encompass it, a covering of grace and beneficence encloses it, and God clothes it in the robe of obedience and His favour, the Supreme Concourse addresses it, saying: ‘Well is it with thee in that thou hast traversed the path and covered the way until thou didst enter into the spring of faithfulness and didst obtain the clear waters of submission and contentment (*riḍā*). Thou hast left behind thy passions and accepted the decree of thy Lord. Thou hast expended what is thine and sacrificed thy spirit, thy heart and thine inner self upon the path to thy Lord. This then is thy consolation. Thus hast thou attained unto this most exalted station and this most glorious company. Thus hast thou become accepted (*marḍiyyah*) and approved in the sight of God, thy Lord, and hast sought the shelter of the bounty of thy Lord, trembling with joy and happiness at His bounty and beneficence. Verily, His grace towards His sincere servants is mighty!’

And on account of its [the soul’s] rising by means of its acceptance (*riḍā*) into the heights of being accepted by God (*al-mir’āj al-marḍiyyah ‘ind allāh*), its Lord, and its being approved in its state of nothingness (*fanā*) by its Creator, it is known as ‘**the accepted soul**’ (*an-nafs al-marḍiyyah*).

And when it [the soul] soared on the wings of holiness into the atmosphere of this paradise and tasted of the sweetness of the stations of reunion in the gardens of heaven, these illumined and lofty stations were collected within it [the soul] [93] and it arose to this elevated and spiritual degree, and there gushed forth from the lofty heights of its reality the springs of the wisdom of eternity (*ṣamadāniyyah*). It became the focal point of inspiration and the dawning-place for the radiance of the lights of this effulgence and became content with the remembrance of God, the gracious Sovereign. It has become accepting (*rāḍiyyatan*) of His decree and accepted (*marḍiyyatan*) in nothingness (*fanā*) at His gate, therefore it is known as ‘**the perfect soul**’ (*an-nafs al-kāmilah*) on account of its being characterized by these spiritual and divine perfections and being comprised of these essential (gem-like, *al-jawhariyyah*) and godly attributes.

Then is it [the soul] worthy and prepared for entry into the heaven of the **Kingdom of God** (*malakūt*) which is the paradise of the righteous and the refuge of the free whose faces have been illumined by the glad-tidings of God. In it appears the beauty of the All-Merciful and the sign of the beneficent One. To these stations do His words, may His grandeur be magnified, refer: ‘O thou assured (*muṭma’innah*) soul, return to thy Lord, accepting (*rāḍiyyatan*) and accepted (*marḍiyyatan*). Enter among my servants! Enter my paradise!’ (Qur’an 89:27-30) For the garden of refuge, the meads of splendour, the exalted heaven and the all-high paradise are the pastures of the kingdom of God. In this day, the doors [of this kingdom] are open, its land stretches out, its lights shine forth, its fruits ripen, its blossoms open out, its streams flow, its oceans billow, its

springs gush forth, its breezes are gentle, its surface is delicate, its doves sing out, [94] its lips smile, its sorrows are made joyous, its lightnings flash, its dawns are filled with light, its birds warble, its palaces are adorned and its joys draw near. Therefore, rise and with the loudest voice proclaim: ‘Hasten, O ye lovers, to the dawning-place of this pre-existent light that shines forth and glistens, and head towards this lofty and sublime refuge.’

The soul, when it has entered this exalted heaven, this eternal paradise, has sought the dawn of this most luminous day, has entered this most pleasant, most pure place, has taken on perfections, acquired the illumination of the essence (*jawāhir*) of names and attributes, has drunk from this ‘cup tempered at the camphor fountain,’ (Qur’an 76:5) has roamed throughout these lands, plunged the depths of these seas, and has been guided to this fire kindled and aflame on the Paran¹⁶ of love, confirms in its reality the profession of divine unity (*kalimat at-tawhīd*) and establishes in its essence the sign of detachment (*ayat at-tajrīd*). It attains to everlasting and eternal life. It takes pleasure from delights the like of which no eye has seen nor any ear heard. It drinks from the clear springs which flow from the right hand of the Throne of Reality and tastes of the fruit of the tree growing in the midst of paradise, stirred by the breezes coming from the direction of the beautiful One, [95] through which the hearts of those who believe in the divine unity have been revived, and the leaves on the branches of the hearts of the sincere ones have been set in motion. It attains unto the seat (*markaz*) of eternal life (*baqā’*) in the shadow of the countenance of its most exalted Lord, such that not the slightest trace of the ephemeral (*fanā’*) should be hidden within it nor the misfortune of evanescence or annihilation befall it – just as He hath said, and His word is the truth: ‘All that are thereon (upon the earth) shall perish and there remaineth but the countenance of thy Lord, full of glory and honour.’ (Qur’an 55:27-8)

And when the soul hath unfolded the wings of the spirit, been attracted by the joy of God, hath soared to the most exalted horizon, hath sought the most glorious company (*rafiq al-abhā*), it doth ascend to the divine station of the **Realm of Divine Command** (*Jabarūt*) and is assisted by an overwhelming and all-conquering power and by the intricate and ancient secret and by the noble and mighty mystery. It becomes aware of the secrets of hidden and invisible realities, which consumes in envy the hearts of the mystic knowers. It is imprinted by the rays shining forth from the Sun of Truth, and by its effects, and comes to resemble its appearance and its light in every state and condition. It ascends to a station that God hath made to be far above the understanding of the minds of men, for this station is created out of the elements of power, strength, might, authority, sovereignty, omnipotence, protection, and freedom. Nothing that has limitations or pluralities has any resemblance to it. On the contrary it is the very essence (*jawhar*) of unity, the substance of singleness and abstraction, the light [96] of lights, the mystery of mysteries, the furthestmost tree (*Sidrat al-Muntahā*), the exalted rank, the all-highest station, the Masjid al-Aqsā (the remotest mosque), and the ultimate goal in the world of creation even though perfections have no beginning nor end to them and are beyond all limitations. Well is it with the one who has entered this holy, noble and mighty station.

And as for ‘**the Divine Soul**’ (*an-nafs al-ilāhiyyah*), it consists of the Universal Reality that brings together all of the divine realities of the realm of Primal Manifestation (*lāhūtiyyah*) and the eternal subtleties, the outer aspect of which is the ancient light and the inner aspect is the most mighty and sublime mystery, the Primal

¹⁶ A mountain near Mecca.

Point, from which appear all things and to which they revert, from which they originate and to which they return. Thus is it the Primal Oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*) in its essence and the contingent Oneness (*al-wāḥidiyyah*) in its attributes. And from it there appears plurality through manifestation (*zuhūr*) and the making of impressions (*āthār*, upon primordial matter), and it becomes divided, dispersed and manifold, and it shines forth. And so the horizons and souls (cf. Qur'an 41:53) become filled and illumined by it on the Day of the Covenant,¹⁷ and on account of it the tabernacles of unity tremble and are set in motion. From it there grow the branches of the tree of oneness and by it [all things] are clothed in the primal mantle and the most perfect light. And from a single sign (*ayah*) from it there appear all of the divine names to which human realities can attain, and from a mark (*simah*) from it there grow forth all of the true hidden divine attributes. And so it is the centre of the circle of existence through the manifestation (*zuhūr*) of 'There is no god but God' and the axis of the sphere of eternity, around which circles [97] the star of oneness and unity, such that all of the hidden realities circle around this point of oneness in the realm of Primal Manifestation (*an-nuqtah al-aḥadiyyah al-lāhūtiyyah*), and all of the subtle luminous essences (*kaynūnāt*) derive from this flame, which is kindled, ablaze and speaking forth in the tree of humanity saying: 'There is no god but He, the mighty, the powerful, the eternal.'

This soul consists of the reality of the sanctified temples and true thrones. The horsemen of human intelligence can never gallop in this pasture, nor can the birds of the mind of creatures travel in this land. Only the sincere ones among them receive the great bounty of the rays of this most luminous light in their haste and progress towards the state of nothingness (*fanā'*) at the gate of the mighty King. Wretched and condemned are the people who imagine that they have attained its high station when they have not even hovered around its precincts. How can the gnats of ephemeral being (*fanā'*) vie with the phoenix of the dawning-place of eternity (*baqā'*)? Why is it that for a putrid, salty, bitter drop, they reject the sweet, clear and billowing sea?

To whatever extent they who seek to rise to the highest stations of mystic knowledge may ascend, or to whatever high station in the degrees of certitude they that hold fast to the divine unity may climb, they are only reading the letters of the book of their souls, (cf. Qur'an 17:14) only attaining the sign that is refulgent, deposited, incorporated, and concealed within the realities of their own inner beings (*kaynūnātihim*) and only revolving around the centres of the circles of their own essential natures (*dhātiyyātihim*). [98] And as for the stages that are above their worlds and beyond their attainment, they are not able to seek information about them nor to understand them.

Observe, with the eye of reality, physical (*khārijīyyah*), created things. Thou wilt see that everything else is unable to understand what is above it, even were it to progress in its station to the highest degree of [its] existence, even as thou dost witness that the mineral, however much it may progress and ascend to the summit of perfection, is unable to know or to understand the station of the vegetable. And similarly, however much the plant may increase in splendour and growth, it can never become aware of the

¹⁷ This refers to the eternal, spiritual Day of the Covenant. According to the Qur'an, on this day, God asks assembled humanity 'Am I not your Lord?' and they reply 'Yea! We testify that Thou art.' (Qur'an 7:172-4) This event is referred to by Baha'u'llah in *The Hidden Words* (Persian, no. 19) and elsewhere (see Todd Lawson, 'Seeing Double: The Covenant and the Tablet of Ahmad', in *The Baha'i Faith and Other Religions* 39-87). The covenants made by each Manifestation of God with his followers – the Greater Covenant (that they will recognize the next Manifestation of God) and the Lesser Covenant (that they will obey his successor) – are but earthly, time-bound reflections of that timeless, spiritual Covenant.

reality of the animal. And in the same way, the animal, however much it may improve its goodness, splendour and proportions, will never possess knowledge of the essence (*huwiyyah*) of humanity nor of its realities, states and attributes.

Know thou therefore that, in the variety of their stages, degrees and stations, souls are bound by this condition – that none of them is able to transgress its limits or station. No bird is able to fly above the upper limit of its flight. And if matters are thus among these created, contingent, physical (*khārijīyyah*) beings that share pertinent and similar aspects, then how much more so between the stations of contingent reality and those of the realities of the Primal Manifestation, which the human intellect fails to understand, which souls become confused in trying to know, [99] tongues are powerless to explain and the wings of the birds of hearts and minds are too feeble to fly to the heights of elucidating.

Let us now return to our theme of the stations of the soul and its degree and conditions, its elevation and decline and its exaltation. We have stated that this most great sign in one station confirms the soul and its degrees and is transformed from stage to stage and from station to station. For in each degree it leaves behind its limitations and its condition. It seizes possession, through its efforts, of the signs of the degree that is above it, and it leaves behind [its former] condition through tests which purify it, refine it, cleanse it and make it detached from whatsoever is not worthy in it in the path of its Creator. And when it is released and saved from all of the lower degrees and ascends with the help of its Originator and Fashioner to a high degree, it gains a victory over the power of the lower degrees and vanquishes the hosts of the realities of the base states.

Then understand what He, glorified be He, hath said: ‘The Byzantines were overthrown’ – that is to say it [the soul] has overthrown and caused to diminish and fade away ‘the commanding soul’ through the misfortune of the thunderbolts that fell upon it from the realms of the Kingdom and the flaming fire that entered upon it from the repositories of Might and Command (Jabarūt). Then was it aided by the hosts of guidance and victory and assisted by the angels of spirit and righteousness. It was awakened from its slumber and its negligence and it ended [100] its immersion, its decline and abasement and bore witness to its fall and its lowly condition. Then it called to mind its condition, refined its vision, purified its sight until it came to know its state and what it was that veiled it and hindered it and became a cause for its remoteness, denial, negligence and inebriation. Then it grasped hold of the hem of grace and mercy and supplicated God and took refuge in His presence, until it ascended and was saved from that station and stage and entered the loftiest station. Thus was it transformed in its stations and degrees and was victorious over and over again until it went back to its origin and returned to its centre and was clothed in the robe of its perfection and entered the shadow of its Lord, the seat of truth in the presence of the mighty King.

O thou who art kindled and aglow with the fire of the love of God! Know thou that were this servant to wish to interpret this divine (*lāhūtiyyah*) verse in all of the hidden stations and divine realities, and in the stations of Jabarūt and Malakūt, the existent realities, the seen and unseen worlds, the manifestations of Primal Oneness and the states of contingent Oneness, the spiritual essences (*kaynūnāt*), the foundations of the heart, the spiritual understanding (*mashā‘ir*) of reality and of the soul and that which pertains, and is supplementary, to this with the most complete exposition and the most perfect explanation, he would be able to do so, with the help of God, and His power and grace and confirmation. But souls are not able, nor do they have the capacity, [101] to hear it and understand it. Therefore do we hold the pen back from exposition and movement and give to thee these keys of elucidation. Therefore open by the power of thy Lord all of the doors that had been shut in thy face so

that thou mayest be aware of the hidden and concealed mysteries of God, mayest witness and reveal the preserved and guarded secret, mayest travel in that spacious and mighty Kingdom, plunge into that swelling and billowing sea and that mighty and surging ocean, and glean from the bright stars of light by the grace of the King of manifestation.

By the Lord of forgiveness and the well-known beauty of gratitude! Were one of the sincere ones to turn to God in this most great day and see with the purest vision, he would understand all of the realities and meanings of every word of the verses of God, the eternal protector – nay indeed, every letter and every dot. For realities and meanings in their entirety flow forth within their inner aspect, and streams burst forth from them, and oceans billow within them. Well is it with those who attain thereunto!

These meanings, which we have set forth, appear and are made manifest from this blessed verse when we read ‘the Byzantines are overthrown’ – that is to say, in the passive form, but if we read it in the active form, there appear from it other meanings, which there is no opportunity today to explain and make clear, or to uncover their mysteries and secrets. We leave that for another time.

We trust in God [102] in all matters, and we seek help from the cord of His mercy and grace. Verily He gives answers to the questioner and wealth to the needy.

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The Bab in Shiraz: An account by Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan

AHANG RABBANI¹

Abstract

Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, known to history as the Bab, was born in 1819 in Shiraz and in 1844 declared himself the Promised One of Islam, thereby inaugurating a new religious movement in Iran. This is a translation of an important document written by Mirza Habib Afnan – a relative of the Bab – comprising family recollections of the early days of the Bab. It relates the story of the early years of the Bab in Shiraz, Bushihr and Karbala, including his marriage, and leading up to the declaration of his mission in 1844. It then tells the story of the arrival of the Letters of the Living and the departure of the Bab for his pilgrimage to Mecca. It continues with events after his return from pilgrimage and the conversion of Sayyid Yahya Vahid Darabi, a leading cleric of the period, as well as recounting the persecution that the Bab suffered at the hands of the governor of Shiraz. Some of the details given in this account vary from those given in Nabil's Narrative.²

During the second half of 1924, on the recommendation of Mirza Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, commenced the process of preserving the recollections of those who had witnessed the early years of the Babi and Baha'i movements. In the Haifa-'Akka area, companions of Baha'u'llah such as Aqa Husayn Ashchi and Aqa Abu'l-Qasim Baghban were interviewed – sometimes, as in the case of Ashchi, literally on their deathbed – about what they remembered of the days of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha.

At about the same time in Iran, Fadil Mazandarani, a deeply learned and capable researcher, had undertaken a massive project to compose a documented history of the Babi-Baha'i religions, which he titled *Tārīkh Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq* (The History of the Appearance of the True One) – an effort that was greatly encouraged by Shoghi Effendi.³ For his history, Mazandarani needed detailed accounts of events and occurrences during the first century of the Faith. In order to gather such data and documentation, he and others travelled extensively throughout Iran and its vicinity and combed the Baha'i community for available information, such as tablets, memoirs, letters, pictures, narratives, poems, historical sites and family trees. However, Mazandarani recognized that he needed much more information, so he turned to Shoghi Effendi.

¹ The kindness of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, who initially requested the translation of the two narratives by his father, Mirza Habib Afnan, and offered many valuable suggestions – some of which appear as footnotes under his name – in the course of translation, and of Professor Juan R. I. Cole, who generously shared a copy of the *Tārīkh Amrī Fārs va Shīrāz* manuscript, is warmly acknowledged.

² Nabil [Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation* (trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970).

³ Shoghi Effendi himself also participated in this enterprise, first by producing an edited translation of Nabil Zarandi's history and later by writing a monumental analytical history of the Babi-Baha'i Faiths, titled *God Passes By*.

During the course of the next two decades, Shoghi Effendi wrote to the Baha'is of Iran urging them to prepare detailed histories of local communities, particularly those that had had a significant Baha'i presence from the early days. He further called upon individual believers who had witnessed the unfolding of the Heroic Age, 1844-1921, in the cradle of their Faith to commit themselves to writing their reminiscences.

In accordance with this instruction, the Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz entrusted the task of writing a comprehensive history of the Faith in this central region to Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan, the hereditary custodian of the house of the Bab in Shiraz, who readily obeyed and wrote what he himself had witnessed and the remarkable stories that he had heard from those associated with the founding of the Babi and Baha'i movements. Mirza Habib notes:

In accordance with the instructions of the beloved Guardian in his blessed and wondrous letter, each town was to write a brief history of the development of the Cause since the dawning of the Sun of Reality. The Spiritual Assembly [of Shiraz] has placed this service upon this unworthy servant, Haji Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan A'la'i. Even though this ephemeral servant considers himself unprepared for this great enterprise, nevertheless, in the hope of the divine confirmation of the Beloved, to a prescribed degree, he has committed to paper what he has seen or heard from reliable observers so that the sanctified command of the Guardian is fulfilled.⁴

Fars and Shiraz

Mirza Habibu'llah was born and raised in the city of Shiraz, in the province of Fars. The land of Fars is a province that millenniums earlier had given birth to two great dynasties – the Achaemenian in the sixth century BC and the Sassanian in the third century AD. These empires were administered by men of great insight and learning, and possessed cultivated societies, formidable armies, great visions for humanity, and just rulers whose achievements were legendary and truly unprecedented. Indeed, the brilliance of their triumphs was so dazzling that the name of the region was extended to the whole of the country, and Persia – from 'Persis' the Greek form of 'Fars' – was born. Therefore, for the Persians the name 'Fars' evokes a deep sense of pride and heritage. It calls to mind the past splendours associated with the cradle of civilization when wise rulers from their seat in Persepolis wielded authority over a kingdom that extended from North Africa to China – kings that governed with such liberalism and equity that the authors of the Old Testament were prompted to speak most glowingly of their benevolence.

The language of the nation, Farsī – the language of Fars – is descended from the language that Cyrus and Darius spoke, in which the proclamations were engraved by their command on rock-tablets in Bī-sitūn and Naqsh Rostam, and upon the walls and columns of Persepolis. This language stirs a profound sense of spirituality and civility derived from the poetry of Hafiz, the voice of the invisible, and Sa'di, the sweet-tongued poet. To this day, no Iranian writer enjoys a wider celebrity or a greater reputation than these two poets of Shiraz – not only in the country of Persia, but wherever the Persian language is cultivated. Indeed, for the Iranians there is no Persian language other than what they have learned from Hafiz and Sa'di, and, deep in their consciousness, there are no greater men of letters than these two towering literary giants of Shiraz. Beyond the circle of Iranians, the Baha'i world community will forever associate the name of Shiraz with the opening chapter of its own

⁴ *Tarikh Amri Fars va Shiraz* 1.

history – the hometown of the Bab and the starting point of his mission.

In regard to this city, Baha'u'llah has written:

Sanctified be God! The All-Glorious Providence has decreed for the land of Sh[iraz] to be the dawning-place of light⁵ and fire. That is, before God, the appearance of these two attributes is most prominent and most evident in that realm. And this is because the fire of opposition broke forth brightly in that city before it appeared in all other lands.⁶ [Provisional translation]

Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan

It was in the house of the Bab that Mirza Habib (Habibu'llah) Afnan (1875-1951) was born and raised by none other than Khadijih Bagum, the widow of the Bab. The stories that he heard from her were the bittersweet stories of the Bab and his earliest disciples, the Letters of the Living, in Shiraz. Khadijih Bagum had a particular affinity with the young lad's father, Aqa Mirza Aqa Nuru'd-Din. It had been the latter whom the Bab had promised would be the family member who would protect and support her, and he had done just that. Khadijih Bagum's great love also readily embraced Nuru'd-Din's children, and Mirza Habib basked in her attention and affection.

At the age of 16, in 1891, Mirza Habib was fortunate enough to be able to accompany his family to the Holy Land, where he spent some nine months in the immediate proximity of Baha'u'llah, in the Mansion of Bahji. For the next decade, he remained in constant communication with 'Abdu'l-Baha from Egypt and periodically visited him in 'Akka, where, as a trusted Afnan, he was privy to some of most heart-wrenching scenes of 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry and was granted a glimpse into the most private inner workings of the Baha'i Faith. He witnessed the defection of the half-brothers of 'Abdu'l-Baha and their corrupt ways, as well as the anguish of 'Abdu'l-Baha, his efforts to conceal their perversion and violation, and the means by which this sad news was transmitted to the Baha'i community.

At the turn of the century, in 1902, 'Abdu'l-Baha wished for Nuru'd-Din and his family, including his son Mirza Habib, to return to Shiraz to rebuild the house of the Bab which had fallen into disrepair. Shortly before the completion of this reconstruction, Nuru'd-Din passed away, and it fell on Mirza Habib to complete the construction and to become the custodian of that holy site. This was the hallmark service of his life, as for the next half-century he served with great distinction as the hereditary custodian of the house of the Bab in Shiraz. Consequently, he stood uniquely qualified to tell the story of the Babi and Baha'i movements in Shiraz and to relate his recollections of the days of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha in the Holy Land.

Narratives of Mirza Habib Afnan

Mirza Habib has penned two documents. The first narrative, entitled *Khāṭirāt Ḥayāt* (Memories of a Life), is the account of Mirza Habib's pilgrimages to the Holy Land and his

⁵ 'Light' is a reference to the declaration of the Bab in Shiraz.

⁶ Original Tablet in *Nuru'd-Din Compilation of Tablets*, no. 144, dated 1 Rajab 1307 AH [21 February 1890]. This unpublished compilation (in private hands) includes some 161 densely written pages containing Baha'u'llah's tablets to Aqa Mirza Aqa Nuru'd-Din, a long-time follower of Baha'u'llah. It was prepared at 'Abdu'l-Baha's request and sent to him in Haifa, and the present translator is grateful to Abu'l-Qasim Afnan for making his copy accessible.

decade-long stay in Egypt. The exact date of the composition of this autobiography is not known, but the author's sons, Abu'l-Qasim and Hasan Afnan, indicate that it was first composed shortly after Mirza Habib's return to Iran.⁷ From internal evidence and family records, it is known that these notes were copied out and reorganized in the middle of 1940s.⁸ Of this narrative, the most important part is the author's recollection of being near Baha'u'llah from the middle of July 1891 until shortly after Naw-Ruz in 1892, that is, a little over two months prior to the passing of Baha'u'llah. The remaining portions are singularly important as they clarify many aspects of the first decade of 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry, when the opposition of 'Abdu'l-Baha's half-brothers was at its height.⁹

The date of composition of the second narrative, entitled *Tārīkh Amrī Fārs va Shīrāz* (History of the Cause in Fars and Shiraz), is not known with any degree of precision, although it has been estimated to be in the early to mid 1930s.¹⁰ The original version was handwritten by Mirza Habib and the final draft was penned by Mirza Abu'l-Hasan Ansif Nayrizi. This final copy was edited by the author, whose remarks are evident along various margins and lines throughout the manuscript; it is this version that has been utilized for translation.

Of this second narrative, unquestionably the most valuable portions are those on the life of the Bab in Shiraz – a city acclaimed by the young prophet as the *balad al-amm*, 'the land of refuge'.¹¹ Mirza Habib did not wish to write a comprehensive history of the Bab's life, since he knew full well that others had already attempted such an undertaking – men like Nabil Zarandi, surnamed Nabil A'zam, who was well known to Mirza Habib. Rather, his objective was to tell stories of the Bab's life that were current among the Bab's immediate family in Shiraz, particularly reminiscences he had heard from Khadijih Bagum.¹²

Mirza Habib was a well-educated man. He attended the same school that the Bab had attended and received tuition from one of the ablest educators of the city. During his youth, Baha'u'llah arranged for him to study with his own sons in the mansion of Bahji. Subsequently, he spent many years receiving daily instruction from the celebrated Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani, one of the most erudite Baha'is of his generation. Therefore, the style of his composition is very learned and represents an important literary achievement in its own right. It is hoped that in due course the original Persian of these two narratives will

⁷ Private communications with the present translator, summer 1985.

⁸ For example, Mirza Habib notes that 55 years had elapsed since the spring of 1892 when he had met Tarazu'llah Samandari in the Holy Land; assuming that these years are reckoned in accordance with the lunar calendar, this places the date of composition around 1945-6.

⁹ An annotated rendering was completed by the present translator in 1998 in consultation with A. Q. Afnan and will be published by Kalimat Press in 2005.

¹⁰ Denis MacEoin (*Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* 179) has hypothesized that this document was composed after 1321Sh/1942-3. However, family history suggests that composition took place prior to the onset of World War II.

¹¹ INBA (Iranian National Baha'i Archives collection) 91:6-10, no. 3 and 91:13-4, no. 4. In *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (undated and unsigned manuscript in private hands), chapter 55, the Bab refers to himself as the Gate of the land of refuge (*Bāb-i balad al-amm*). Verse 35 of the chapter 'Pillar' (*rukhn*) of the same book refers to Shiraz as the *balad al-amm*. It should also be noted that INBA volumes 51 and 52 contain many tablets addressed to Baha'is in Fars. Volume 51 (633 pages) contains tablets of Baha'u'llah, while volume 52 (683 pages) contains tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

¹² For those not fully familiar with the story of the Bab, it should be noted that the reader's path may be eased if, while reading this history, reference is made to Nabil's history, presented in an edited version in *The Dawn-Breakers*, and to Hasan Balyuzi's biography, *The Bāb* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973). In these volumes are to be found many of the persons and incidents mentioned in this narrative, but depicted in a wider context. For a more academic treatment of the same subject see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

also be published so that students of the Faith will become better acquainted with his elegant style of composition.¹³

Notes on the Present Translation

What is offered in this monograph represents a preliminary rendering of the first 115 pages of *Tarikh Amri Fars va Shiraz*, where the story of the Bab is told.¹⁴ In the course of this translation, every effort has been exerted to stay as close to the original documents as possible, to the degree that a literal rendering has often been preferred to a more stylistic one. Footnotes have been added to augment information, clarify obscure points, and provide a more detailed perspective. Occasionally comments by the translator have been added to improve the clarity or continuity of the material. These are enclosed in square brackets, thus [. . .].

Typically the Bab is referred to in the text by such honorific titles as ‘His Holiness’ or ‘His blessed Person’ and these have been retained faithfully, although they may appear somewhat excessive to Western readers. By the time that Mirza Habib penned these narratives, many of the principal personalities featured had passed away, and therefore the original text often refers to them as ‘the late’ or ‘the deceased’. These references have been kept to aid future researchers in identifying various dates. The page numbers of the manuscript are indicated in brackets every five pages.

Many of the details of the events recorded here differ from those that are to be found in *Nabil's Narrative*, the standard history of these events. However, given that they represent an oral tradition within the family of the Bab, they have their own importance and must form part of the analysis of historians. It should be emphasized that the spoken words of the Bab quoted in these pages do not have the same scriptural authority as his writings, as no one took notes at the time the words were uttered. However, it cannot be ruled out that some may be the very words spoken.

First Portion of *Tarikh Amri Fars va Shiraz*

The Beginning of the History

The names of the paternal and maternal ancestors of the Exalted One [the Bab] – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him – are as follows:

The blessed name of His Holiness the Exalted One was Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad,¹⁵ son of Mirza Muhammad-Rida, son of Aqa Mirza Nasru’llah, son of Aqa Mirza Fathu’llah, son of

¹³ H-Bahai has electronically published *Tarikh Amri Fars va Shiraz*, see <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol4/shiraz/shiraz.htm>.

¹⁴ A translation of the complete text has been prepared by the present translator and approved by the Baha’i World Centre for publication. It is scheduled for publication by Kalimat Press in 2005.

¹⁵ In the following provisional translation from the *Qayyum al-Asma’*, Surah al-Qarabih [kinsmen], verse 14, the Bab states: ‘Verily We have named this Remembrance by two Names from divine Self after two Beloved among Our servants in the heavens.’

Aqa Mirza Ibrahim.¹⁶ He was of an illustrious family of Husayni Sayyids¹⁷ to whose nobility, integrity, trustworthiness, piety, devotion and detachment everyone in the province of Fars would testify, and they stood exemplary in integrity and purity in the whole of the region. Their occupation was commerce.

The name of the mother of His Holiness was Fatimih Bagum, the daughter of the late Haji Mirza Muhammad Husayn, son of Aqa Mirza ‘Abid,¹⁸ son of Aqa Mirza Sayyid Muhammad. This family also ranked among the best-regarded and trustworthy merchants of Fars.

His blessed birth took place on the first night of Muharram of 1235 [AH]¹⁹ in the house belonging to his mother’s uncle, Aqa Mirza ‘Ali.²⁰ The reported words of that exalted lady, the mother of His Holiness, which were often recounted, are:

From the moment of birth, it was evident that, unlike other children, he was not rapacious in drinking milk. Normally he was serene and made no noise. During a twenty-four-hour period, he would desire milk only four times and while nursing would be most gentle, and no movement was discerned from his mouth. Many times I was disturbed by why this child was not like others [and thought that] perchance he suffered some ailment that prevented him from desiring milk. Then I would console myself that if indeed he experienced some unknown illness, he would manifest signs of agitation and restlessness.

Unlike other children, he did not complain nor behave in an unseemly manner during the weaning period. I was most thankful that, now that the Exalted Lord had granted me this one child, he was gentle and agreeable.

Moreover according to what trustworthy personages have reported, from the beginning of his childhood extraordinary and unusual character traits were apparent in him, which had excited the wonder and amazement of all the relatives, friends and strangers, [5] as the Bab was unlike any other child.

According to Mulla Fathu’llah Maktab-dar [the schoolmaster], son of Mulla Mand-‘Ali, when [the Bab] had reached the blessed age of five years,²¹ he was taken to the [Qur’anic

¹⁶ The Bab gives a slightly different genealogy in *Ṣaḥīfih Bayn al-Haramayn* (Treatise Between the Two Shrines) of which the following is a provisional translation: ‘Say: My name is Muhammad after the word ‘Ali [i.e. ‘Ali Muhammad]. And the name of my father, as hath been revealed in the Book of God, is Rida after Muhammad. And the name of my grandfather in the Book of God is Ibrahim, and his father is named Nasru’llah, as has been revealed in the Qur’an (Fathu’llah)’ (Browne Or. MSS F. 7{9}, p. 7). The final statement is a reference to the Qur’an 61:13 where it reads: ‘And another [favour will He bestow], which ye do love – help from God (*naṣr min Allāh*) or a speedy victory (*fath qarīb*); so give the glad tidings to the believers.’ The same genealogy is given in the *Qayyum al-Asma’*, Surah al-Qaribih, verses 14-5.

¹⁷ That is, this family traced its ancestry to Imam Husayn.

¹⁸ Muhammad ‘Ali Faizi, *Haḍrat Nuṣṣṭih Ūlā* (Tihiran: Mu’assih Milli Matbu’at Milli, BE 132/1965) 64, gives his name as Zaynu’l-‘Ābidīn.

¹⁹ 20 October 1819.

²⁰ The Bab provides the date of his birth in the *Saḥīfah Bayn al-Haramayn* in a passage of which the following is a provisional translation: ‘Say O denizens of the Concourse! Hear the command of the Remnant of God from this Servant, the Exalted, the Wise. And this Servant was born, as hath been concealed in the Book of God, on the first day of Muharram of the year twelve hundred and thirty-five.’ Also, the same date can be computed precisely from his age given in his personal diary appended to the Azali-published *Kitab Panj Sha’n* (the Book of Five Modes). Other references to his age are to be found in the *Persian Bayan* 2:1 and 4:11 and the *Dala’il Sab’ih* (the Seven Proofs).

²¹ In Persian, when someone is described as being, say, five years of age, it means they are in their fifth year of life. In English, during the whole of the fifth year of life, a child is called a four-year-old. In general, whenever

school of] Shaykh ‘Abid,²² known as Shaykh Anam,²³ located in Qahvih-yi Awliya,²⁴ one of the retreats (*takayā*) occupied by the mystics of Fars, in the Tayr market-place,²⁵ near the house of his maternal grandfather and respected maternal uncle. Mulla Fathu’llah Maktabdar, son of Mulla Mand-‘Ali, was the custodian of the Masjid Vakil²⁶ and, together with his father, was numbered among the early believers [in the Bab]; because of the persecutions and people’s harassment, he became a fugitive and travelled extensively.²⁷ He related:

When they brought His Holiness to the *maktab* [Qur’anic school], I worked for Shaykh Anam in the Qahviyah Awliya, which is one of the retreats (*takayā*) of mystics [Sufis] in the old neighbourhood of Shiraz,²⁸ where the school had several rooms and a circular courtyard. The honoured Shaykh ‘Abid, a man of many qualities, was the schoolmaster and taught the children of the noblemen, the affluent, the merchants and other distinguished citizens. He was a tall, ever-dignified man who displayed a long beard. A follower of the late Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa’i and Sayyid Kazim Rashti, he ranked among the learned and the divines of Shiraz.

At that time, I served the shaykh as the *khalīfih* (that is, the assistant). Those wishing for their children to receive tuition from him, had to come beforehand and meet with him in person, or to send a missive or, through a distinguished intermediary, apply for attendance. This was due to the fact that the shaykh did not accept the children of just anyone, and particularly, because of their ill-manners and dirty clothing, was reluctant to accept boys from the bazaari shopkeepers.

Description of His Blessed Condition during Childhood

At any event, one morning, I saw the honoured Aqa Mirza Muhammad-Rida,²⁹ who had been a friend of Shaykh Anam, come to the Qahviyah [Awliya]. He sat next to the shaykh and described his situation thus: ‘After forty years, the Exalted Lord has graced me with a child that has caused me to

age is given in Baha’i histories translated from the Persian, it is necessary to subtract one to get the age in English. In the present translation, everywhere that age is provided, the original number is given.

²² His given name was Shaykh Muhammad (d. 1263 AH/1847), and he is also known as Shaykh Zaynu’l-‘Abidin or Shaykh Mu’allim. The Bab recalled him in the *Arabic Bayan* 6:11, ‘Say: O Muhammad, my teacher! Do not beat me ere my years have gone beyond five.’ [provisional translation]

²³ A variation of the same name, Shaykhuna, is employed in Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 75.

²⁴ Named after a certain Sufi saint, Darvish Awliya’ (d. 1119 AH/1707), this convent is occupied by the dervishes and Sufis. Located in the Bazaar Murgh quarter, it is situated near the house of the Bab’s maternal uncle, Haji Mirza Sayyid ‘Ali, and over the years has decayed so thoroughly that presently no trace of it is evident.

²⁵ Known also as Bazaar Murgh [poultry market] quarter, it is one of the most prosperous and religiously significant quarters of the city and one of the five Haydari wards of Shiraz. For further details see Fasa’i, *Farsnamih Nasiri* 2:27-47.

²⁶ Masjid Vakil is the largest and the most important of Shiraz’s mosques.

²⁷ Mulla Fathu’llah and his father converted on the day the Bab proclaimed his mission in the aforementioned mosque. Both were among the Babi martyrs at Shaykh Tabarsi and therefore his recollection of the Bab must have been conveyed to the Afnan family at an early time.

²⁸ Mirza Habib adds parenthetically: ‘And this convent was standing in the middle, surrounded by ruins and evidence of old graves and gravestones.’

²⁹ A. Q. Afnan informs us that on that occasion it was Haji Mirza Sayyid ‘Ali, the Bab’s maternal uncle, who went to the school. (Private communication, August 1992).

wonder over his behaviour.’ The shaykh asked him to explain further, but he only replied, ‘It is hard to say.’ [The shaykh] insisted, to which [the father] offered: ‘O honoured Shaykh! Which of his amazing conditions should I recount? Of him such peculiar characteristics are manifest as to excite one’s wonder. Now that he has reached the age of five, at times he raises his hands in prayer to the threshold of the One God. At midnight, he wakes and stands to offer his obligatory prayers, in the midst of which he weeps. Sometimes he is sad, on other occasions he is happy, or immersed in rapture, or preoccupied with the imaginary world. My astonishment prevents me from describing it. Were I to tell all that I have observed from the time of his birth until the present, it would make a large book.

‘At such a [young] age, he tells the doings of the entire clan, men and women alike. For instance, some time ago, together with his uncle, the honoured Haji Mirza Sayyid ‘Ali, we were at the bathhouse of Bazaar Murgh quarter.³⁰ This child was asleep between his uncle and I, when suddenly he rose and said, “The roof of the *garm-khānih* [steam chamber] of Mirza Hadi’s bathhouse has just caved in, and five women and one child were [killed] under the rubble.” His uncle said to him, “Aqa, please sleep and refrain from saying such things. What manner of talk is this?” He responded, “It is as I said.” It was not long after that we heard a commotion coming from the direction of the entrance, with the news that Mirza Hadi’s bathhouse was wrecked and a number of women were under the rubble. One person said twenty women [were killed], another said thirty or forty, but it was later determined that five women and a child had been killed and the truth was what he had said.

‘In another instance, a while ago, he informed us, “Last night, I dreamt that a large balance was suspended in mid-air in the vast space. [10] His Holiness Imam Ja‘far Sadiq was positioned on one of the plates and, because of his weight, the plate was resting on ground while the other plate was suspended in the air. An invisible hand lifted me and placed me on the empty plate. My plate was now heavier than the other and I came to the ground and the first plate went into the air.” I said to him, “Child, please do not speak in such a manner.”

‘What should I say? There are so many astonishing stories about him that I cannot say. At one time, Aqa Mirza Sayyid Hasan³¹ suggested that perhaps this child was under the spell of witches or sorcerers and said that we should take him to those knowledgeable in such matters and request prayers of protection for him. Even though I did not believe him to be suffering from such things, because of his [Sayyid Hasan’s] comment, I brought Aqa Muhammad-Hasan, the astronomer (*munajjim*), to the house and described for him the details. He made some calculations, said that no harm had come to him by way of sorcerers or witches, and then asked for his date of birth. Thereupon, he wrote certain prayers and charms, and recited some other verses and having learned of his date of birth, he left. After the departure of Aqa Muhammad-Hasan, the child tore up the talismans and the instruction sheets and said to me, “As the mystic [poet] has said, ‘You offer a gazelle, and

³⁰ A. Q. Afnan suggests that only the Bab and his maternal uncle, Haji Mirza Sayyid ‘Ali, were present on that occasion. (Private communication, August 1992).

³¹ This may be either the Afnan Kabir of later years or another relative, Mirza-yi Shirazi, who became the foremost cleric of the Shi‘i world.

I am that gazelle.”³²

‘In short, for some time I have been consumed with the difficulties of this child and do not know which of his conditions I should describe for you. It is now time for his education, and I wish for him to receive his tuition and religious training from you.’

I was most astounded by the descriptions of the honoured Mirza [Muhammad-Rida] and the shaykh was astonished as well. It was decided that at an agreeable time on [the following] Thursday the child would be brought to the *maktab*.

On the promised morning, the child arrived, followed by a servant³³ carrying a small [copper] tray filled with sweetmeats and a small copy of the Qur’an, which typically was used by the [*maktab*] students in Shiraz. Because of Aqa Mirza Muhammad-Rida’s descriptions of him, the shaykh, several of the students who had reached the age of maturity, and I myself were thoroughly enthralled in watching him. He came in, greeted us and sat before Shaykh Anam. Soon thereafter, his maternal uncle, the honoured Haji Mirza Sayyid Ali, arrived too and sat next to the shaykh. After the exchange of formal pleasantries, the shaykh took the Qur’an from the tray of sweetmeats, opened it and said [to the young pupil], ‘Come, Aqa, read.’ He smiled and said, ‘As you please.’ As was customary, the shaykh read to him, ‘Say, “He is the Deliverer, the All-Knowing.”’³⁴ His Holiness remained silent. The shaykh repeated, but he kept his silence, and then [after a pause] asked, ‘Who is “He”?’ The shaykh responded, ““He” is God. You are still a child, and what concern of yours is the meaning of “He”?’ The pupil responded, ‘I am the Deliverer, the All-Knowing!’ The shaykh was deeply enraged and picked up his stick and said to him, ‘Do not utter such things here!’ His Holiness commenced reading, and his maternal uncle smiled and ordered certain arrangements, and then left.³⁵

The late Aqa Muhammad Ibrahim Isma‘il Bayk, who was a well-known and respected merchant, related:

I was twelve years old at that time, and on that day Sayyid-i Bab came and, with courtesy, sat cross-legged between me and Aqa Mirza Muhammad Rida Mustawfi, who was about the same age as I. His head was bowed over the primer, but he did not utter a word, so I asked, ‘Why are you not reading [aloud] like other children?’ He made no reply; however, two other lads sitting near us [15] were heard reading poems from Hafiz and came upon this verse:

From the pinnacle of Heaven they call out unto thee,
I know not why thou art entrapped here.

He turned quickly to me and said, ‘That is your answer.’ I replied, ‘Well done.’³⁶

³² An alternative reading of this poem is: ‘You offer a prayer, and I am that prayer.’

³³ The original *ghulam* signifies a permanent, purchased servant.

³⁴ Qur’an 34:25

³⁵ Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 75-6, tells a similar story though considerably different in details.

³⁶ Brief recollections of Aqa Muhammad Ibrahim have previously appeared in Balyuzi, *The Bab* 34-5.

Similarly, it is related:

As Shaykh Anam was a learned man and a follower of Shaykh Ahmad [Ahsa'i], each morning he conducted a seminary session in Qahvih-yi Awliya where several of his [theological] students would come and engage him in discussions. One day a scientific topic was being discussed and, after considerable debate, remained unresolved, since it was particularly complex. The shaykh stated, 'Tonight I will study the [authoritative] books on this topic and tomorrow will present a solution and complete our discourse.' At this point, the exchange was concluded.

Suddenly the young pupil [who had been listening] raised his blessed head and with sound reasoning, irrefutable proof and scientific evidence propounded the answer which they sought and removed all complexities. They were wonder-struck and amazed. The pupils informed their teacher that they had no recollection of ever having discussed that topic in such a way that this child could have parrot-wise memorized it and now repeated it for them. They expressed their bewilderment, and the shaykh responded that he too was filled with awe and asked him where he had gained this knowledge. The pupil smiled and offered this couplet from Hafiz:

Should the grace of the Holy Spirit once again deign to assist,
Others will also do what Christ could perform.³⁷

At all events, during those tender years many such manifestations of extraordinary and innate qualities were observed in him and are testified by both friends and foes, remaining beyond my abilities to describe.³⁸

When he was nine, his illustrious father, Aqa Mir Muhammad Rida, passed away,³⁹ and from then he was raised in the bosom of his honoured maternal uncle, Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali. With his own eyes, the late uncle had witnessed such remarkable and astonishing feats by him, that when he declared his Cause, without the need for any proof or evidence, Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali readily and unhesitatingly accepted his claim, believed in him and sacrificed his life and possessions in the path of the Beloved of the world.

My late paternal grandmother [Zahra Bagum], who was a paternal cousin of the Bab's mother, related that she herself had heard the illustrious uncle [Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali] discussing [the claim of the Bab] with his younger brother, Haji Mirza Hasan 'Ali, and the latter was resisting the argument saying, 'Brother, what ideas are these that you have come to now? You have departed from our ancestral religion and follow our nephew!' The eminent [soon-to-be-] martyred uncle responded, 'You should know well that God the Exalted has completed the proof unto me. That which I saw with my own eyes since his childhood and have come to behold with the essence of certitude after his adulthood leaves no room for doubt for anyone, especially for me.' He then continued, 'Have you forgotten our journey to

³⁷ See Balyuzi, *The Bab* 35. For similar childhood stories of the Bab, see Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 75-6.

³⁸ The Bab in the *Qayyum al-Asma'*, Surah as-Sina, verse 5, addressing himself states, 'And We favored Thee during Thy Childhood with the mighty Cause of God, as it had been decreed as such in the Mother Book.' In the same Book, Surah al-Isma, verse 34, the Bab proclaims: 'Verily as a child I was aware of the truth of My own Self, and God is the Almighty, the All-knowing.' (Provisional translations.)

³⁹ In the *Qayyum al-Asma'*, Surah al-Jihad, verse 39, the Bab states, 'O My God, My Lord! Verily in Thy will, My father passed away and I do not remember him. My master, when he is seated with the heavenly angels, inform him of my Cause and record him in this mighty book.' (Provisional translation.)

Sabz-Pushan⁴⁰ when he was a child of nine years old? There was a group of us, and he came along as well. When we arrived, being completely exhausted, we performed our ablutions, offered our late afternoon and evening obligatory prayers, [20] paid our homage of visitation, ate dinner and went to bed. It was not long after, at midnight, that I awoke and noticed that he was not in bed. Deeply perturbed, I was overtaken with anxieties that perhaps he had fallen from the mountain. Finally, after searching extensively, I heard a voice raised in praise and glorification of the Lord coming from the lower extremities [of the mountain]. When I followed the melody of that chant, I found the child, singularly standing in consummate rapture voicing prayers and supplications to the One Who transcends all mention, in the middle of that vast field, and at that late hour of the night. My beloved brother, I ask: After observing such things, is there any room for doubt? With a knowledge born out of certainty, with truth that stands most manifest, and with my own unimpeachable observations, it is thoroughly evident that the Promised One whom we had anticipated has now appeared after twelve hundred and sixty years. The proof has been completed. Whosoever denies these revealed verses, each page of which stands equal to the whole of the Qur'an, must surely be among the most inequitable.'

In short, our late grandmother often recounted this story and description for us.

Commerce

When his blessed person had reached the age of fifteen,⁴¹ the Bab joined his celebrated maternal uncle⁴² in commerce. He remained for a short while in Shiraz and then moved to the port city of Bushihr. Once in the new town, he established an office in the Minandi caravanserai. Although it was before his declaration, a great many signs of divinity and wondrous verses were revealed through his pen that would attract the envy and the jealousy of men of learning.⁴³

One day in Egypt, during the time when the illustrious [Mirza] Abu'l-Fadl [Gulpaygani] was occupied with writing the *Kitāb Farā'id*, we came to talk about the early years of the Bab – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him – prior to his declaration, and the period when he was engaged in trading. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl related the following to me:

I myself heard the late Haji Sayyid Javad, known as Karbala'i, relate that 'When His Holiness [the Bab] was engaged as a merchant in Bushihr, because of my friendship and close association with the maternal uncles of the Bab, I used to stay with them whenever I visited either Shiraz or Bushihr. One day the late Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad, a maternal uncle [of the Bab] came to

⁴⁰ Mirza Habib adds parenthetically: 'Located south of Shiraz and on the mountains, the shrine of Sabz-Pushan is about twelve kilometres from the city. The route to that place is most difficult and even strong individuals are very tired by the journey. People often visit that spot in the summer.'

⁴¹ A. Q. Afnan suggests (private communications, January 1993), on the basis of extensive family correspondence examined by him, that the Bab began to work in his uncle's office at the age of ten, and it was at the age of fifteen – the age of maturity in Islamic law – that he moved to Bushihr. The same fact is also provided by the Bab himself in the *Kitāb Fihrist* (manuscript in private hands), 'After My childhood had passed, by the will of God, I began the occupation of commerce as this was decreed by God, and I commenced this from the age of ten.' (Provisional translation.)

⁴² The Bab first started commerce with Haji Sayyid 'Ali (Khal A'zam) and later went to Bushihr as an agent for his other uncle Haji Sayyid Muhammad (Khal Akbar).

⁴³ Nicolas, on the authority of Haji Mirza Jani of Kashan (whom Nicolas assumed to be the author of the *Kitāb Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*), suggests that at the age of eighteen the Bab revealed the *Risālih Fiqhiyyih* (A. L. M. Nicolas, *Seyyed Ali Mohammad dit le Bab*; Paris, 1905, p.189, n. 131).

me with a request, "Give some good counsel to my nephew. Tell him not to write or utter certain things that can only provoke the jealousy of certain people. These people cannot tolerate seeing a young merchant of little schooling show such erudition and, therefore, they become envious and resentful." Haji Mirza Muhammad was very insistent that I should counsel the Bab [to desist from such activities]. I, however, replied [with these lines of verse]:

The fair of face cannot endure being veiled,
Shut him in, and out of eyelet will he show his visage,

We are earthbound and he is celestial. Our counsel is of no use to him.⁴⁴

In Bushihr, he was engaged for six years⁴⁵ in commerce and associated with all strata of society, including the ulama, the merchants and the shopkeepers, and dealt with all in such wise that in every respect they were most pleased and grateful. In all gatherings, men spoke and praised his splendid qualities.

On one of my [pilgrimage] journeys when I was in the sacred presence of 'Abdu'l-Baha, one day in the course of a conversation he spoke of the time of the Exalted One [the Bab] – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him – and of his commercial activities. He stated:

During his stay in Bushihr, His Holiness the Exalted One fashioned wondrous things and thoroughly demolished the foundation of people's corrupt practices. It was the custom of merchants of Bushihr, after a deal was consummated, to renege and barter for a lower price. Some of them came to His Holiness, negotiated the purchase of some Prussian [blue] dye, and bought a very large quantity of the material. After they had reached agreement and moved the lots of Prussian blue to their own office, they returned to renege and bargain. His Holiness did not accept and said, 'We had a deal, [25] we signed papers, and it is done. I will not give a discount and will not renegotiate.' They insisted. He replied, 'What I said is final.' However, they stated, 'It is the custom of the country.' He responded, 'Many of these practices are wrong and soon shall be changed.' No matter how much they insisted, he would not accept, and at last he said, 'If you think you have purchased it too expensively, then return the merchandise, as I will not barter.' Once again they said, 'It is the custom of this land.' He replied, 'I wish to put an end to this custom.' They put it to him that 'It would be a source of disrepute for a merchant to return the commodities that he has purchased and moved to his shop.' 'It is your choice,' the Bab told them. 'Accept the terms and refrain from renegotiation.' Insistently, they said, 'But this is the custom of the realm.' Yet again, he reminded them, 'I will end this custom.'

'Abdu'l-Baha continued:

Eventually, the Bab ordered the merchandise to be brought back to his shop and did not yield to their bartering efforts, and changed many of the unseemly practices of the wholesalers in Bushihr.

⁴⁴ A similar translation appears in Balyuzi, *The Bab* 39-40.

⁴⁵ The Bab indicates he was in Bushihr for five years; see *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 180-1.

Soon thereafter, one of his maternal uncles arrived at Bushihr, and the same merchants who had failed to persuade the Bab to bargain came to see the uncle and complained about his behaviour, saying, 'He has ruined our reputation. We had a deal on dyes; however, as is customary, we reneged on our word in hope of renegotiations, but to no avail. He arranged for the goods to be brought back to his shop. This is a great insult to us as merchants. You should counsel him not to repeat such offences.'

The maternal uncle approached the Bab asking him, 'Why do you refuse to yield to people's wishes and thus disrupt the customs of the realm?' [The Bab] told him, 'Even now, should they wish to barter after our transaction is completed, I will not accept their appeal and will never yield.'

That was a joyful day. 'Abdu'l-Baha – may the spirit of both worlds be a sacrifice unto him – smiled unceasingly and repeated several times, 'Prior to his declaration, His Holiness the Exalted One stated that he would change many of the customary practices.'

After six years of residence in Bushihr, the Bab wrote several times to his uncles, 'I plan to visit the 'Atabat [the Shi'i shrines in Iraq⁴⁶] and one of you should come to Bushihr and take over the business so I can commence my journey to the 'Atabat.' Each time, however, they postponed their promise and did not heed his wish. When the time for his departure from that city had arrived, he settled all his transactions, prepared a detailed account, sealed the books and left them in the office. He then sealed the entrance to the office and entrusted the key to the custodian of that building with the instruction that whichever of his maternal uncles should arrive first from Shiraz was to gain admission. Thereupon he wrote to Shiraz, 'Though I wrote to you repeatedly asking that one of you come to Bushihr, as I have a journey to the 'Atabat in mind, you have not heeded this request. I have sealed the shop's door, therefore, and entrusted the key to the custodian and have left for the 'Atabat.'⁴⁷ And after a stay of six years in Bushihr, his sacred person left for the 'Atabat.

Once his blessed letter was received in Shiraz, his [eldest] maternal uncle Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad became deeply worried and perturbed, complaining, 'What manner of conduct was this? Our good name in the commercial community will be ruined and the chain of business transactions will be broken! Who will settle the accounts with our clients?' To this, the illustrious uncle Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali responded, 'Rest assured! I know him, and our nephew does not commit wrong acts. I am certain that he has arranged all the affairs of the people prior to his departure.'

The illustrious uncle Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad⁴⁸ immediately left for Bushihr and upon arrival secured the key to their office, noted the care with which the door was sealed, entered therein and began a careful examination of the books. He found all the accounts most satisfactory and accurate. Relieved, he wrote to his brothers [30] expressing praise and gratitude for the excellent manner in which their nephew had conducted their business transactions.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The 'Atabat is a general term referring to the region where Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn and Samarra are located. The first two cities hold within them the shrines of Imam 'Ali and Imam Husayn, respectively. Kazimayn is famous because the shrines of the seventh and the ninth Imams are located there. Samarra is where the shrines of the tenth and the eleventh Imams, 'Ali an-Naqi and Hasan al-'Askari, are situated.

⁴⁷ Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani, *Tarikh Zuhur Diyanat Hadrat Bab va Hadrat Baha'u'llah*, (unpublished manuscript) gives the date of Bab's departure as 1 Rabi'u'l-Avval 1257 AH [23 April 1841].

⁴⁸ A.Q. Afnan suggests that it was the younger uncle, Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali, who went to Bushihr. (Private communication, November 1991.)

⁴⁹ For a brief description of the Bab's stay in Bushihr see Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 77-80.

In the ‘Atabat

His Holiness arrived at the ‘Atabat. The story of his blessed stay in the ‘Atabat is very extensive and it will be related here briefly, as our purpose is to relate the events of Fars.

One day the honoured Mulla Husayn, who at that time was engaged in studies in the ‘Atabat under the tutelage of the late Sayyid [Kazim Rashti], saw the Bab while he was standing in prayer at the sanctuary of the Prince of Martyrs [i.e. Imam Husayn]. Bewildered by the condition of this young sayyid, aged no more than twenty-two, offering his supplications with such intense humility and rapture as until that day had not been observed among any of the ulama, the mystics or the pilgrims to that sacred Shrine, Mulla Husayn, filled with admiration and praise, approached His Holiness and greeted him warmly. However, wrapped in devotions, His Holiness did not reply. Mulla Husayn moved to the back and waited there. Having completed his prayers at the inner sanctuary, the Bab came out to the courtyard, and to Mulla Husayn’s utter astonishment, commenced further meditation in that location.

Once more, Mulla Husayn came nigh and offered salutations. Being occupied with his prayers, the Bab did not respond, which further deepened the akhund’s⁵⁰ wonder. When the Bab had completed paying homage [to the fallen Imam], he moved outside from the courtyard where Mulla Husayn awaited him and the akhund stepped forward and greeted him yet again. The Bab acknowledged him in turn and apologized, ‘Twice you were kind enough to offer welcome, but I, absorbed in my devotionals and concentrated singularly on the exalted shrine of the Imam – upon him be peace – did not respond, and hence I apologize. Whosoever attains a sacred ground must become oblivious of the world and all therein.’⁵¹

Hearing such a speech only served to enhance the amazement of the akhund as he had never thought that a young merchant could manifest such an extraordinary depth of humility, reverence, piety and veneration. Therefore, he extensively expressed the depth of his gratitude and thanks, and eagerly asked, ‘Aqa, where is your abode so that I may attain your august presence?’ The Bab told him. [Mulla Husayn] then said, ‘The honoured Sayyid [Kazim Rashti] holds a session of *rawdih*⁵² and preaching at his own home every Friday morning, and, should you decide to attend, we would be greatly honoured and much appreciative.’ [The Bab] responded, ‘There is no harm in that,’ and promised to attend the session.

The honoured akhund reported to the honoured Sayyid [Kazim] with great care the details of what had transpired and the latter smiled and recited this verse of poetry:

That which my heart and soul desired,
Was hidden behind veils, but now is manifest.

During the last two or three years of his classes, the late Haji Sayyid Kazim Rashti, exalted be his station, had devoted his sermons and lectures to describing evidences of the manifestation of the promised proof and the signs and character of the author of the cause. Many a time he would tell [his students that the promised Qa’im] must be young, not influenced by the learning of others, and must be [a progeny] of the Banu Hashim.⁵³

On the morning of the appointed Friday, [the Bab] arrived at the residence of the sayyid

⁵⁰ ‘Akhund’ is another word for ‘mulla’, a cleric.

⁵¹ For a description of a similar observation by Shaykh Hasan Zunuzi, see Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 30.

⁵² Recital of the suffering of the Imams.

⁵³ That is, a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad.

where the latter was occupied with preaching on the pulpit and the house was filled to capacity with worshippers. Finding no seat available, the Bab sat close to the threshold. Upon beholding his countenance, the late sayyid discontinued his address and held his peace, which served to heighten the astonishment of the listeners. After some quarter of an hour, he resumed an oration regarding the signs of the manifestation of the Promised One, and with the words, 'Do you not see him as [clearly as] the rising sun?' [35] he concluded his arguments and descended the pulpit.⁵⁴ It was at this moment that with the utmost reverence Akhund Mulla Husayn approached the Bab and led him to a seat next to the sayyid's.

Were I to describe the events associated with the sojourn of the Bab at the 'Atabat and all the wondrous occurrences that transpired in that land and the evident tidings and manifest prophecies imparted by the late sayyid, of a certainty, it would be a voluminous compilation which would be beyond our purpose, which is to outline the events of Fars.

Return from the 'Atabat

After six months had passed of his blessed sojourn in the 'Atabat, profoundly longing to once again behold the face of her only offspring, his mother earnestly implored her brother, the honoured Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali, to proceed to the 'Atabat and to bring His Holiness to Shiraz – a matter that she greatly insisted upon. Deeply devoted to his sister and nephew, the illustrious uncle readily accepted this mission and proceeded at once to the 'Atabat. After attaining the presence of His Holiness, he stated, 'I have come to accompany your return to Shiraz.' The Bab refused. No matter how fervently the uncle pleaded, the Bab rejected his insistence and would reply, 'I have in mind to remain for a while longer in the 'Atabat.'

Impelled by the fact that his sister expected the arrival of the Bab in Shiraz, the uncle refused to cease his efforts to urge his return and, through a message sent in care of the honoured Haji Sayyid Javad Karbala'i, appealed to the honoured Sayyid [Kazim] to persuade him to return to Shiraz. The illustrious uncle himself one day proceeded to the residence of the Sayyid [Kazim] and explained the situation thus: 'My nephew had lived in Bushihr for six years prior to coming to the 'Atabat. His mother has no other child besides him, and deeply longs to behold him once again and to arrange for his marriage. My entreaties [for his return to Shiraz] have not met with his good pleasure and, therefore, I beg of you to speak with him, asking him to accompany me to Shiraz.' At first, the sayyid replied, 'Why are you forcing the issue? Allow us the benefit of his presence for a while longer.' The illustrious uncle responded, 'As his mother is anticipating his arrival and her approval is important as well, kindly make presentation to him for returning to Shiraz.'⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See *The Dawn-Breakers* 27, where Nabil outlines slightly different recollections of Shaykh Hasan Zunuzi's observations on that day.

⁵⁵ The following is noted in Muhammad 'Ali Faizi, *Khānidān Afnān* (Tihran: Mu'assissih Milli Matbu'at Amri, BE 127/1970) 132-33 on the authority of Fadil Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq* volume 3 (n.p., n.d.):

Because of the insistence of the mother of the Bab and other kinsmen, as well as his own profound desire, Haji Mir[za] Sayyid 'Ali the uncle, had come to Karbala. One day the Bab met Mulla Sadiq [Khurasani] in the courtyard of the Shrine of Imam Husayn. The Bab said to him, 'My uncle has recently arrived from Shiraz and if you wish to meet him, come to our abode.' The akhund had expressed his deep interest and with thanks had assured him that he would come. That very afternoon he had gone to the home of the Bab, where a great many of the ulama, merchants and other dignitaries were present, with the uncle sitting and conversing with the guests and the Bab busy serving tea and sherbet. Mulla Sadiq spoke of the Bab's peerless qualities and his exalted character. In response, the uncle said, 'Even though our entire family is well known in Shiraz and its vicinity for our pious nature and goodly characters, yet this youth shines like a most brilliant candle in our midst and it is most evident that he is cut of a different cloth. Our one wish is for him to undertake study of diverse sciences so as to bring added honour to us. However, he refuses.' Mulla Sadiq responded, 'If you do

Eventually, the sayyid suggested to His Holiness that he should agree to return to Shiraz. Because of his appeal, His Holiness assented to accompany his uncle to Shiraz and arrived there [shortly thereafter].

Marriage and the birth of a son, Ahmad

For several months [the Bab] remained in Shiraz and visited his mother and kinsmen; then once again he began speaking of returning to the 'Atabat. Hearing that His Holiness entertained such considerations caused his mother to grow deeply anxious and with great urgency she spoke with her brother, Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali, about arranging for him to marry. [For this purpose,] the illustrious Khadijih-Sultan Bagum, daughter of the late Aqa Mirza 'Ali and a paternal cousin of the Bab's mother, was chosen, and arrangements for the marriage ceremony were made. The wedding⁵⁶ took place on Friday, 18 Rajab 1258 AH⁵⁷ in the presence of an assemblage of the merchants, the noblemen and the ulama of Fars.⁵⁸ And since the date of his Manifestation was nigh, he did not travel in any direction, and was constantly engaged in revealing verses in Arabic and expositions on [divine] sciences.

After a year, that is, in 1259 AH [1843], God granted him a son, but he died at birth. Before his birth, the Bab had prophesied, 'The child is a boy named Ahmad, but it is not his destiny to live.' This child was buried in the Bibi Dukhtaran cemetery of Shiraz.⁵⁹ My paternal grandmother, [Zahra Bagum], who was the sister of Khadijih Bagum, related the details surrounding the child's birth [40]:

The mother's accouchement with the child was most difficult to the point that several times we lost all hope for her recovery. During the final surge of the labour pain, the mother of the Bab proceeded into his presence where he asked of her, 'Has she given birth?' to which she responded negatively. The Bab then took a small mirror beside his blessed person, penned a prayer in form of a talisman on the face of the mirror, and instructed his mother to take it to his wife and hold it before her face. As bidden, she took the mirror and held it before [Khadijih Bagum] and as her gaze fell upon that mirror [and its inscriptions], instantly the child was delivered and the mother regained her

not take him with you to Shiraz, I will see to it that he is engaged in studying.' Thrilled with the prospect, the uncle stated, 'Even though it is very agonizing for his mother and other kinsmen to be far from him, because of your assurance, I will return by myself to Shiraz.' A few days later, the uncle returned to his native city and left that illustrious personage in Karbala. However, it was not long thereafter that he, too, returned to Shiraz.

⁵⁶ It was the custom for such occasions to consist of two separate celebrations, one for the men and the other for the women. The men gathered in the house of the Bab's uncle, Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali, while the women gathered in the residence of Khadijih Bagum's father, which was next door. The wedding was conducted by Shaykh Abu-Turab, the Imam Jum'ih.

⁵⁷ 25 August 1842. A copy of the Bab's marriage certificate provides the same date, see Balyuzi, *The Bab* page opposite 80 and Faizi, *Khanidan Afnan* 158-61.

⁵⁸ The Bab refers to his wedding thus: 'O concourse of Light! Hear My call from the point of Fire in this ocean of snow-white water on this crimson earth. Verily, I am God, besides Whom there is no other God. On the exalted throne a beloved noble woman, bearing the same name [Khadijih] as the beloved of the First Friend [the Prophet Muhammad], was wedded to this Great Remembrance; and verily I caused the angels of heaven and the denizens of paradise, on the day of the Covenant, to bear witness, in truth, to God's Remembrance.' (Provisional translation from *Qayyum al-Asma'*, Surah of Qarabat [The Chapter of Kinship], quoted in Faizi, *Khanidan Afnan* 7-8).

⁵⁹ Named thus as the tomb of Bibi Dukhtaran is located there. For further details consult Fasa'i, *Farsnamih Nasiri* 2:1131.

well-being, but the child was deceased.⁶⁰ The Bab's mother then returned into his presence and remonstrated with her son, 'As you evidently possessed such [preternatural] abilities, why did you not perform this act sooner and preserve the life of the child?' He smiled and replied, 'It is not my destiny to leave any progeny.' His mother was infuriated with this comment, but said no more.⁶¹

The illustrious wife of the Bab recounted for me:

One night I dreamt that a fearsome male lion was roaming the courtyard of our house, and my hands were around the neck of the lion. The beast dragged me twice round the whole perimeter of the courtyard, and once round half of it. I then woke up and was profoundly alarmed and trembled with fright. His Holiness asked of me the cause of my agitation, and in response I related the dream. His comment was: 'You awoke too soon, as [your dream portends that] our life together will not last more than two-and-a-half years.' And what he said transpired.

The Declaration of the Bab

The declaration of the Bab occurred on the eve of Friday, the fifth day of Jamadiyu'l-Avval, 1260 AH⁶², two hours and eleven minutes into the night.⁶³ That too has a wondrous and magnificent description that was related to me by the wife of the Bab in these words:

The practice of His Holiness was that each day he would return home about an hour after the sunset and commence his devotionals, prayers and his writings. About three hours into the night he would have the evening meal and retire about four hours past the sunset. In the morning, he would awake one hour before the dawn and, after washing, would perform his ablutions and then proceed to the upper chambers of the house, which served as his outer formal guestroom. There he stood reciting visitation tablets, prayers, supplications and repetitions of verses. When the sun had risen, in the chamber occupied by his mother, Fiḏḏih⁶⁴ would fire up the samovar and prepare the tea. His Holiness would come down to that apartment and have the morning tea. After that, he would proceed to undertake his commercial activities and other

⁶⁰ The following passage from *Qayyum al-Asma'*, Surat al-Qarābih, is addressed to Khadijih Bagum (cited in Balyuzi, *Khadijih Bagum*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, 8-9): 'O well-beloved! Value highly the grace of the Great Remembrance for it cometh from God, the Loved One. Thou shalt not be a woman, like other women, if though obeyest God in the Cause of Truth, the greatest Truth. Know thou the great bounty conferred upon thee by the Ancient of Days, and take pride in being the consort of the Well-Beloved, Who is loved by God, the Greatest. Sufficient unto thee is this glory which cometh unto thee from God, the All-Wise, the All-Praised. Be patient in all that God hath ordained concerning the Bab and his family. Verily, thy son, Ahmad, is with Fatimih [the Prophet Muhammad's daughter], the Sublime, in the sanctified Paradise' [provisional translation]. Also, see Balyuzi, *Khadijih Bagum* 9, for another instance where the Bab mentions Ahmad in Surat al-'Abd of the *Qayyum al-Asma'*.

⁶¹ See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 76-7 for a brief reference to this incident and a prayer purported to be by the Bab marking the passing of his son.

⁶² 23 May 1844.

⁶³ The exact time and date of the Bab's declaration is given in the *Persian Bayan* 2:7.

⁶⁴ Mirza Habib adds parenthetically: Fiḏḏih and Mubarak were two black servants purchased in Bushihr during his days of commerce.

personal business.

However, one night, unlike other nights, he came home at dusk [earlier than usual], saying, 'Inform Fidḍih to prepare whatever we have for the evening meal sooner than usual, as tonight I have a particular task to attend to.' About an hour and a half into the night, the dinner was served and he joined others for this purpose. Afterwards, Fidḍih brought water for him to wash his blessed hands and, as on other evenings, she spread our night bedding and left for her own quarters. His Holiness came to bed and retired for the night.

It was not long after that I saw him rise from the bed and leave the room towards the outer courtyard. At first, I thought he had gone to visit the facilities, but when his absence was prolonged and he did not return, I became concerned. I rose from my bed and went out to look for him, but he was nowhere to be found. Trying the street door I found it locked from within. I checked the chamber of his mother and did not find him there either. By then I was deeply bewildered and perplexed. I walked to the western side of the courtyard, looked up towards the upper chamber, situated on the eastern direction of the house and serving as his private quarters, and saw that it was well lit. It seemed as if a thousand lamps illumined the room. This added to my surprise, because we had no guests that required such a profusion of lights. Therefore, with astonishment, I went up the steps of the chamber. When I entered, I noticed that although there was only one light in the room, it was so brilliant that it overwhelmed me. [45]

There I saw His Holiness standing, facing the *Qiblih*,⁶⁵ his hands raised heavenwards, intoning a prayer. As soon as my gaze fell upon him, I beheld such majesty and resplendence that is beyond my powers to explain. Suddenly, as if thunder-struck, such fear and trepidation enveloped me that I stood transfixed where I was, trembling uncontrollably. I could neither retrace my steps nor stand. I was near losing consciousness. Fright and shaking had thoroughly overtaken my entire being when all of a sudden he made a gesture with his blessed hand, telling me to go back. This movement of his sanctified hands gave me back my courage, and I returned to my room and my bed. But I could not sleep and I remained deeply disturbed. Whenever I thought of his blessed person and that scene [in the upper chamber], it added to my consternation. I felt like a wrongdoer who awaits the all-powerful sovereign to pass sentence on her. Sleep was impossible that night, and then came the dawn, and I heard the muezzin's call to prayer from the mosque adjacent to our house.

After the conclusion of the call to prayer, he came downstairs to our room. As soon as my eyes alighted on his blessed countenance, I paled and shuddered [involuntarily]. He seemed no longer like the person with whom I had lived for two-and-a-half years. I did not have the courage to utter a word. Somehow the morning arrived and I rose from the bed, performed my ablutions and stood for prayers.

In accordance with our everyday practice, our servant, Fidḍih, had taken the samovar and tea sets to his mother's room and informed us that tea was ready. Accompanied by him, I went there. In his mother's room, he drank

⁶⁵ 'Point of Adoration'.

some tea. Each moment added to my anxiety and perplexity. With his blessed hand he poured a cup of tea, passed it to me, and with a heavenly smile said, 'What is it that troubles you? You are agitated.' I drank a bit of the tea, which to an extent calmed my nerves. I said, 'Aqa, what event and condition was it last night that I beheld in your chamber?' He replied, 'What a time you arrived! It was not a good time for you to come. But it was the will of God [for you] to see with your own eyes. Know and be certain that at that very moment the One Exalted God appointed me [as His Manifestation] to guide these servants. I am that same promised Person whose advent they have expected for the past twelve hundred and sixty years and for whose appearance they have perpetually beseeched the Almighty. I have been sent forth for the salvation of the peoples.' As soon as I heard him speak these words, I kissed his knees and became a believer in him. In prostration, I raised my voice in gratitude to God for having enabled me to recognize him.⁶⁶

It was thus that the first woman to believe in him was the illustrious wife of the Bab, [Khadijih Bagum], and among the men of this family [the Afnan], it was the illustrious martyred uncle, [Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali,] and among the ulama, the illustrious Babu'l-Bab, Akhund Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, whose story will be recounted next.

Recognition and Meeting of Akhund Mulla Husayn in Shiraz⁶⁷

After the passing of the late Sayyid [Kazim Rashti] – may his station be exalted – who was a harbinger of this blessed Manifestation, the akhund [Mulla Husayn] was afflicted with great perturbation and inner agitation. Together with a group of fellow-students numbering over forty, he undertook a period of meditation, and this assemblage included Aqa Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Barfurushi,⁶⁸ Mulla 'Ali Bastami, Akhund Mulla 'Abdu'l-Jalil Khu'i, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Hadi, Mirza Muhammad Hadi, the honoured Aqa Sayyid Hasan Yazdi, Mulla Hasan Bajistani, Mulla Bashir, Mulla Baqir Turk and Mulla Ahmad Abdal, each ranking as among the most eminent of the learned, and expecting the manifestation of the Promised One. Details concerning each one of them can be found in the historical narratives, as our purpose is only to recount the events of Fars.

After a period of forty days of ascetic observance in the Masjid Kufih and Masjid Sahlih, the honoured akhund [Mulla Husayn] established a covenant with fellow-disciples whereby should any of them hear the call of the Truth, he would inform the others at once. Bidding them farewell, he proceeded towards Shiraz.

⁶⁶ See Balyuzi, *Khadijih Bagum* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 10-13, for a different rendering.

⁶⁷ The section pertaining to Mulla Husayn correlates closely with the narrative of Mirza Husayn Hamadani (see *Tarikh Jadid*, Cambridge: University Press, 1893, 35-9) which is purported to be based on recollections of Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Khurasani from utterances of Mulla Husayn and captured in the history of Haji Mirza Jani of Kashan. The present translator has not been able to determine if a copy of Mirza Jani's valuable history was in the possession of the early Afnan family. However, it is known that Mirza Jani's original text, which consists of about 80 pages, is extant and is in possession of a non-Baha'i in Tehran. Though he did not allow his precious manuscript to be copied, because of his long-standing friendship with Fadil Mazandarani, he permitted the latter to examine this document, and he certified its authenticity. See William McCants and Kavian Milani, 'The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*, Dated 1268 (1851-52)', *Iranian Studies* 37 (2004) 431-4. See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 52-66 for Nabil's moving, though very different, description of the Bab's declaration.

⁶⁸ Quddus had returned to his native town some months prior to the passing of Sayyid Kazim; see Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq* (n.p., n.d.) 3:405-7.

Upon his arrival at Shiraz, because he had been acquainted with his Holiness [the Bab] during his sojourn to the 'Atabat, he desired [50] a meeting and sought out the abode of His Holiness. He wished to stay at his house during his sojourn of a few days in Shiraz. [Locating the Bab's house], he knocked at the door, and His Holiness himself came and opened the door. He warmly greeted and welcomed the honoured akhund, and expressed great kindness and affection. Together they proceeded to the upper chambers that served as the guestroom, [the Bab] stating, 'All day I have felt disinclined to go to the caravanserai,⁶⁹ and now I know that it was because of your coming.'

After they had exchanged the customary inquiries and pleasantries, tea was served for the akhund and then the host asked of the teachings and doctrines of the late Shaykh [Ahmad] and Sayyid [Kazim]. [The guest] replied, 'Their entire discourse and teaching was focussed on signs of the manifestation of the Promised One.' The Bab then asked, 'You Shaykhis believe that after the passing of the late sayyid someone else must take his place, and now five months has elapsed since his death. Whom do you recognize as your guide?'

'As yet,' [Mulla Husayn] replied, 'we have recognized no one and have found no successor to him. We anticipate the author of the Cause, whose advent is expected by all, to appear.'

'What manner of man,' asked he, 'must the master be?' The honoured akhund pondered for a moment and then enumerated some of the requisite qualifications and characteristics for the expected person. 'Do you observe these in me?' As he had not observed signs of knowledge during his host's residence in Karbala and knew that he had not studied with any of the teachers, [Mulla Husayn] responded, 'I see in you none of these qualities.' To this [the Bab] made no reply.

After a while, he [Mulla Husayn] observed several books lying on the shelf. Examining one of them, he found it to be a commentary on the Surah of Baqara.⁷⁰ After perusing it for a little, he perceived it to be an exposition of unprecedented merit, and asked in astonishment who the author might be. 'A mere youthful beginner,' answered he [the Bab], 'who lays greater claims to knowledge and attainments.' Again he [Mulla Husayn] asked who and where the writer was. [The Bab replied,] 'You see him.' [At the time, Mulla Husayn] did not apprehend his meaning and read on another page where it was written, 'the explanation of the essence of the essence'. Considering this an error, he remarked, 'It should be "the explanation of the essence".'

'What can I say?' he [the Bab] answered, 'the author of this commentary advances claims to even more than this of greatness and knowledge. Consider the passage attentively.' This time, the akhund read more closely and noted that the original phrase, 'exposition of the essence of the essence', was indeed correct. He said, 'I am wearied now. You read some more and I will listen.' His Holiness read for a time, and then, as divines are wont, the honoured Mulla Husayn said, 'It is enough. That was sufficient. Do not further trouble yourself.'

Shortly thereafter lunch was served, and then Mulla Husayn rested for a while. In the late afternoon, His Holiness had invited several of the Shaykhi, ulama and merchants to take tea and converse with the akhund. [In the course of the conversation,] it was agreed that the next morning they all would gather at the Masjid Ilkhani where the akhund would deliver a lecture.

⁶⁹ Mirza Habib adds parenthetically: 'The Bab's place of business was at the customs building, known as the caravanserai.'

⁷⁰ See Todd Lawson, *The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab*, 1987, PhD dissertation, McGill University. For copies of manuscripts see Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History*, Leiden: Brill, 1992.

[The next morning saw them] all assembled at the mosque. However, desiring to commence his discourse, the akhund found that in place of the ready flow of language and easy delivery customarily at his disposal, he was as though tongue-tied and unable to speak. Filled with amazement, he recognized that so rare an occurrence must be due to some peculiar cause, and wondered much as to who it was that exercised this secret control over him, and what might be his object in rendering him mute and in such a state. [55] Such was the astonishment and emotion which took possession of him that, unable to deliver his scheduled lecture, he was obliged to make the best excuses he could for terminating his discourse. Thereupon the assembly broke up, and [Mulla Husayn] returned to his lodging deeply bewildered.

The next day when he wished to preach he found himself, even more than the previous day, mute and devoid of ready knowledge. Therefore, he had to make excuses to the audience. The same happened on the third day. On this last occasion, he departed from the mosque in a state of utmost misery and wonder, and then the Exalted One, noting the akhund's despondency, told the rest of their friends to go to their own houses and instructed the akhund to accompany him home.

When they arrived at his sacred house, after a short rest the Bab said, 'By what signs and evidences can you recognize the author of the cause, and what proof do you deem most effectual to convince you that you have attained the object of your search and discovered your beloved?' The akhund answered, 'By scientific evidences and by possession of the point of knowledge that is the well-spring and centre of all the wisdom of past and future prophets and near-ones.'

'Do you perceive these qualities in me?', [the Bab] inquired. 'What if I were so endowed with such attributes?' Upon hearing this, the akhund was deeply perturbed, and stated, 'That you are devout, godly, and live a pure life, is true; but only innate knowledge and infinite wisdom can admit to this most exalted station.' At this comment, His Holiness was silent for while as though in wonder, while the akhund thought to himself, 'What idea can this devout youth be harbouring in his mind that he so persistently introduces this topic? I must at all events ask some questions of his honoured person that he has never heard discussed and cannot answer, so that he may be turned aside from his vain imaginings.'

Therefore, he presented to His Holiness a question that appeared to him to be very difficult of solution, and which he had always had in mind during the lifetime of the late Sayyid [Kazim], though he had never found an opportunity of putting it forward in such wise as to have the difficulty removed in a satisfactory manner. Without hesitation, his host provided a full and sufficient answer. The akhund was filled with amazement, and proceeded to ask yet another hard question, which he answered with tremendous facility, in the most conclusive way. Utterly astounded and bewildered, nevertheless [Mulla Husayn] reflected within himself, 'Is not this the youth who but a few days ago did not correctly read the commentary on the Surah of Baqara? How is it that he has now become the source and well-spring of all past knowledge?'

Even as the akhund thought thus, he observed His Holiness sitting in a most dignified and majestic attitude, the left hand laid on the left knee and the right hand over it. As the guest looked, he began to utter most wondrous verses containing answers to every thought that passed through the akhund's mind, until many verses had been revealed from the fount of divine revelation. During this entire period, the akhund waited anxiously for him to conclude, so strong was the fear and awe that possessed him. At length he ceased, and [Mulla Husayn], in the extremity of terror, rose up to flee, as some delinquent might flee from before a mighty sovereign. He asked permission [to take his leave, but] His Holiness responded, 'Remain seated! Where are you going? Anyone who should see you in this state would think you have lost your mind.' Constrained by his bidding, he regained his seat,

while His Holiness withdrew to the private section of the house.

During his absence, the akhund was prey to most anxious thoughts. Care for worldly interests and fear of incurring suffering, what he needed and what he wanted to avoid, all urged him to draw back; and yet, ponder as he might, he could find no pretext whereby he might excuse himself from recognition of the Lord of Creation, [60] neither did he perceive any course save confession and acceptance. As such, he was greatly perturbed, agitated and troubled beyond all measure. After some while, contrary to his practice on other days, [the Bab] himself brought in the tea, and seated himself near the akhund, and showered him with most gracious expressions. He poured the tea and handed him a cup, but the honoured akhund remained as one distraught and filled with wonder, and presently again asked permission to depart. 'You are still,' [the Bab] informed him, 'in a state of extreme bewilderment, though you are not yourself aware of it. Should anyone see you thus, he would assuredly deem you to have lost all your faculties.' After about an hour though, when he had regained his composure, [Mulla Husayn] was permitted to take his leave.⁷¹

On the occasion of the next visit, [Mulla Husayn] was shown a revealed commentary on the Hadith Jariyyih⁷² and recalled that the late Sayyid [Kazim] had stated when he was alive that the Proof [*Hujjat*] who was to appear would compose a full explanation of this tradition, and now saw his promise manifest before him. Moreover, he remembered that one day, when he was alone with the late Sayyid [Kazim] in his library, in the course of conversation, he [Mulla Husayn] had asked why the Surah of Yusuf [Joseph] of the Qur'an was entitled the Ahsanu'l-Qisas [the Best of Stories], to which the late sayyid had replied that it was not then the proper occasion for explaining the reason. This incident remained concealed in his mind.

Now His Holiness stated, 'Honoured Mulla Husayn, do you recall inquiring once of the late sayyid why the Surah of Yusuf was called the Ahsanu'l-Qisas, and how he replied that the proper occasion for explaining this had not yet come? The time for this exposition has now arrived.' Thereupon he showed [Mulla Husayn] a commentary on this Surah revealed from the Most Exalted Pen, and upon its perusal, the eminent akhund attained the shore of certitude and prostrated himself in gratitude to God.⁷³

⁷¹ The date of the Bab's Declaration is fixed in the *Persian Bayan* 6:13 and 2:7, 'And from the moment when the Tree of the Bayan appeared until it disappeareth is the Resurrection of the Apostle of God, as is divinely foretold in the Qur'an; the beginning of which was when two hours and eleven minutes had passed on the eve of the fifth of Jamādiyu'l-Avval, 1260 AH [22 May 1844], which is the year of 1270 of the Declaration of the Mission of Muhammad.' (Trans. in *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 107.) In a tablet in honour of Mirza Qabil of Abadiah, 'Abdu'l-Baha specifies this date as Kamal (8th) of 'Azamat; see Ishraq-Khavari, *Ganjīnih Hudūd va Ahkām* (Tihran: Mu'assih Milli Matbu'at Amri, BE 128/1971) 426.

⁷² Ishraq-Khavari (*Muhādhirāt*, Langenhain: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 1987, 14) notes that Jariyyih was a daughter of Khadijih, the wife of Muhammad. For a discussion of this Tradition of the Handmaiden attributed to Imam Ja'far Sadiq, see Abu Ja'far Muhammad Kulayni, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, (4 vols., Tihran, 1392/1972-73), 1:495-6. See also C. Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 vols., London, 1879-1883) 1:30.

⁷³ In the course of the first section of the *Kitab Panj-Sha'n* (the Book of Five Modes, Tehran, n. d., n. p.) 9, revealed on the sixth anniversary of his declaration, the Bab describes the night of his declaration in the language of a prayer. The following is a provisional translation of this: 'In the name of God. There is no God but God. Sanctified art Thou, O God, My God. I testify that at an hour such as this, Thou hast bestowed honor and exaltation, glory and loftiness upon this night and has sanctified it above all other nights through Thy Manifestation. This is the hour of the appearance of the Point of Bayan, who is the sign of Thy dawning, the countenance of Thy morn of eternity, the evidence of Thy unity, the manifestation of Thy oneness, the confirmation of Thy loftiness, the signifier of Thy holiness and the very essence of the divinity of Thy kingdom. Sanctified and exalted art Thou, that thou hast glorified this hour by creating whatsoever is within the Bayan and by decreeing the manifestation of whatsoever Thou willeth. I testify, and all things testify, that on such a night I was at my house before Thy threshold when the first person [i.e. Mulla Husayn] who has

Conversion of Mulla Sadiq Khurasani

In the presence [of the Bab, Mulla Husayn] reverently stated, 'During our stay at the Masjid Kufih and Masjid Sahlih, prior to dispersing [in search of the promised Qa'im], my companions and I established a covenant whereby whichever one of us first heard the call of the truth would inform the others. For this purpose, Akhund Mulla Sadiq [known as] Muqaddas Khurasani proceeded towards Isfahan and now dwells in that city. If it would please you, allow me to proceed to Isfahan and to enlighten him so that he, too, would attain the station of assurance.'

'There is no harm in that,' the Bab replied. 'However, it must be conditioned upon several things.'

'Whatever is your command,' [Mulla Husayn] responded, 'I will instantly and faithfully obey.'

The Bab then revealed an extensive commentary on one of the shorter Surahs of the Qur'an and entrusted this sacred document to the honoured Akhund Mulla Husayn, instructing him, 'Take this commentary with yourself to Isfahan. After you have renewed your acquaintance with the akhund, first ask if during his period of search, he has heard or met anyone who advanced a claim to be the Promised One? Should he respond that he has neither met a claimant nor heard of such a call, ask if he himself is putting forth a claim. And should he present one, as you have observed yourself, he must firmly and irrevocably prove his station based on the divine verses. But if he states that he has no claim of his own, then present him with this commentary, without identifying its author, as he himself must discern [the Source of Revelation].'

The honoured akhund proceeded to Isfahan ever mindful of [the Bab's] instructions, and upon arrival was united with his old companion, Mulla Sadiq. 'O honoured Akhund, since we were separated from one another,' Mulla Husayn inquired, 'have you met a claimant or heard of [anyone advancing such] a call?' He responded negatively. 'Do you observe in yourself such qualities which may serve as evidence of some exalted station?' Deeply puzzled, Mulla Sadiq rejoined, 'Have you gone mad? Who are we to contemplate such things? The Promised One must be of necessity possess innate knowledge. Have you lost your rational faculties that you ask such a question?'

Once he was certain of Mulla Sadiq's position, [65] Mulla Husayn, in accordance with the Bab's wish, presented a copy of the commentary to him, and after perusing a bit of it, Mulla Sadiq seized the hem of Mulla Husayn's garment, inquiring, 'Who is the author of this commentary? Of a certainty he is the Truth. Where and who is he?' Refusing to answer his question directly, [Mulla Husayn] informed him that he was not permitted to divulge such information and that, unaided, [Mulla Sadiq] was to discern [the identity of its Author]. In face of [Mulla Sadiq's] insistence, [Mulla Husayn] remained adamant. Soon darkness fell, and supper was served. Afterwards the honoured Mulla Husayn retired satisfied in the knowledge that he had carried out in its totality the mission entrusted to him.⁷⁴ The story of

tasted the sweetness of Thy love in this Ridvan attained to me. He prostrated himself before Thy effulgence in this Paradise, and with him were the Letters of the Three. At such an hour, Thou caused me to show myself to him. Sanctified and exalted art Thou for enabling him [i.e. Mulla Husayn] to recognize upon hearing them the signs of Thy guidance, and for having created in him a clear vision when I made mention of Thee. Therefore praise and gratitude to Thee, O My God, with praise the like of which no soul in the past has offered and none in the future will offer, and such gratitude as none before has offered and none in the future will offer, for the first who recognized my person, and for the recognition with which he recognized Me.' From this passage it cannot be determined whether the three travelling companions of Mulla Husayn also attained the presence of the Bab that very night or at a later occasion.

⁷⁴ Mirza Habib has added the following marginal note in his own hand: Aqa Mirza 'Ali Muhammad, the illustrious son of the Akhund Mulla Muhammad Sadiq Muqaddas related for me the following description

the honoured Mulla Sadiq and the manner of his recognition [of the Bab] is quite extensive and no doubt is related thoroughly in narratives pertaining to Isfahan, and, this being so, this servant will not add to the burden of the reader.

In short, after achieving certitude, Mulla Sadiq, together with several others, proceeded to Shiraz so that they might attain the blessed presence [of the Bab]. Upon arrival in Shiraz, however, they learned that His Holiness had departed on his journey to Mecca. The honoured Akhund Mulla Sadiq and his companions began to propagate the news of the revelation, particularly from the pulpit of Masjid Baqir-abad. This matter was reported to the ulama, who consulted [on the matter]. By order of Husayn Khan, the *ajūdān-bāshī*, known as Sahib-Ikhtiyar, those illustrious personages were seized, beaten with sticks, their beards burnt, and their nose pierced and a rope passed through the incision. From dawn to dusk, the *mīr-ghazab* [the executioner] paraded them throughout the bazaar and [stopped] by each shop and collected a present from the shopkeeper. At sunset, those severely injured, faithful and wronged believers were released and forced to leave town, bitterly tired and hungry.⁷⁵

As for the confirmation of Aqa Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali Barfurushi, who was surnamed Quddūs, he was among the ulama and learned divines famous for piety and godliness. Because of his inner spirituality and purity, no sooner had he heard the call than he left [his native town] in search of the Promised One in Shiraz.⁷⁶ Upon arrival at that city and meeting the Bab in the streets, without seeking proofs or signs, nor evidence or deductions, he instantly attained unto complete certitude. From then he ranked among the foremost disciples, manifesting unsurpassed qualities, and excelled all others in knowledge. The details of his glorious life, magnificent services and his martyrdom are described in detail in the history of the events of Fort Tabarsi and as such will not be repeated in these pages.⁷⁷

The Bab’s Blessed Journey to Mecca, Sha‘ban 1260 [AH]⁷⁸

The blessed and heavenly cavalcade of the Bab left for Mecca – an undertaking that completed the proof for all that dwell on earth. Among those who were in his blessed presence were: Haji Abu’l-Hasan, the late father of Aqa Mirza Baqir Khan Dihqan, whose goodly qualities remain beyond description, Aqa Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali, surnamed Quddus,

which he had heard from his honoured father: ‘No matter how I implored Mulla Husayn [to divulge the name of him who claimed to be the promised Manifestation], he refused and would only state that it was forbidden for him to do so and that I must seek him independently. Disappointed by this response, I proceeded to the room set aside for devotions and performed my ablutions. I spread the prayer mat and began my supplications. I entreated with such earnestness that the tears pouring from my eyes dampened the prayer mat. In the midst of such contemplation and in a state of semi-consciousness, I beheld the young sayyid that I had met in the gathering of late Sayyid [Kazim Rashti]. He stood over me saying, ‘Akhund, what do you desire? If you seek faith, it stands apparent and manifest.’ Before dawn, this experience was thrice repeated. After the third occurrence of this vision, I came to the room where Mulla Husayn was resting. I woke him and said, ‘Mulla Husayn, I have discovered the identity of the master of this Cause. It must be none other than that same Shirazi sayyid that we met in the ‘Atabat.’ Mulla Husayn responded affirmatively.

⁷⁵ A similar description is provided in Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 144-8, relating to the events that befell Quddus, Mulla Sadiq and Mulla ‘Ali-Akbar Ardistani subsequent to the Bab’s return from pilgrimage.

⁷⁶ In his writings, Quddus describes the vision of the Bab that he had experienced some time prior to the latter’s declaration, which enabled him to recognize the promised manifestation. He further states that on the first day of Jamadiyu’l-Avval [18 May 1844], he left his native town for Shiraz. For a detailed discussion of the life and writings of Quddus, see the present translator’s forthcoming book on this subject.

⁷⁷ Among the various eyewitness accounts of events at Shaykh Tabarsi, the most detailed was recorded by Lutf-‘Ali Mirza Shirazi, a translation of which has been completed by the present translator and is scheduled for publication in 2005.

⁷⁸ August-September 1844. The Bab in one of his sermons, known as *Kutbih Jiddiyyih*, gives the date of his departure from Shiraz as 26 Sha‘ban (10 September 1844); see, A. H. Israq-Khavari, *Muhadirat* 729-31.

and Haji Mubarak, a slave purchased by the Bab while in Bushihr, who possessed a pleasant and noble disposition.⁷⁹ This group proceeded from Shiraz. That year a large contingent of the city's inhabitants, including many of the ulama and the merchants were journeying towards Mecca as well.⁸⁰ Shaykh Hashim, a brother of the Imam Jum'ih, Shaykh Abu-Turab, who was a particularly mischievous and malicious person, was also among this group of pilgrims.

According to the Islamic traditions, whenever the 10th day of Dhu'l-Hajjih, which is the observance of the 'Īd-i Adhā [the Festival of Sacrifice], falls on a Friday, that pilgrimage is called Hajj Akbar (most great pilgrimage) and signifies the year of the Manifestation [of the Promised One]. Moreover, the well-known tradition informs us that on such an occasion, the Qa'im will place his back against the Masjid al-Haram and will openly declare his cause. On that year a great many pilgrims from all corners of the world that had Muslims were proceeding towards Mecca.

At that time the journey by sea was most difficult and dangerous, as steam vessels did not travel the waters of the Persian Gulf, and only sailing ships were available, which made the voyage to Jiddih a minimum of three or four months. [70] One day the late Haji Abu'l-Hasan – may his station be exalted – [who had been a travelling companion of the Bab] described his pilgrimage journey for this servant in such words:

During the time that we were in the presence of His Holiness aboard the ship, there were many passengers who, for the most part, were hostile [towards the Bab]. Among them was Shaykh Abu Hashim, who, both verbally and physically, showed rancour and would cause great discomfort for His Holiness. His troubles and injuries had reached such a degree that often the captain of the ship would come forth and admonish him not to perpetrate so much abuse and affliction upon the innocent sayyid [i.e. the Bab]. However, he would not cease from his actions.

One day he began to dispute with the captain and uttered such unseemly words that the latter became so aggravated that he instructed sailors to seize the shaykh and throw him overboard into the sea. Greatly perturbed and enraged, the captain stood nearby to ensure that his instructions were indeed

⁷⁹ The Bab provides a brief outline of his *hajj* journey in the *Persian Bayan* 4:18; for translation see *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 89-91. Additionally see the *Persian Bayan* 4:16 and 6:17.

⁸⁰ From Bushihr, the Bab sent a letter to his wife in Shiraz (The text is quoted in *Khanidan Afnan* 166-7, and the original letter is displayed in the International Baha'i Archives in Haifa), of which the following is a provisional translation:

O the best of Protectors! In the Name of God, the Exalted.
My sweet life! May thou be protected by God!

It was not because of sadness that I did not write sooner,
Nor was it due to My heart being sorrowed.
Nay, My hand wrote thee,
But My tears washed away the words.

God is My witness that I have been overcome with so much sorrow since our separation that it cannot be described. However since we are all seized in the grasp of destiny, such has been decreed for us. May the Lord of the world, by the righteousness of the Five Near-Ones, ordain My return.

It is now two days since we arrived in Bushihr. The temperature is extremely hot, but the Lord of creation will protect. Apparently this very month our ship will sail. Out of His mercy, may God watch over us. At the time of departure, it was not possible to meet my esteemed mother and, therefore, kindly convey my greetings to her and ask for her prayers. Regarding the silk cloth, I will write to Bombay. I also intend to secure a maidservant for you. God willing, that which is ordained will come to pass. Upon thee rest the peace, favours and grace of God.

carried out post-haste and that the shaykh was cast overboard. At this point, His Holiness arrived and interceded [on behalf of the shaykh]. The captain did not accept [his intercession] and commanded loudly, 'Throw this accursed one into the sea!'

Sensing that they were about to carry out the captain's instructions, His Holiness threw himself on the shaykh and embraced him firmly and once again pleaded with the captain to forgive the shaykh on his account. Deeply moved by the benevolence and the generosity manifested by His Holiness, he accepted his request and said, 'My master, this accursed one has perpetrated more injuries upon you than anyone else and consequently you must be even more eager than others to see him perish. Why is it then that you prevented us from so doing?' 'Such people only harm themselves,' the Bab pronounced, 'and we must look upon their deeds with sin-covering eyes.' The meekness exhibited by his sacred self, and his intercession on behalf of the shaykh, caused a change of heart [towards him] among many passengers and they no longer displayed enmity or inequity, and became repentant and remorseful.

Once our ship had anchored at Jiddih, His Holiness proceeded towards Mecca. The number of pilgrims during that year was beyond estimation and count. They included Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Kurds and Indians, totalling in excess of seventy thousand pilgrims who for the most part came from the rank of the ulama and the learned. Many had mastered the science of divination and *jafr* [numerology] and had determined that in that year the Promised One would appear and that the true claimant would openly manifest himself in Mecca, and they had come to partake in such an event.

Among them was the renowned Haji Sayyid Ja'far Kashfi,⁸¹ who ranked as the ablest in the field of numerology and had a profound knowledge of *jafr*. He had closely studied such sayings as the Hadith Marvi narrated by the Immaculate One [the eighth Imam, 'Ali ar-Rida], upon him rest peace: 'In the year sixty, his cause will be made manifest and his remembrance exalted,' and the allusions of certain mystics who had openly given many signs for his appearance, such as Shah Ni'matu'llah Vali, who in his poems had clearly given the news of the Manifestation:

If thou reacheth the year *ghars*,⁸² behold,
the renewal of the sovereign, realm, nation and faith.

He had also written:

With the passing of *ghars* years,
I see the Absent One hath appeared.

And also in the collection of Khajih Hafiz poetry:

⁸¹ The renowned father of Vahid Darabi and one of the most distinguished theologians of his generation. For a detailed discussion of his life and writings, see Ahang Rabbani, *Epics of the Brave: the history and documents of the Babis of Nayriz* (forthcoming), and 'The Family of Vahid Darabi', at: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/vol7/darabi.htm>.

⁸² According to the Abjad system, *ghars* has a numerical value of (1000+200+60=) 1260, hence signifying the year of the appearance of the Bab.

Behold the crest of moon in Muharram,
 and drink from the wine cup,
 Since it's a sign of safety and absence of harm,
 and augurs the year of peace and love.

He [i.e. Sayyid Ja'far] had studied these according to the science of numerology and had consulted an expert in divination: 'As this is the year "sixty", will the Qa'im appear in Mecca?' To which he had received an affirmative response. He had then asked, 'If I were to go [on pilgrimage], would I attain the presence of the Qa'im?' And again he had received a positive response. The sayyid had then asked if he was destined to become a follower of the Qa'im, to which the expert had responded: 'You will not become a believer.' I myself met Haji Sayyid Ja'far in Mecca. He saw [the Bab] with his own eyes and heard [him proclaim his Faith] with his own ears and yet failed to recognize him.

Haji Mirza Muhammad 'Ali [Quddus], some other believers and myself were in his blessed presence [i.e. the Bab]. After the conclusion of the pilgrimage rites [75] in the Masjid al-Haram, throngs of pilgrims were present and waves of them would flow over all the courtyards and rooftops. His Holiness approached the shrine and leaned his blessed back against the Ka'bih, holding the door-chain with his sacred hand. With the utmost clarity and eloquence, he thrice announced in a resonant voice, 'I am the Qa'im whose appearance you have been expecting!'

It was a true wonder that, despite the massive multitude and the noise, as soon as the Bab began to speak a complete silence overcame that whole area, in such wise that one could hear a bird flap its wings. Once complete silence was established over everyone, with a reverberating voice and utmost clarity, thrice he uttered the same blessed proclamation so that all the pilgrims could hear.

Deeply excited, the pilgrims were recounting that occurrence and interpreting the meaning of it for one another. All conversations among the multitude of travellers solely concerned this event. Indeed, the very first topic that the pilgrims wrote of to their kinfolk was that a young merchant sayyid, twenty-five years of age, had taken hold of the Ka'bih's chain and with resounding voice had advanced the claim of the Qa'imiyat. In a short time, this news was spread in all parts of the world. Those men who sought the Truth and those among them who thirsted after certitude readily uttered, 'Yea, yea!' and enrolled among those who believed.

The news of this event was now spreading rapidly in Shiraz. Prior to the voyage to Mecca not all of the city's inhabitants were aware of this claim. Some had heard it and recognized its truth, while others had not heard [the claim], and yet others were wont to say, 'These matters are pure calumny and there is no validity in them.' After the news from Mecca had reached Shiraz, and his exact utterances were written and disseminated, all the people were now aware and fully informed, and no room remained for doubt and vicissitude.⁸³

⁸³ See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* 130-41 for further details on the Bab's *hajj* journey.

Return from Bushihr

The time was well nigh for the arrival of His Holiness in Shiraz. Shaykh Abu Hashim [brother of the Imam Jum'ih] wrote a most provocative description of the events aimed at promoting mischief, raising the cry, 'Our religion is lost!' His sole purpose was to provoke the baser elements into protestation. Great excitement arose when his letter reached Shiraz and, as a result, a contingent of the ulama, such as Shaykh Husayn Zālim [the tyrant], known as the Nazimu'sh-Shari'ah, Akhund Mulla Muhammad 'Ali Mahallati, Shaykh Mahdi Kajuri, and a score of others, went before Husayn Khan, who at that time was the governor-general of Shiraz. They complained, 'The sayyid who publicly claimed [the station of] the Qa'imiyat and the Babiyyat in Mecca will shortly arrive [in Shiraz] and you must protect the adherents of Islam by quenching this fire and quieting his call, so it is barred.' Manipulated by the adulation that he received from the divines, Husayn Khan dispatched to Bushihr a mounted escort of several men to arrest His Holiness and to return him to Shiraz.

Late one afternoon, His Holiness was standing above an elevation by the village of Dalaki,⁸⁴ a distance of two days' journey to Bushihr, when the soldiers passed through that location and His Holiness instructed Haji Mubarak, 'Quickly go and inquire of the soldiers their destination and their mission.' In accordance with his command, Haji Mubarak approached the soldiers and asked their purpose. However, the men rebuked him by saying, 'What concern of yours is it, black man, what we are intending?' Haji Mubarak returned to his presence and informed him, 'The horsemen refused to tell of their charge.' This time, [the Bab] enjoined, 'Go and tell them to come before me.' Haji Mubarak went to the soldiers, saying, 'My master asks that you trouble yourself and come, so he can make your acquaintance.'

A certain Aslan Khan who was older and wiser than the rest came back with Haji Mubarak and attained his [the Bab's] blessed presence. He was asked, 'Where are you going and what mission have you been given?' The soldier tried to hide their intended mission and did not divulge the character of their charge. This time [the Bab] stated, '[There is] no reason to conceal your mission, as your purpose is to arrest the Sayyid Bab and to return him forthwith to Shiraz. Do not trouble yourselves. [80] I stand ready. Should you continue on your march to Bushihr and pass this spot, surely you will fail in the discharge of the entrusted mission.' The official looked closely at his countenance and noted that all the signs that he had been given in Shiraz to identify him were evident and as such recognized that the intended person stood before him. He returned to his companions and reported what had transpired, which caused them all to exclaim with wonder, 'If a man is sought by the government and authorities, surely he must flee those sent for his arrest. How is it then that with the utmost courage and firmness this personage has come forward informing us that indeed he is the object of our quest? Of a certainty he must be telling the truth!'

The valour of the Bab awakened the consciousness of the men. They attained his blessed presence and His Holiness showered upon them his immense kindness and benevolence. He instructed Haji Mubarak to serve them the supper he had made ready as these men had been travelling and must certainly be hungry and tired. Haji Mubarak placed before the soldiers the same food that he had prepared for his master and himself, which was sufficient for only two persons. The men looked and noticed that there was very little food, and that it would not suffice even one of them. However, they sat to dine and soon discovered that they were all fed most adequately from that one plate. This experience deepened their wonder and throughout the journey they bore witness to many such miracles

⁸⁴ About five miles south of Burazjan.

and extraordinary occurrences.⁸⁵ Eventually, with the utmost respect and dignity, the men accompanied His Holiness to Shiraz and told their friends and acquaintances of what they had observed and of the grandeur and majesty of the Bab.

Return of the Exalted One From Mecca to Shiraz in 1261 [AH]⁸⁶

At all events, after the news of the Cause had been raised by the truly learned ones (*'ulamā*), who were the heralds of the Manifestation, throughout the realm and particularly in Shiraz, which had received a universal proclamation, His Holiness returned from Mecca in 1261 [AH]. Since he had unveiled and proclaimed his Cause in Mecca and made evident his Manifestation, this accelerated the spread of the Faith in all parts – a fact recorded extensively in all Baha'i histories and which will be recounted briefly here as well.

In short, His Holiness arrived in Shiraz in the company of the guards, and they proceeded directly to the governor's office where [the Bab] was handed over [to the authorities]. The soldiers who had met him at Dalaki and had witnessed the extraordinary events along the way reported all that had transpired on this journey to the Nizamud-Dawlih. Husayn Khan ordered the arrest of His Holiness, and this news was disseminated [throughout the city]. Immediately, those who were ignorant yet known for their knowledge were assembled and began to heap scorn and disdain upon [the Bab], and that which was applicable to themselves, they attributed to him. With his own hand, Shaykh Husayn Zalim struck His Holiness.

When the illustrious maternal uncle [of the Bab] and the revered mother of His Holiness were informed of these events, they became deeply perturbed. The latter began to lament and weep in the presence of her brother, Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali. The Bab's maternal uncle departed for the governor's office and, on meeting Husayn Khan, stated, 'His Holiness has only now returned from pilgrimage to Mecca and his mother and other members of his household eagerly expect his arrival. Why have you arrested him? Is he not a descendent of the Prophet of God? Is there no shame before his illustrious ancestor?' Noting the forceful manner in which the uncle presented his defence, Husayn Khan replied, 'If you will consent to intercede and serve as a guarantor, pledging that he will not meet with anyone and will desist from writing treatises or distributing such things, then I will release him.'

The illustrious uncle Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali ranked among the most honoured merchants and was well acquainted with all the noblemen of the city. As such, he responded, 'I associate with, and am a friend to, men from all strata of the city, and His Holiness is my nephew. Since it is customary to visit one who has been on pilgrimage, [85] many people will come to visit him. How am I to ask friends and acquaintances not to come for such a meeting?' Faced with irrefutable logic, Husayn Khan responded, 'For three days townsfolk may come to visit, but on the fourth day you are to close the door to all and allow no further association.' It was thus that, through this guarantee of the uncle, His Holiness was brought home with him.

[Upon the Bab's arrival home], his mother and his blessed wife, along with other friends and relatives, attained his honoured presence, and for three days all the believers and acquaintances enjoyed this union and gained indescribable and immeasurable spiritual insights. [During those days,] divine verses poured forth as torrential showers and these

⁸⁵ In a tablet dated 24 Jamadi ath-Thani 1261 AH [30 June 1845] to his uncle, Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali, the Bab mentions the esteem that the horsemen showed him during this journey.

⁸⁶ 1845.

were penned in his own blessed hand on large sheets of ‘cashmere’ paper⁸⁷ and bestowed upon the visitors.

On the completion of the three days, all access was denied to the friends and none was permitted to attain the presence [of the Bab]. However, though men may strive ever more to hide the Sun of Reality with the clouds of formal restrictions, its radiance and effulgence becomes more apparent. Consequently, although to all appearances the believers were denied access and prevented from gaining such a felicitation, they still continued to submit to him their question and difficulties and to receive replies, for it is incumbent on the generous to answer him who asks, especially when the questions refer to religious matters and the demands are for guidance and direction into the path of salvation. Moreover, a large number of people from the surrounding country also came to inquire into the matter. These likewise submitted their questions and received, each according to his own capacity, full and satisfactory answers, whereby they too were brought to believe.⁸⁸

Arrival of Vahid Darabi

Among those who attained the presence [of the Bab] during the days of Shiraz, and who has a wondrous and amazing story, was the honoured Aqa Sayyid Yahya Daraba, the illustrious son of the late Haji Sayyid Ja‘far Kashfi, mentioned in the [above] recollections of the late Haji Abu‘l-Hasan – may the divine bliss be upon him – in the section pertaining to Mecca. He was eminent among the mujtahids and the learned scholars, [divinely] gifted with supernatural faculties and high spiritual attainments, and unrivalled in discourse, discovery, austerity of life and piety. At that time he was residing in Tehran. The late Muhammad Shah Qajar trusted him so profoundly that he would not take any actions or undertake any decree without the leave and the *fatwa* of Sayyid Yahya. When the news of this affair reached the monarch’s ears, he summoned the honoured Aqa Sayyid Yahya, saying, ‘According to the information received at our court, a certain personage in Fars has advanced the claim to the station of Qa‘im and Bab. As you enjoy our utmost confidence, you must proceed at once to that province and investigate the matter fully, and appraise us of the veracity or falsity of these reports, so that we might know what our religious and worldly obligations are. You must prepare to journey at the earliest time and write a detailed report of your interview.’ [The Shah] then appointed a stipend for the mission and provided him with a steed.

Upon arrival at Shiraz [Sayyid Yahya] met with a certain eminent and illustrious personage, who is in truth learned in divine knowledge and wise in the wisdom of the eternal, the honoured Haji Sayyid Javad Karbala‘i, of whom he had been a friend and associate in the ‘Atabat. Through him, [Sayyid Yahya] met with several other [Babi] ulama and prominent believers and, as the object of his search, he was eager to obtain forthwith an interview with the Bab, but permission was for sundry reasons deferred, and he spent this interval examining some of the revealed verses. Finding in them no ground for objection or denial, he said in confidence to the honoured Haji Sayyid Javad, ‘These luminous words and verses bear witness to the truth of the claim, and leave no room for doubt; yet were it permitted to me to behold some miracle or sign beyond this, I should gain a fuller certitude and assurance.’ [90] To this, that illustrious personage answered, ‘For people like us, who beheld a thousand marvels stranger than the fabled cleaving of the moon, to demand a miracle or sign from that perfect Truth would be as though we should seek light from a candle or be satisfied with a lighted wick in the full blaze of the radiant sun.’

⁸⁷ A special, very expensive paper that was starched and contained small flecks of gold.

⁸⁸ This paragraph is congruent with the narrative of Mirza Husayn Hamadani, *Tarikh Jadid* 203.

In short, Aqa Sayyid Yahya prepared a petition and therein requested that a commentary on the blessed Surah of Kawthar be revealed for his edification. One night, about four hours after sundown, he took this supplication to the blessed house of the Bab and attained his presence, presenting his request. [The Bab] instructed him to return at dawn to receive the answer to his quest.

In the early dawn, as he was bidden, once more [Sayyid Yahya] attained his presence and there was given the answer in the form of an unrivalled commentary on the Surah of Kawthar that consisted of nearly five thousand verses of text.⁸⁹ Bringing that book home with him, no sooner had he perused its contents and its luminous verses than, filled with wonder, he attained the presence of the honoured Sayyid Javad Karbala'i and stated, 'I have beheld a marvel a hundred-thousandfold beyond what I sought, for, with all my learning and scholarship, I spent nine whole days in writing one single page of questions containing not more than twelve lines. Most wonderful, therefore, does it seem to me that I put my request to him at four hours into the night, and by the time of dawn such verses and illustrations of exceeding eloquence and clarity of style were revealed and written down during five or six hours of the latter part of the night, which is the time for His Holiness's repose.'

When, therefore, Aqa Sayyid Yahya had well considered that wondrous treatise, he immediately prostrated himself and attained full certitude. After a sojourn of some little while, during which the honour of further interviews was accorded to him, he received permission to depart through Bavanat and Marvast [Marv-Dasht], then subsequently he set out for Yazd to proclaim the blessed Cause and to teach the Faith. Surely, the details of the occurrences in Yazd will be documented in the histories of that city. God willing, his return from Yazd and the events of Nayriz will be narrated later in this book.

The Bab's Public Announcement at Masjid Vakil

At all events, the hostility of his [the Bab's] enemies was now manifested to the utmost degree, and they exerted many efforts to prevent the friends from attaining the presence [of the Bab] and meeting with his person. However, the devotion of the believers and the grandeur of the Cause could withstand their onslaught, and the friends' visits to his sacred presence increased considerably in accordance with the verse, 'Verily the devils inspire their friends.'⁹⁰ The honoured opponents reported the events to Husayn Khan [who issued an order for the arrest of the Bab], and on the eve of 21 Ramadan [1262 AH],⁹¹ [gaining access] over the neighbour's wall, the guards entered the house of His Holiness.

'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan, the *dārūghih* [police chief], who was charged with carrying out this order, arrived with several of his *farrāshes* [functionaries] and noted that His Holiness was alone in the dwelling. Deeply embarrassed, 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan said, 'Certain reports had reached us that a crowd had gathered at this location and, therefore, we came to investigate. However, since it is evident that no one is here, we take our leave.' He then asked for a gratuity, to which [the Bab] responded, 'There is nothing here.' Insisting on receiving a present, 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan seized the imported cashmere shawl that the Bab was wearing around his waist, sliced it through the middle, and took half of it with him.

The *dārūghih* thereupon went before Husayn Khan telling the latter that none was in the Bab's house save him. However, the mischievous elements, led by the ulama, continued to perpetrate sedition and therefore Husayn Khan, the governor, sent his men to summon His

⁸⁹ For comparison, the Qur'an is slightly over 6,600 verses.

⁹⁰ Qur'an 6:121.

⁹¹ 11 September 1846.

Holiness with his maternal uncle to the governor's office. There, he [Husayn Khan] rebuked the illustrious uncle severely, 'You guaranteed that none would be associating [with the Bab], but you have acted against your own written statement. Consequently, you must be punished.' He then turned to the *farrāshes* and spoke harshly and contemptuously with them too, and instructed that sticks be brought. The illustrious uncle, who was a greatly respected Sayyid and over sixty years of age, [95] was beaten with sticks most severely,⁹² and the Bab was struck in the face as well. Afterwards, a sum of money was extracted from the victims and [as the uncle was unable to walk] the *farrāshes* carried him over their shoulders to his house where he remained injured in bed for a period of time.

His Holiness was subject to brutal treatment and imprisoned in the house of 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan. For a while it passed thus. Once again, the ulama assembled and went before Husayn Khan demanding that he must follow through and force the Sayyid Bab to be summoned and compelled to recant his claim. One afternoon all the ulama gathered in the government house, that is, the governor's office, and consulted on the situation and unanimously decided that His Holiness must be brought to the Masjid Vakil where all of the city's inhabitants, including such ranks as the ulama, the merchants, the shopkeepers, and others, would be present, and in that assemblage he must be forced to withdraw his claim.

My brother, Haji Mirza Buzurg, and I were present once when the late Haji Mirza Muhammad Sadiq Mu'allim [teacher], who was a most respected man and had witnessed the event of Masjid Vakil, related briefly that episode for the late 'Andalib. The details are as follows:

I was about twenty-five years old and had reached the age of being able to discern right from falsehood. It was noised throughout the city that, on the request of the ulama, the authorities were inviting all inhabitants of Shiraz, from every stratum, to gather in Masjid Vakil where the Sayyid Bab would renounce his claims. I went to the mosque as well, and exerted particular effort to find a spot near [the pulpit] where I could behold him and clearly hear his utterances and speech. From the morning of that day, rank upon rank of onlookers arrived at the mosque, and by three o'clock in the afternoon the entire courtyard, the cloisters, the roofs and even the minarets of the mosque were thronged with people. The governor, the ulama, the merchants and other dignitaries entered and sat in the cloisters, near the stone pulpit. (This is a pulpit carved out of one piece of marble and has fourteen steps.)

I was sitting near the pulpit when a commotion was raised in the courtyard: 'He is coming!' He entered through the entrance of cloisters in company of ten *farrāshes* and 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan, the *dārūghih*, and came near the pulpit. The Bab was wearing a turban and an 'abā and walked with such dignity, might, grandeur and magnificence that is truly indescribable. Such a large multitude of people in attendance meant nothing to him, and he heeded them not in the least.

He said to the ulama and the governor, 'What is your purpose in summoning me to this place?' They responded, 'The intention is that you should ascend this pulpit and repudiate your false claim so that this fury and excitement would subside.' [The Bab] did not respond and ascended the pulpit where he stood on the third step. With great vehemence, Shaykh Husayn Zalim said, 'Ascend to the top of the pulpit so everyone can see you and hear

⁹² Most likely the bastinado is meant.

your voice.’ His Holiness ascended to the top of the pulpit and sat there. Suddenly an absolute silence prevailed and not a whisper could be heard from the people, and it seemed as if not a soul was in that mosque. Everyone was listening most attentively.

At first, with utmost majesty and sovereignty, he commenced recitation of an exquisite Arabic homily, with absolute eloquence and clarity, that lasted some half an hour. The entire concourse of people, high and low, learned and illiterate alike were in total rapture and listened with great fascination. The people’s silence caused agitation in Shaykh Husayn who said to the governor, ‘Have you summoned the sayyid to the presence of these people to establish the validity of his Cause or to recant his false claim? He is casting a spell on the assemblage with his enchanting speech. Instruct him to say what he was intended to say. What drivel is he uttering?’ Husayn Khan, the Sahib-Ikhtiyar, said [to the Bab], ‘Sayyid, say what they [i.e. the divines] have told you to say. What is this idle chatter?’ [100] His Holiness remained silent for a moment and then uttered, ‘O People, know this well and be informed. I say unto you what my Grandfather, the Messenger of God, spoke twelve hundred and sixty years ago and I do not speak what he did not. “What Muhammad made lawful remains lawful unto the Day of Resurrection and what he forbade remains forbidden unto the Day of Resurrection.” In accordance with this Hadith Marvi from the Immaculate One, “Verily, the Qa’im will usher forth the Day of Resurrection.”’

Having recited this tradition, he then descended the pulpit. Many of those who had previously harboured enmity or malice, once they had encountered him, were guided aright and repudiated their ways. Shaykh Husayn Zalim, out of sheer hostility, raised his walking-stick to strike His Holiness in the head, but the late Mirza Abu’l-Hasan Khan, the Mushiru’l-Mulk, who was a young man in those days, readily brought forward his shoulder to ward off the attack and it was his shoulder that sustained the hit. Afterwards, Husayn Khan instructed that His Holiness be once again imprisoned in the home of ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Khan.

In short, the aforementioned Haji [Mu‘allim], though not a believer but an admirer [of the Bab], related this story to the late ‘Andalib. His purpose was [to show] that [the Bab] on that occasion affirmed the truth of his Cause and completed his proof before the concourse of people.⁹³

Fatwa Against the Bab

After His Holiness returned from the mosque and was placed under house arrest at the home of ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Khan, the entire body of the ulama assembled, and they fixed their seal on a *fatwa* [judgement] decreeing the death of His Holiness. Among those who were present and signed the document was Shaykh Husayn Zalim, known as the Nazimu’sh-Shari’ah, who was the source of all sedition and the prime instigator of mischief. Others were Shaykh Abu Hashim, Shaykh Asadu’llah, Shaykh Mahdi Kujuri, Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali Mahallati, and others like them. They wrote whatsoever they wished and signed that paper.

⁹³ See Balyuzi, *The Bab* 96-8, for a slightly different translation.

That congregation then proceeded to the home of the late Shaykh Abu Turab⁹⁴, the Imam Jum'ih, who, despite their insistence and every effort, had refused to attend their assemblage. Attaining the presence of the shaykh, they acquainted him with their purpose and presented the document, requesting him to fix his seal on the paper as well so that the matter of the sayyid might be concluded [and the Bab be slain]. Upon perusing the *fatwa* and considering its content, the shaykh, profoundly moved with indignation, threw the paper to the ground and cried, 'Have you lost your faculties! Never will I sign such a paper as I have no misgivings whatsoever about the nobility, chastity, integrity, sagacity, piety and virtuosity of this sayyid! In this youth I behold the ultimate manifestation of Islamic and human attributes, as well as evidence of highest reflections of wisdom and reasoning. I see two possibilities: either he speaks truthfully or he is, as you allege, a liar. If he speaks genuinely, then I would be remiss to issue a *fatwa* against an honest and trustworthy person. And should he, as you aver, be a liar and a perjurer, which of us standing here can claim to have spoken only the truth in our lives? Therefore, arise and leave this place and do not conceive such void imaginings.' No matter how they pleaded, the late Shaykh Abu Turab – may his station be exalted – refused to sign the document with his seal, and through this refusal their efforts came to naught, their purpose was frustrated, and their wish remained unfulfilled.

Departure for Isfahan

In short, at this time, for the warning and awakening of the neglectful and ignorant, the ocean of divine wrath was stirred forth, and a grievous cholera epidemic fell upon Iran and raged with especial fury over Shiraz. Great multitudes from all ranks, including nobles, peasants, learned, illiterate, ministers and subjects, escaped quickly from this evident calamity. The first to retreat was Husayn Khan, the governor, and then others followed from all ranks of society.

A large number died. It chanced that the two young sons of 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan, the *dārūghih*, fell ill of the cholera and came nigh to death's door. Their mother, deeply agitated, spoke harshly with her husband, 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan, saying, 'Their illness is because of your evil doings towards this wronged sayyid [105] who has been unjustly imprisoned here. Through such negligence, you will bring ruin upon yourself and the whole household. Let this innocent sayyid leave.' 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan besought the Bab, saying earnestly, 'Depart for wherever your holy inclinations may lead you.'

'Husayn Khan has escaped from the city in the face of divine chastisement,' [the Bab] responded, 'but when he returns, you will be responsible [for my whereabouts].' 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan pleaded, 'It is I who must remain answerable to Husayn Khan as, because of my misdeeds, my sons are now near death. After them, I do not wish to live any longer in this world.' He cried bitterly for the fate befallen him and beseeched the intercession of His Holiness, who prayed and responded by handing him a sweet pomegranate, saying, 'Have your sons eat from this fruit.' After the boys had partaken of the pomegranate they were healed and made a full recovery. 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan, having witnessed the occurrence of this miracle, implored him, 'Do not tarry even for an hour in this dwelling and I will not prevent your departure in whatever direction that you will. And furthermore, I stand ready to

⁹⁴ A son of Shaykh Muhammad Zahid [the pious] who had served as the Imam Jum'ih of Shiraz after his father. Shaykh Abu Turab ranked as the foremost divine of the city and was greatly loved and admired by the citizens. During the reign of Muhammad Shah he lived for a few years in Tehran, but eventually returned to Shiraz where he passed away in 1855; see Mahdi Bamdad, *Tarikh Rijal Iran* (6 vols., Tehran: Zawar, 1347/1968) 1:71.

offer whatever service Your Holiness may require.’

[The Bab] retired to his house and there the family and kinsmen came to visit him. Later, in company of Aqa Muhammad Husayn Ardistani, one of the believers and his close companion, [the Bab] proceeded to the city of Isfahan.⁹⁵ The events occurring in that land are indeed beyond all description and assuredly have been recorded in the narratives pertaining to that city. For our purposes, only the following note regarding the incidents of Isfahan should suffice.

Upon arrival in the city of Isfahan, the late Manuchihr Khan, the Mu‘tamad ad-Dawlih⁹⁶, exalted by his station, came into the presence [of the Bab] and immediately became a most ardent admirer. His Holiness described some of tyranny and injuries that he had previously endured at the hand of Husayn Khan, adding, ‘When we departed from Shiraz, cholera raged over the province of Fars, and Husayn Khan escaped with all deliberate speed from the city. I was made captive at the home of ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Khan, but because of the epidemic and the fact that his own sons fell victims to the illness, he released this wronged one and, of necessity, asked that I leave. In so doing he remarked, “Upon Husayn Khan’s return, I will personally shoulder the responsibility.” Surely, after the pandemic of cholera has been eradicated and quiet has once again become the city’s norm, Husayn Khan will return and will inquire after me. As he is a wicked and ill-natured man, upon discovering that I no longer reside within his grasp, he will injure my kinsmen and family. My purpose is to ask Your Excellency to petition Husayn Khan so that he would not disturb [my family].’ As soon as this request was made by his distinguished guest, the late Mu‘tamad ad-Dawlih wrote a detailed letter to the governor-general of Fars, stating, in effect, ‘The Sayyid Bab is a guest in my abode in Isfahan and I stand as his protector. Should the government summon him [to Tehran for further inquiry], I will personally deliver him. You have no cause to pester his family or disturb them.’ This letter was sent to Shiraz with a special envoy.

Persecution of the Bab’s Family

When the epidemic had subsided to a certain degree, the people who had fled the city returned forthwith, including Husayn Khan, who [as anticipated by the Bab] immediately inquired from ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Khan the whereabouts of His Holiness. The latter responded, ‘As the epidemic raged uncontrollably throughout the land and my wife and sons had fallen victim to the illness as well, I could no longer properly administer his affairs and therefore asked him to retire to his own dwelling.’ Deeply angered by the turn of events, Husayn Khan instructed ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Khan to proceed at once in company of ten *farrāshes* and search

⁹⁵ In the language of prayer, the Bab gives an outline of the events befallen him: ‘Thou art aware, O My God, that since the day Thou didst call Me into being out of the water of Thy love till I reached fifteen years of age I lived in the land which witnessed My birth [Shiraz]. Then Thou didst enable Me to go to the seaport [Bushīhr] where for five years I was engaged in trading with the goodly gifts of Thy realm and was occupied in that with which Thou hast favoured Me through the wondrous essence of Thy loving-kindness. I proceeded therefrom to the Holy Land [Karbala] where I sojourned for one year. Then I returned to the place of My birth. There I experienced the revelation of Thy sublime bestowals and the evidences of Thy boundless grace. I yield Thee praise for all Thy goodly gifts and I render Thee thanksgiving for all Thy bounties. Then at the age of twenty-five I proceeded to Thy sacred House [Mecca], and by the time I returned to the place where I was born, a year had elapsed. There I tarried patiently in the path of Thy love and beheld the evidences of Thy manifold bounties and of Thy loving-kindness until Thou didst ordain for Me to set out in Thy direction and to migrate to Thy presence.’ (*Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 180-1.)

⁹⁶ For a biography of Manuchihr Khan, see Bamdad, *Tarikh Rijal Iran* 4:159-63. ‘Abdu’l-Baha has written a tablet of visitation for him wherein it is stated that his resting-place in Qum is endowed with special spiritual potency.

the home of His Holiness, or wherever else that he might be, and to bring him forthwith to the government house.

As instructed, they advanced immediately to the house of His Holiness and, not finding him there, proceeded to the home of his illustrious uncle, [Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali,] but unable to locate the latter at home either, [110] they then proceeded to the residence of the late Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim. The latter was a paternal cousin of the Bab's mother and a brother of the honoured wife of the Bab [Khadijih Bagum] and at the time was the renowned standard-bearer of the family. My maternal grandmother [Zahra Bagum], who was the sister of the Bab's wife, related:

My late brother, that is, Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, was at home suffering from cholera and resting in bed because of the weakness caused by the illness, when, some time before noon, there was a violent knock on our door. The entire household was deeply disturbed. Firuz, our black bred slave, went to inquire who it was, when suddenly and with no warning, 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan the *dārūghih*, in company of a number of *farrāshes* and some other lewd characters, entered our home and filled the courtyard. A most disturbing uproar ensued as they hurriedly searched the house for any trace of His Holiness and, disappointed [in their inability to locate the Bab], came to the room where my late brother was resting in bed because of his illness. The *farrāshes* placed him on their shoulders and took him before Husayn Khan, the Sahib-Ikhtiyar.

Profoundly infuriated, the latter inquired callously, 'Where is the Sayyid Bab?' 'I have been afflicted with cholera,' my brother replied, 'and still suffer from the illness. Thus I do not know his whereabouts, nor do I have any news of him.' Husayn Khan dealt with him most harshly and severely, and finally he was granted fifteen days to either present His Holiness or to pay a fine of fifteen thousands tumans.⁹⁷ Reluctantly, he agreed. Then the governor asked for a guarantor and Haji Muhammad Sadiq Isfahani, who ranked among the best known and most respected of the merchants, and was a very close friend of the honoured Haji, stood in this capacity. After a surety was extracted, the Haji was dismissed and returned home.

After the lapse of the agreed number of days, *farrāshes* were sent to summon the haji [Abu'l-Qasim] to the governor's office and to present him before Husayn Khan. The latter once again spoke most sternly, demanding either the delivery of His Holiness or the sum of fifteen thousands tumans. The more the haji implored for mercy and the more he swore that he was bereft of any news from him, the angrier the governor grew. Finally, [unable to withstand the governor's admonishments,] the haji fell to the ground unconscious, and it was at that moment that the special envoy sent from Isfahan bearing the letter of the late Mu'tamid ad-Dawlih arrived, and the envelope displaying the seal of Manuchihr Khan was presented to Husayn Khan.

Upon considering its content, [Husayn Khan] realized that he could no longer cause trouble or remonstrate, but nevertheless he extracted fifteen hundred tumans from him before allowing the late haji to leave. He further issued a command that hereafter should any piece of paper be found in that

⁹⁷ Fifteen thousands tumans represented an extremely large sum of money for that time.

city bearing the handwriting of His Holiness or a verse revealed by him, he would demolish that house. Husayn Khan rounded up all the believers and devotees of His Holiness and, after administering severe beatings with sticks and causing them much injury, he extracted from the victims whatever sum they could muster.

Husayn Khan was an ill-natured, wicked man and His Holiness the Exalted One – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him – has described his evil doings in the *Khutbih-yi Qahriyyih* addressed to Haji Mirza Aqasi and the reader may refer to that tablet.⁹⁸ From his contemptible, base and malicious deeds, it can readily be discerned how truly evil and corrupt a person Husayn Khan was.

Fate of the Bab's Writings

In short, my late maternal grandmother [Zahra Bagum] – may the Mercy of God rest upon her – used to relate:

After the governor's order was proclaimed in the city, whoever had received such writings [revealed by the Bab] would bring them in bundles and deposit the packs in a long vestibule in the house of Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim. One side of the courtyard was stacked high with all these writings, all penned on large sheets of exquisite 'cashmere' paper in the hand of His Holiness. Were even a page of those precious writings available today, it would surely be worth an immense fortune. Those papers all contained innumerable commentaries, prayers, homilies and scientific treatises on diverse themes. The illustrious uncle⁹⁹ of the Bab was asked in what manner we were to dispose of those writings, and he had made reply, 'These are all words of God and as such cannot be treated disrespectfully. Wash the papers and throw the water in the well of the courtyard.'

We placed four large washtubs on the ground of the courtyard, and the four of us, that is, the mother [of the Bab], Khadijih Bagum, the wife of Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim,¹⁰⁰ and myself, began to place stacks of these papers in the tubs and washed them much like cloths are washed by hand. Page by page, the ink was washed away from all the sheets and the water and the papers thrown down the well.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ See Faizi, *Hadrat Nuqtih-i Ulā* 151-3 and Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq* 3:85-9. In a tablet, the Bab describes the governor to Muhammad Shah as a 'vicious and sinister' man, who owing to consummate drunkenness 'was never able to pass a sound judgment' (INBA 64:115 [provisional translation]).

⁹⁹ Presumably a reference to Haji Mirza Sayyid 'Ali.

¹⁰⁰ Her name was Sultan Bagum and she was from Jahrum.

¹⁰¹ For other details on the Bab's stay in Shiraz see Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 8.

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A Prolegomenon to the Study of Babi and Baha'i Scriptures: The Importance of Henry Corbin to Babi and Baha'i Studies

ISMAEL VELASCO

During his lifetime Henry Corbin was the foremost western authority on the Islamic philosophy of Persia and he ranks among the most influential Islamicists of the 20th century. His work has unique relevance to understanding the philosophical contexts for the emergence of the Babi and Baha'i Faiths in nineteenth-century Persia. While best known for his work on Avicenna, Ibn Arabi, Suhrawardi and the school of Isfahan, on imamology and Ismailism, he is also the most significant western scholar of Shaykhism to date. His work thus constitutes a philosophical link between the Babi-Baha'i Faiths and the philosophical and religious matrix within which they were conceived. Dr 'Ali-Murad Davudi, the eminent Baha'i scholar and administrator who 'disappeared' (presumed executed) during the persecution of the Baha'is of Iran following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, captures the philosophical genealogy of the Babi and Baha'i religions in a wonderfully concise yet evocative passage:

The philosophies of the East manifested themselves in Islamic lands with the two aspects of Mashshā'ī (Peripatetic) and Ishrāqī (Platonist Illuminationist). A third aspect of these two ways of thinking was to attain gnosis (*'irfān*) or spiritual wisdom. These three trends found interrelations with each other, with the specific input of Islamic belief, and thus speculative theology (*kalām*) was engendered. This cultural attainment continued its progress in history from Farabi to Avicenna, but this achievement was able to include in its appendage both Ash'ari and Ghazali. From the aforementioned it reached Khwaja Nasiru'd-Din Tusi but was also accepting of the appearance of Suhrawardi. All these inputs enriched each other, often because of a certain admixture of faith (*dīn*) and intersections of ideas from scriptural interpretation (*tafsīr*), some from jurisprudence (*fiqh*), some from mysticism (*tasawwuf*); sometimes one or more elements would be dominant. In this progression these three appeared: Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra, and Mulla Muhsin Fayz and similar souls. It was against this background, but with a preponderance of the religious and faith element, with a predilection for the narrations of the Imams (*akhbār*) and the traditions of the Prophet (*ḥadīth*), that Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i and Sayyid Kazim Rashti appeared. With such a background, these twin souls disclosed their teachings. And it was this substrate (*mādiḥ*) that had the capacity to receive the Spirit of Divine Revelation and become the bearer of the Trust of God; thus it could pride itself that its verbal and semantic

substratum could be chosen for the exposition of the wondrous new Faith and Cause, and thereby raise its head higher than high heavens.¹

Dr Davudi's intellectual map is not dissimilar to that traced by the great philosopher-poet and founding father of Pakistan, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, who, as far back as 1908, published his first book, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, following the thread of Persian philosophical thought from Zoroaster to Baha'u'llah. Like Davudi, Iqbal highlighted the milestones represented by al-Farabi and Avicenna, al-Ash'ari and al-Ghazali, Suhrawardi, Mulla Sadra, and Shaykh Ahmad. 'But all the various lines of Persian thought', Iqbal declared towards the end of his book, 'once more find a synthesis in that great religious movement of Modern Persia – Babism or Bahaism.'² The relationship he thus establishes between Baha'u'llah's thought and that of the great Persian thinkers he highlights earlier in his work accords closely with Davudi's genealogy. Allama Iqbal's insights in this 'neglected book'³ however, were destined to remain in obscurity for a long time.⁴ Professor Walbridge of Indiana University, in his assessment of the significance of this book, writes that 'Iqbal was dealing with aspects of Islamic philosophy that would remain untouched by anyone else for nearly half a century, and whose importance would not be fully appreciated until the 1970s'.⁵ Here Walbridge is tacitly alluding to the work of Henry Corbin, who may be credited with almost single-handedly lifting out of western academic obscurity the mainsprings of Persian philosophical thought after Avicenna, as adumbrated by Dr Davudi and explored in brief compass by Allama Iqbal.⁶

Such was the neglect in which these Persian thinkers languished until well after Corbin's researches began to appear in the 1940s that, when writing his ground-breaking overview of Islamic philosophy, as late as 1962, he felt compelled to justify the designation of 'Islamic', as opposed to 'Arab' philosophy in the title of his book, in response to two misconceptions prevalent among his contemporaries: (1) that Islamic philosophical thought was largely confined to the Arab lands or the Arabic tongue, and (2) that Islamic philosophy accompanied Averroes to his grave, never to rise again. On the contrary, Corbin stressed, Islamic philosophy had, from its beginnings, high and ample expressions in the Persian language, particularly within the Shi'i sphere, and continued to find expression in that language with undiminished vigour well into the 20th century, and he adduced as proof the work of Suhrawardi, the school of Isfahan and Mulla Sadra, and the Shaykhi school

¹ I am grateful to Dr Khazeh Fananapazir for kindly providing this translation of this passage from 'Ali Murad Davudi, *Falsafih va 'Irfan*, vol. 1: *Insan dar A'in-i Baha'i* (ed. Vahid Ra'fati, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1987) 298-299. For Dr Davudi, see Novin Dustdar, 'Ali-Murad Davudi', *Obituaries, Baha'i Studies Review* 9 (1999-2000) 241-44.

² Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (London: Luzac & Co, 1908) 143,

³ John Walbridge, 'Allamah Iqbal's First Book' *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, 5/1 (April 2001), H-Bahai, <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/notes/vol5/iqbalmet.htm>.

⁴ *ibid.* One exception to this neglect comes from the great Italian Baha'i orientalist Alessandro Bausani, who was to map the same philosophical journey in greater breadth (acknowledging his debt to Iqbal's work) in his seminal work *Persia Religiosa* (trans. as *Religion in Iran*, New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 2000). Bausani's chronicle of the evolution of religious thought in Persia from Zoroaster to Baha'u'llah arrived yet again at a similar spiritual genealogy of Babi and Baha'i thought.

⁵ John Walbridge, 'Allamah Iqbal's First Book'.

⁶ See also Ann-Marie Schimmel's comments on Iqbal's book in 'Iqbāl and the Baha'i Faith', in Heshnat Moayyad (ed.), *The Bahā'ī Faith and Islam* (Ottawa: Association for Baha'i Studies, 1990) 111-119.

inaugurated by the Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, whose thought proved foundational for Corbin's philosophical project.⁷

It is necessary to stress in this connection that Corbin's project was indeed essentially philosophical in nature, as Corbin, unlike the overwhelming majority of the great Islamicists before and after him, was a philosopher first, and an Islamicist second, as he himself writes: 'Our own approach to Islamic studies was that of a philosopher.'⁸

It was, indeed, while studying philosophy in the Sorbonne under the tutelage of the eminent Etienne Gilson, an authority on medieval thought and seminal Catholic philosopher, that he was first exposed to the thought of Avicenna in its Latin translations. This led him to study Arabic in the 1920s and make acquaintance with the great French chronicler of Islamic spirituality, Louis Massignon, who, in turn, acquainted him with Suhrawardi and thus initiated a lifelong journey into Persian mystical philosophy. In the 1930s Corbin also journeyed to Germany, where he made the acquaintance of Rudolf Otto and Martin Heidegger, becoming instrumental in the introduction of Heidegger's thought to France through his early translations of this philosopher. Thus Corbin entered the field of Oriental studies with a sophisticated philosophical education, and an even more sophisticated philosophical sensibility, giving his work a distinctive quality that made him almost unique among his fellow Islamologists, not only in his approach, but also in his influence outside Islamics. In his native country, Corbin came to be regarded as an eminent philosopher and man of letters, so that his name, for instance, adorns encyclopaedias of French belles-lettres that have nothing to do with Islam.⁹ Through Carl Jung's famous Eranos circle in Ascona, Switzerland, Corbin's thought critically influenced people like James Hillman and Albert Durand, and cross-fertilised with that of eminent figures like Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem, Kathleen Raine, Joseph Campbell and others.¹⁰

This philosophical perspective made Corbin's approach distinctive within Islamics, and it remains distinctive today. In his introduction to the Routledge History of Islamic Philosophy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr places the emergence of Corbin in context:

. . . from the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century onwards, with the rise of the discipline of the 'history of philosophy' . . . combined with the development of Oriental studies, the attention of Western scholars turned to Islamic philosophy, which they sought to study 'scientifically'. The Orientalist view of Islamic philosophy, while contributing much to the edition of texts and historical data, was primarily philological and historical rather than philosophical, the appearance of a figure such as Henry Corbin being quite exceptional. At best this view dealt with Islamic philosophy in the context of cultural history or the history of ideas, but hardly ever as philosophy'.¹¹

⁷ Corbin, 'Avant Propos', *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) 5-12.

⁸ Corbin, *The Voyage and the Messenger: Iran and Philosophy* (trans. Joseph Rowe, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1998) 91ff.

⁹ For a brief overview of Corbin's life and work see *ibid* and Pierre Lory, 'Henry Corbin: his work and influence', in Oliver Leaman and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (eds.), *Routledge History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1996, vol. 2, ch. 69.

¹⁰ For Corbin and the Eranos circle, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'Introduction', in Leaman and Nasr (eds.), *Routledge History of Islamic Philosophy*, 1:11.

With Corbin the emphasis was reversed. Interested as he was in the place of the thinkers he examined in the cultural history of Islam, he was more concerned with what their philosophies had to say to philosophers in any age, his included. The words of his old teacher, Etienne Gilson, on this issue captured perfectly his own approach to the history of Islamic philosophy:

. . . the biography of a philosopher is of great help in understanding his philosophy; but that is the history of a philosopher, not of his philosophy . . . Philosophy consists in the concepts of philosophers, taken in the naked, impersonal necessity of both their contents and their relations. The history of these concepts and their relations is the history of philosophy itself . . . Proceeding as they do . . . the untiring efforts of historians, sociologists, and economists to account for the rise of philosophical ideas by historical, sociological and economic factors seem ultimately headed for a complete failure . . . The trouble with explanations of that sort is not that they do not work, but that they always work with the same infallible success. Any philosophy can be explained away by its time, its birthplace, and its historical setting. Any philosophy can be accounted for by the collective representations that prevailed in the social group in which it was conceived. And any philosophy can as successfully be traced back to the economic structure of the nation in which the philosopher was born and lived. Whatever method you choose, it works beautifully. But it ascribes the birth of Aristotelianism to the fact that Aristotle was a Greek and a pagan, living in a society based on slavery, four centuries before Christ; it also explains the revival of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth century by the fact that St. Thomas Aquinas was an Italian, Christian, and even a monk, living in a feudal society whose political and economic structure was widely different from that of 4th century Greece; and it accounts equally well for the Aristotelianism of J. Maritain, who is French, a layman, living in the 'bourgeois' society of a nineteenth-century republic . . . the ultimate explanation of the history of philosophy has to be philosophy itself.¹²

For Corbin the overriding project was, within the sphere of Islamic, and to a lesser extent western, esotericism, to chronicle the history of 'the concepts of philosophers, taken in the naked, impersonal necessity of both their contents and their relations'.¹³ He described his method as phenomenological. Corbin's use of this term to describe his method should be understood in the context of the philosophical hermeneutics inaugurated by Husserl, seeking to extract from the outward aspects of experience from what are designated as the 'perceptual properties' of life, the inner 'essences', the 'abstract' or 'universal' properties that are latent within them, grasped by means of 'eidetic intuition' leading from the image to its essence.¹⁴ A crucial constituent of Corbin's philosophical vision lay in the resonance between this philosophical approach and the spiritual hermeneutics of Islam founded on the

¹² Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955) 308. This passage was first drawn to my attention by Steven Scholl in an electronic list.

¹³ Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* 308.

¹⁴ For a concise introduction to Husserlian phenomenology refer to the Oxford Companion to Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) entries on 'Husserl' and on 'Phenomenology'. Also Husserl's article, 'Phenomenology' (tr. C. V. Solomon), in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., Chicago, 1927.

relationship of the *bāṭin* to the *zāhir* (the Hidden or Latent to the Manifest or Apparent), with *ta'wīl* as the eidetic method developed in Islam to journey from the image to its content, its reality (*ḥaqīqat*).

Thus Corbin's philosophical project was grounded in religious-spiritual hermeneutics. Having been a pupil at the great Catholic seminary of Issy, Corbin subsequently converted to Protestantism, taking a deep interest in the new Protestant approach of Karl Barth to exegesis. His experience of the world, of the Book, and of the Incarnation as an eidetic process, leading from the apparent to the real, the perceptual to the abstract, the physical to the spiritual, the image to its reality, led him to enter into the mindset of *bāṭinī* Islam, with its roots in the traditions of the Imams of Shi'ism, notably the fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and the sixth Imam Jafar as-Sadiq.

In Corbin's expositions, understanding is conditioned on a mode of being, and one's mode of being is conditioned upon understanding: 'The lived situation is essentially a hermeneutical situation. That is to say the situation where the true sense germinates, which simultaneously renders one's existence true. This truth of meaning, correlative with the truth of being, truth which is real, reality which is true, all this is expressed in one of the key terms of the philosophical vocabulary of Islam: the word *ḥaqīqat*.'¹⁵

Moreover, the esoteric tradition of Shi'i eschatology, with its emphasis on the fourteen Pure Ones (the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatimah and the twelve Imams) as loci for the manifestations of the unknowable God (theophanies) in both the physical and the spiritual world, illuminated Corbin's own perspective of the central facts of Christianity: the incarnation of Christ, his resurrection, his ascension, and his promised return.¹⁶ In Shi'i esotericism, the pre-existence of the fourteen Immaculate Ones, their appearance and function in this world, the occultation of the Twelfth Imam and the expectation of his parousia provided rich philosophical material for Corbin's theological contemplations. Thus, the philosophy that Corbin was interested in was what he designated 'prophetic philosophy', which is acquired and developed in recognition of, and adherence to, a divine Revealer and his revelation, an intermediary between the unknowable Essence and contingent being. For what Corbin characterized as 'the paradox of monotheism' – transcendent, unknowable God worshipped by limited, contingent minds – could only be resolved by the positing of intermediary stages of existence between God and human consciousness. The exploration of this 'imaginal' realm, where the human and the divine encounter one another, became Corbin's *raison d'être*, leading him to immerse himself in Iranian spirituality from Zoroastrianism to Shaykhism and, in the western tradition, in the visionary architecture of thinkers such as Emmanuel Swedenborg.

Corbin was prolific, producing some 300 publications. Much of his work consisted of the painstaking collection of significant manuscripts and their publication and translation in scholarly editions in Iran, where he founded the Franco-Iranian Institute of Islamic studies, and in Paris, where he succeeded Massignon in the École Pratique des Hautes Études. But his truly ground-breaking work lay in three main fields:

1. His seminal monographs on major Islamic philosophers, both the well-recognized and the neglected, which, fifty years on, remain indispensable. Suhrawardī, Avicenna, Ibn Arabī, Ruzbihan Baqlī, Shaykh Ahmad and his successors, among others, all benefited from such focussed treatment.

¹⁵ Corbin, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique*, 8.

¹⁶ Cf. Gilbert Durand, 'Henry Corbin: L'Envers d'un Siècle de Ténèbres', *Révue intemporelle des Humains Associés*, no. 8, <http://www.humains-associés.org/No8/HA.No8.Durand.html>.

2. His thematic monographs on key philosophical ideas, such as the imaginal world, the Man of Light, the Hidden Imam, idea of the Temple, cyclical time, angelology, spiritual chivalry, alchemy and others besides. It is in these works that Corbin's philosophical vision is developed most distinctively. These were often developed in the context of the Eranos circle.
3. His great syntheses of Islamic mystical philosophy; notably but not exclusively in his *Histoire de la Philosophie islamique* and his magnum opus, the four volume *En Islam iranien*.

While recognising Corbin's undoubted achievements and the monument of research that he has bequeathed us, it is also important, however, to point to the limitations of method and perspective that affect his work.¹⁷ As a philosopher, his concern with ideas is sometimes pursued at the expense of historicity, and it is not always possible to recognise where Corbin's thought ends and where that of the authors he describes begins. For Charles Adams, the result of Corbin's philosophical approach to Islam has resulted in a 'distortion of the historical reality'¹⁸ of his subjects, in favour of a philosophical project that, often, was Corbin's own rather than that of the authors he examines. The critique of Corbin has therefore to be borne in mind while mining his corpus for insight, without, however, minimising either the legitimacy of his philosophical exploration, or the actual and potential contributions that his studies have made and will make. This overview of Corbin's life and work provides a promontory from which to judge Corbin's potential contribution to Babi and Baha'i studies. Before proceeding however, a word on Corbin's attitude to the Babi and Baha'i religions is in order

Corbin states his position on the Babi-Baha'i Faith in several places. One of the clearest of these occurs in an important Eranos article dealing largely with Shaykhism, titled the 'Morphology of Shi'ite Spirituality'.¹⁹ In it Corbin dwells on the Shaykhi vision of simultaneous, hierarchical realms of being that receive and manifest the effulgences (*tajalliyat*) of God in accordance with their own degree. In the same way that the human body exists simultaneously in the mineral, vegetable and animal realms, the human soul exists simultaneously in a hierarchy of spiritual dimensions. Corbin, inspired by the work of Victor Zuckerkandl, uses the analogy of different octaves in which the same melody is played simultaneously. The reality of the Imams, Shaykh Ahmad explains, originates and belongs in these spiritual realms. The occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the Promised One of Shi'i Islam, which Corbin describes as 'the fundamental idea of Shi'ism', refers, in Shaykhism, to his existence in that suprasensible spiritual dimension, and the mysterious cities of Jabulqa and Jabulsa allude to these higher spiritual realms. The occultation of the Twelfth Imam constitutes for Corbin the driving force of Shi'i spirituality, nowhere more so than in Shaykhism. Shaykhism spiritualised Shi'i eschatology, developing, in Corbin's

¹⁷ For an overview of the critique of Corbin in the scholarly literature, see J. Vahid Brown, 'A Counter History of Islam: Ibn al-'Arabi within the Spiritual Topography of Henry Corbin', *Journal of the Ibn 'Arabi Society* 32 (March 2003) 45-65. For more in depth critiques see Hamid Algar, 'The Study of Islam: The Work of Henry Corbin', *Religious Studies Review* 6:2 (April 1980) 85-91, and Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*. A balanced assessment may be found in Charles C. Adams, 'The Hermeneutics of Henry Corbin', in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (ed. Richard C. Martin, Oxford: Oneworld, 2001) 119-150. There was a colloquium held in Paris in 2001 on Henri Corbin.

¹⁸ Adams, 'The Hermeneutics of Henry Corbin', 139.

¹⁹ 'Pour une morphologie de la spiritualité Shi'ite', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 29 (1960) 57-107.

words, ‘a veritable phenomenology of the *ghaybat*, the occultation, the realm of the invisible’ and opening the way to two possible resolutions to the chiliastic expectations associated with the return of the Hidden Imam. These interpretive alternatives came to constitute the dilemma facing the Shaykhi community at the death of Siyyid Kazim. At the crux of this dilemma lies the Shaykhi perspective on communion with the Imam. Shaykhism had its genesis in Shaykh Ahmad’s experiences of spiritual attainment to the presence of the Imams by means of dreams and visions. For Shaykh Ahmad, the journey to the Imams involved not a horizontal, but a vertical, journey of consciousness into the higher realms of spiritual awareness, where the reality of the Imam had its locus. Shaykh Ahmad’s ascent into the realms of consciousness to reach the presence of the Twelfth Imam may also be regarded as the descent of the Imam to the heart of Shaykh Ahmad. Thus the possibility of a spiritualised interpretation of the promised return of the Imam, preserving the *ghaybat* intact (i.e. not entailing his physical appearance in the world or the instauration of a particular social order), was opened up. This was to be Corbin’s interpretation, shaped in significant measure by the thought of the Sarkar Aqa (the leadership title of the Kirmani branch of the Shaykhi order) in the 1950s and 1960s. The alternative was that a uniquely pure soul could come to manifest the spiritual reality of the Hidden Imam in his own being so fully as to become the vehicle for the physical manifestation of the Qa’im (the Twelfth Imam) in this world, in turn opening up the possibility of his subsequent and subordinate reflection within the mirror-like community of believers that recognised his advent. This was the interpretive avenue that led Shaykhi students to embrace the Bab, and opened up the way for the Bab’s highest claim to be the Point of Manifestation in this world of the Primal Will Itself, the primordial Intermediary between God and His creation. For Corbin, this interpretation represented a negation of the *ghaybat*, and thus of the cycle of inward meaning and inward realisation, which to him constituted a negation of the very premises of the spiritual philosophy of Shi’ism:

If the Imam, first and last Theophany, is today the Hidden Imam, this is not a situation stemming from an external event taking place suddenly, on a certain day, in the past. The date of the death of the last *nā’ib*²⁰ marks merely a staging point . . . It is men that have veiled themselves from the Imam, that is, have rendered themselves incapable of seeing him, have paralysed the organs of theophanic perception, perception of the *dimensio mystica*. Hence neither the Imam nor his people can show themselves, declare themselves publicly, outwardly and unveiled. Such an epiphany would presuppose humanity’s possession of a perceptive organ such that the Imam and his people might show themselves and, rendered visible by such an organ, be recognised through it. In fact, in its current state, and for whatever reason, humanity is deprived to such an extent of an organ of this kind, that any public declaration reclaiming the station of Bab to the Imam, let alone that of the Imam himself, can only be an imposture – an imposture against which the Imam himself warned all his followers, in his last message to his last *nā’ib*.

. . . For this reason this manifestation [of the Imam and his invisible Companions] remains a secret, or at any rate the privilege and personal testimony of whoso is thus favoured; it legitimates no pretensions to a collective recognition . . . The consequences go very far: whoever would proclaim himself publicly to be the Bab of the Imam, would place himself *eo*

²⁰ The last living representative of the 12th Imam according to Shi’ism.

ipso outside the Shi'ite sodality, since he would profane the fundamental secret, violate the *ghaybat* . . . It would mean the destruction of the gestalt of time, as monstrous as the destruction of a musical form by its *intempestivo* interruption. It is for this reason that Babism (whatever other interest it might engender, and which captured the attention of Gobineau and of E. G. Browne) cannot but appear, on this decisive point, as the negation of Shaykhism; it requires considerable inattention or philosophical inexperience to judge otherwise.²¹

Corbin, more than perhaps any other scholar before or since, captured in his writings the philosophical mood of Iran on the eve of the Bab's declaration. The writers he studied, the themes he highlighted, touched the very fabric of the philosophical language of early Qajar Iran. The fact that the *terminus ad quem* of his philosophical exploration of Persia was Shaykhism is highly significant. No other western scholar before or since has engaged with Shaykhism in such depth or with such persistence. As Todd Lawson has explained, 'he was the only person to really take the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad seriously (at least in the twentieth century). He was attracted to Shaykh Ahmad because he saw in his thought the logical culmination of a long and rich philosophical history. What was this history? Very briefly and at the risk of offending professional philosophers in the audience, Corbin read the history of Western philosophy as a tragedy. He saw in Islamic philosophy a kind of salvation.'²² From the beginning of his research into Islam in the 1940s to the last decade of his life in the 1970s, Corbin returned again and again to the insights of Shaykhism.

In this he showed himself more in touch with the intellectual world of Persia in the first half of the 19th century than with that of 20th-century Islamics. For early Qajar Iran and Corbin were agreed on considering Shaykhi thought of considerable significance, and in regarding Shaykhism's central questions – what Corbin described as 'a phenomenology of the occultation' of the Twelfth Imam – as of critical importance. In contrast, contemporary scholars failed to pick up the baton from Corbin, judging Shaykhism to be peripheral and transient – philosophical ephemera. For this reason Corbin, more than perhaps any other western Iranologist, can assist Baha'i scholars in appreciating the philosophical sub-text, the 'substratum' to cite Davudi, of the language of the Baha'i revelation. Corbin captures the questions and concerns that gave rise, in the form of answers and responses, to the distinctive articulation of the Bab and to a lesser extent Baha'u'llah's thought. Corbin, in other words, powerfully evokes the most immediate intellectual contexts for the emergence of the Babi-Baha'i revelation.

It is inevitable that as Baha'i scholarship evolves, the words of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i and Siyyid Kazim Rashti, whom Shoghi Effendi referred to as 'Twin Luminaries',²³ will be rescued from their relative oblivion, and their ideas will be harnessed to accentuate previously hidden or dimly heard tonalities in the melody of the Baha'i writings. If an understanding of Islam is said by Shoghi Effendi to be indispensable for an informed understanding of the Baha'i teachings, then within Islam, it follows that nowhere would this

²¹ Corbin, 'Pour une morphologie de la spiritualité Shi'ite', *Eranos Jahrbuch* 29 (1960) 85-86 (my translation).

²² Todd Lawson, 'Henry Corbin and the Spiritual foundations of Culture', unpublished workshop notes, Association of Baha'i Studies, Ottawa, 1988. See also Lawson, 'Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyum al-Asma', *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, 5:1, January 2001 (<http://h-net2.msu.edu/~bahai/>).

²³ Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980) 101.

prove more so than in Islam's exposition by the 'twin harbingers' of the Bab's Revelation.²⁴ When the time comes for such systematic study of early Shaykhi thought, the following works by Henry Corbin will prove indispensable:

- *L'école shaykhie en théologie shî'ite*, Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes-Études (Sorbonne), Section des sciences religieuses, 1960-1961
- 'L'École Shaykhie', *En Islam Iranien, aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, volume 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pages 205-300
- *Terre Célèste et Corps de Resurrection de l'Iran mazdeen à l'Iran Shi'ite* Paris, 1960, translated by N. Pearson as *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Princeton, 1977, especially chapters 2, 9-11
- Mulla Sadra, *Le Livre des pénétrations métaphysiques (Kitâb al-Mashâ'ir)*, (includes Shaykh Ahmad's commentary thereon), tr. Henry Corbin, Bibliothèque Iranienne, volume 10. Tehran; Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1964
- 'Face de Dieu et Face de L'Homme', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, volume XXXVI (1967), pages 165-227
- 'Pour une morphologie de la spiritualité Shî'ite', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, volume XXIX (1960), pages 57-107.
- 'De l'Épopée héroïque à l'Épopée mystique', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, volume XXXV (1966), pages 177-239

Beyond Corbin's researches in Shaykhism, Corbin's entire corpus, as indicated earlier, is suffused with themes, terminology and ideas that run through the Baha'i writings and are in very early stages of exploration in Baha'i studies. Corbin's work serves as a genealogical map of such terms and ideas, linking them to writers, texts and traditions that illuminate their meaning and enrich their allusions. Crucial among the vast number of relevant concepts explored in depth by Corbin is the concept of Manifestation of God. Juan Cole's ground-breaking monograph on the subject merely scratched the surface of the valuable material to be found in Corbin. Again and again the latter explores and expounds on this theme, in all four volumes of *En Islam Iranien*, in his monographs, in several of his Eranos submissions, demonstrating how rooted this concept is in *bâtinî* or gnostic Imamology. A detailed exploration of Corbin's work on this subject is certain to yield new and powerful insights into the appropriation and reformulation of this concept in the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. Similar explorations may be fruitfully pursued in relation to other foundational Baha'i theological concepts, such as progressive revelation, to which Corbin

²⁴ In an as yet untranslated tablet Baha'u'llah, referring to Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim, declares that only two souls truly appreciated the purpose of Muhammad after the setting of the Star of the Imamate (i.e. occultation of the Twelfth Imam) in the year 260 AH (cited in Ishraq-Khavari, *Rahîq-i Makhtûm*, Tehran: Mu'assisah Matbû'ât Amrî, 130 BE/1973, 2:763; I am grateful once more to Dr Fananapazir for the reference). In his *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988, 120), Baha'u'llah also affirms: 'The followers of Shaykh-i-Ahsa'i (Shaykh Ahmad) have, by the aid of God, apprehended that which was veiled from the comprehension of others, and of which they remained deprived.'

devotes major attention in his examinations of prophetic cycles within Isma'ilism as within Twelver Shi'ism.

With the notable exception of Dr Todd Lawson's works, Corbin's extensive studies on the eschatology of the Hidden Imam in Shaykhism have been insufficiently used in historical studies examining the Bab's claims in the context of his Shaykhi milieu.²⁵ Typically, one finds citations of *En Islam Iranien* and his monograph on Shaykhism, but seldom, if ever, does one see references to the three Eranos articles (not counting those that appeared in book form subsequently, in such works as *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*), which devote major sections to Shaykhi thought.²⁶

Beyond the philosophical and cultural understandings of the Babi-Baha'i Faiths that familiarity with Corbin's writings promises, they also offer a rich source of literary references for words and allusions in the Baha'i writings. In the dispensation of Baha'u'llah, for instance, 'Abdu'l-Baha states that the believers in Baha'u'llah attain the station of the prophets of Israel who are not endowed with constancy.²⁷ Corbin, in his *Histoire de la Philosophie islamique*, identifies a source that states in very similar terms that the Imams after Muhammad occupy the station of the same ancient Jewish prophets. Other symbols, images and concepts whose genealogy may be explored with the aid of Corbin include the analogy of the mirror for the Manifestation of God and the symbolism of Sinai, of mount Qaf, of the Throne, of veils and of heavens. The concepts of the unity of all the prophets, the Seal of the Prophets, the Countenance of God, the Maiden, the worlds of God and the notion of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and of the Covenant of *Alast*. Alchemical and colour symbolisms are also given substantial treatment, as are significant *hadīth* and *akhbār* cited in the Baha'i writings.

Why is such genealogy important? Clearly, it illuminates the context and allusions of many Baha'i texts, while also providing opportunities to appreciate the originality and power of the Bab's and Baha'u'llah's transformation of a rich intellectual and spiritual legacy. Evidently there are pitfalls. Dr. Nader Saiedi, in his seminal study of Baha'u'llah's thought,²⁸ warned against over-simplistic readings of Baha'i texts that reduce their meaning to the discourse and understanding of his contemporaries and predecessors. As he points out, such exercises risk distorting the meaning of texts that, while drawing on time-honoured concepts, give them altogether new and revolutionary meanings, that can best be apprehended with reference to keys found within the writings of Baha'u'llah themselves, and not in their surroundings. As Baha'u'llah declared most emphatically: 'Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men.'²⁹

²⁵ See especially the unpublished PhD dissertation of Todd Lawson, 'The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muhammad, the Bab', (Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Canada, July, 1987) where Lawson states 'I have relied heavily on the works of Henry Corbin. Corbin's contribution to the understanding of Iranian Islam, has provided, in many instances, the only source of information on many of the more obscure problems which the Bab's *tafsīr* contains.' (17) Lawson's seminal work provides a good indication of the gems awaiting the scholar who delves into the Corbin corpus.

²⁶ Cf. *Eranos Jahrbuch*, vol. 29 (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1960) 57ff.; vol. 35 (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1966) 177ff.; vol. 36 (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1967) 165ff.

²⁷ Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahā'u'llāh* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991) 112.

²⁸ Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000) 41-5.

²⁹ *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa, Israel: Baha'i World Centre 1992) 56. Also: 'Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have, at the bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency' (*Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh*, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988, 84). And again, 'Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every

Nevertheless, to ignore the importance of previous thinkers, and contemporary questions, in shaping the language of Baha'u'llah's Revelation would be to miss the powerful manner in which Baha'u'llah preserves and transmits the collective wisdom of mankind, and the manner in which he generates aesthetic and spiritual effects by drawing on the rich literary, historical, philosophical and mystical heritage of the Middle East. Again, Baha'u'llah asserts: 'The highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing, the Ever-Abiding God.'³⁰

Even more clearly, Baha'u'llah explains the relationship of his religion to the thought of past ages in the following passage:

If it be said that all things (*kull*) were hidden and concealed (*mastūr wa maknūn*) in the Book of God and, in the Manifestation of the Point of the Bayan – may the spirit of all being be his sacrifice! – the countenances of meanings (*ma'ānī*) heretofore hidden in the chambers of divine Words (*kalimāt*) came forth from behind their veils, then this utterance is the indubitable truth (*ḥaqqun lā rayba fīhi*). If it be said that in the past the meanings were mentioned in summary (*ijmāl* – abstract, summary, abridged, synopsis) and it is now that the interpreter (*mubayyin*) and expounder (*mufaṣṣil*) has come, this utterance is also true and no doubt attacheth thereunto. Again if it be said that all that has appeared (*ẓāhir*) in this new wondrous Manifestation has not been there before (*na-būdih*) and everything is a new creation, this manner of utterance is also correct and accurate (*saḥīḥ wa tamām*) for if the One True God – glorified be His remembrance (*dhikr*) – speaks a Word – a Word which all peoples have been speaking from time immemorial – nevertheless that Word is new, were ye to ponder this theme in depth (*tatafakkarūn*) . . .³¹

Finally, not only may Corbin's work potentially assist in our intellectual grasp of the teachings of Baha'u'llah, but, through a deeper appreciation of the allusiveness and philosophical richness of his writings, it might lead to a more intense aesthetic experience of Baha'u'llah's words, adding layers of meaning that are not immediately apparent from a surface reading of the English translation.

word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet. Well is it with them that apprehend this truth.' (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh*, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976, 142).

³⁰ Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 95.

³¹ Baha'u'llah, *Alvāḥ-i Mubārakah-yi ḥaḍrat-i Baha'u'llah shāmīl-i iqtidārāt va chand lawḥ-i digār* (Bombay 1310/1893) 86-87. I am grateful to Khazeh Fananapazir for this reference and provisional translation.

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COMMENTARY

What is a Man? Some Thoughts on 'Abdu'l-Baha's Explanation of Evolution

COMMENTARY on Keven Brown's 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Response to Darwinism: Its Historical and Philosophical Context' in Keven Brown (ed.), *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*, Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions, vol. 12. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2001, pp. 1-134

THOMAS LINARD

Charles Loyseau (1566-1627), a legal expert in Paris, is one of the first authors to have understood that the way man is defined carries major consequences for the social and political order. He writes in his *Traité des ordres et simples dignités*: '... l'âme raisonnable des hommes, venant immédiatement de Dieu . . . n'a point de participation naturelle aux qualités de la semence générative du corps, où elle est colloquée' (the rational soul of men, which comes immediately from God . . . does not participate by nature in the qualities of the body's generative seed, with which it is associated).¹ In putting forth this concept, which was Cartesian before its time, and was in opposition to the teachings of the doctors of the Sorbonne in Paris (who were holding to a Thomist doctrine in which the soul is much more bound to the body – a doctrine so much more favourable to the feudal order), he produces a powerful argument for his main thesis: common men are able as much as noblemen to hold royal commissions (since parents cannot transmit a noble spirit).

I think that a new definition of man has consequences so deep that it could give birth to a new civilization; and that, since Darwin, it is not possible to propose a conception of man without proposing a conception of evolution: each will shape the other. Since 'Abdu'l-Baha proposed both, both must be explained together. To treat the subject of Baha'i conception of evolution without treating in depth the matter of Baha'i anthropology leads to the risk of manipulating words and concepts as if their meaning were evident and shared by all. I will try here to demonstrate both the importance of Baha'i anthropology and the coherency of 'Abdu'l-Baha's thought.

Baha'i Anthropology

Let me first admit that prior to reading Keven Brown's essay 'Abdu'l-Baha's Response to Darwinism: Its Historical and Philosophical Context', I had some preconceived ideas of what an essay on 'Abdu'l-Baha's conception of evolution should contain, following a close reading of both Jean-Marc Lepain's seminal work, *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu: Ontologie des mondes divins dans les écrits de Baha'u'llah*,² and 'Abdu'l-Baha's Some

¹ Charles Loyseau, *Traité des ordres et simples dignités* (Paris: A. L'Angelier, 1613) chapter 4, *De l'ordre de la noblesse en général*. The quotation follows the original edition, but I have modernized the spelling. The English translation is mine.

² http://www.bahai-biblio.org/biblio_doc_ouvrage_prophetie.htm, hereinafter *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu*.

Answered Questions.³ Lepain devotes the second of the three parts of his work (titled ‘The Theosophy’) to Baha’i anthropology. For example, he puts stress on this passage in *Some Answered Questions*, which states that ‘the body is but an accident of the spirit’: ‘Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident – that is to say, the body – be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.’⁴ I understand this passage as signifying that if the dwellers of the Zoltar planet had ten arms and twenty legs, this would not prevent them from being accounted as human beings (which is largely a free interpretation of mine, but one that I think can be justified). For if the body is but an accident, the bodily form affected by a human being cannot be of much importance.

Lepain explains at length that Baha’i anthropology is much more complex than the simple dichotomy between body and soul. Two passages from *Some Answered Questions* are important for the rest of the argument:

The vegetable spirit is the power of growth which is brought about in the seed through the influence of other existences.

The animal spirit is the power of all the senses, which is realized from the composition and mingling of elements; when this composition decomposes, the power also perishes and becomes annihilated . . .

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing.⁵

When we consider beings with the seeing eye, we observe that they are limited to three sorts – that is to say, as a whole they are either mineral, vegetable or animal, each of these three classes containing species. Man is the highest species because he is the possessor of the perfections of all the classes – that is, he has a body which grows and which feels. As well as having the perfections of the mineral, of the vegetable and of the animal, he also possesses an especial excellence which the other beings are without – that is, the intellectual perfections. Therefore, man is the most noble of beings.⁶

In *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu*, Lepain underlines the differences between the rational soul, or spirit (*rúh*), our god-like ego and the soul (*nafs*) where reside the ego, the thought, the sensations and feelings, which is also the animal spirit. He explains that ‘the reflection of the spirit (*rúh*) in the mirror of the body, which creates the transitory phenomenon of the soul (*nafs*), is possible only when the body has attained to a sufficient degree of maturity and its parts are in harmony.’ He adds that ‘at the time of death, the soul (*nafs*) disappears with the body, which cannot be effected without a deep transformation of the conscience. It is enlarged, since it has now direct access to the spiritual realities, but at the same time it is brutally despoiled of all the idiosyncrasies we are used to considering as a determinant

³ ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* (trans. Laura Clifford Barney, Wilmette, Ill: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1981).

⁴ *Some Answered Questions* 239.

⁵ *Some Answered Questions* 208.

⁶ *Some Answered Questions* 235.

element of our personality. That shows how our personality and our human identity are illusory.’⁷

It would, in my opinion, have been better if Brown had treated in depth the question of Baha’i anthropology, and early in the book (in order that the contemporary Western reader might understand that, when ‘Abdul-Baha speaks of vegetable, animal or man, he does so with an unfamiliar meaning; for the reader may misconstrue the words of ‘Abdu’l-Baha by applying to them definitions common in the West) and had also explained the notion of ‘classes’ which divide species. Brown mentions the different kingdoms (pp. 86-88) but does not follow this up by expounding an anthropology or by connecting the concept of kingdom with the concept of species. In the other part of *Evolution and Bahá’í Belief* Eberhard von Kitzing treats that question (‘The Origin of Complex Order in Biology: ‘Abdul-Baha’s Concept of the “Originality of Species” Compared to Concepts in Modern Biology’ 198-202). But von Kitzing does not underline the more important point, which is that the concept of classes, or kingdoms, as an exposition of the Baha’i anthropology, suffices to explain that man is not an animal, without any recourse to the concept of species. Of course, it seems at first insufficient to affirm that man is not descended from the animal – but I will come back to this point in the second part of this commentary.

Unfortunately, Baha’i anthropology does not play a leading part in Brown’s article: it is not until note 274 that he writes, drawing on *Some Answered Questions* (pp. 151 and 143): ‘once the human spirit, i.e. the rational soul, comes into existence, it continues forever. But the other spirits, such as the plant and animal spirits, are perishable.’ Brown’s exposition is sufficient to explain that the animal man is from a species different from the animal monkey, as the latter is from the animal dog, and therefore the monkey cannot produce a man, as neither can the man produce a monkey. But I feel that, in order to state with ‘Abdu’l-Baha that all human beings can be put in a category and all animals in another, and that the first group cannot belong with the second, both the explanation in terms of species (i.e. the influence of a certain essence) and the brief passage of note 274 are very unsatisfactory or at any rate too short: why omit the notion of classes? Why never have recourse to arguments other than those related to the species?

Coherency of the doctrine of evolution with the remainder of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teachings

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s exposition contains one more difficulty of explanation, in the affirmation that man ever was: ‘Therefore, it cannot be said there was a time when man was not . . . Therefore, it is inconceivable that the worlds of existence, whether the stars or this earth, were once inhabited by the donkey, cow, mouse and cat, and that they were without man.’⁸

In Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophism,⁹ an interesting concept of evolution is devised: man is man, because he is endowed with a spirit, a rational soul, as opposed to all the other living beings. On the other hand, he possesses, in common with animals, an animal component, with the plants and animals, a vegetal component, and, with all that is, a mineral component. Man existed from the beginning of creation, and existed then alone. Then he shed his surplus of mineral, then of vegetal, then of animal, giving birth in the process in

⁷ Jean-Marc Lepain, *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu*, chapter X, ‘Conséquences philosophiques de la psychologie bahá’íe.’ My translation.

⁸ Brown in *Evolution and Bahá’í Belief* 90-91, quoting a revised translation of *Some Answered Questions*.

⁹ A traditional exposition of the anthroposophist conception of evolution is found in Roy Wilkinson’s, *Man and Animal* (Stourbridge, England: The Robinswood Press, 1990).

turn to plants and animals. In this perspective, the appearance of the soul and the spirit is but their manifestation, permitted by the refinement of the body. Thus anthroposophism overcomes the challenge of keeping its internal coherency as a spiritualist doctrine, while accepting evolution.

I do not mean to say that Steiner's and 'Abdu'l-Baha's teachings are the same, or that a perfect coherency in 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings is to be found at whatever cost. But the anthroposophist conception, in its main lines as expounded above, is a conception of evolution compatible with the rest of 'Abdu'l-Baha's teachings.

In March and April 2003, I exchanged on the list H-Bahai some views with Keven Brown about several points in his article, points that had disappointed me. In spite of its many qualities, the article seemed to me to be incomplete on the issue I deemed the most important, fundamental even, that is, the conception of man. I considered that this lack of a clear definition of the nature of man causes a great prejudice to the exposition of 'Abdu'l-Baha's doctrine. On pp. 90-91, Brown comments on the quotation cited above (containing among other things: 'Therefore, it cannot be said there was a time when man was not') thus: "'Abdu'l-Baha focuses on the necessity of the eternal existence of the human species to act as a comprehensive mirror of God's created names and attributes.' On H-Bahai, Brown did develop this idea in the sense I had perceived: for him, the essence of man (the human species) always existed, but man did not. On 31 March 2003 he wrote:

I feel that the human soul and the body (i.e. man as individuals), according to 'Abdu'l-Baha's position, is something that emerges during the process of evolution. The only part of man that precedes physical evolution is his archetype or essence, which is not individual man, but something by which all men are rational beings. This is why man has always been man, and not an arbitrary derivation of evolution.

I concluded that for Brown, the potentiality of the appearance of man, body, soul and spirit, and the existence of a timeless essence (the human species) are enough to affirm that man always existed.

In *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu*, writing on the spirituality of the soul, Lepain emphasizes the traps set for Western philosophy by Greek philosophy, and how 'Abdu'l-Baha had succeeded in avoiding them by saying that the body is the accident and the spirit the essence. The theory of evolution is another trap, a trap awaiting any spiritualist philosophy. It is easier to affirm a spiritualist anthropology in a creationist outlook: if man were created in the beginning of the creation as he is now, many problems do not even appear. On the contrary, evolution necessitates an explanation for the appearance of both soul and spirit. Brown's position seems to me to get back to man's body as the essence of man. If 'the human soul . . . emerges during the process of evolution', man is fully man only from a determined degree of bodily perfection (the existence of a species' essence, which would programme the appearance of man does not matter: nothing happens as long as the body is not perfect enough). This theory gives so much importance to the body that the continuance of the spirit after death is in jeopardy, as well as the unity of races or sexes, and the humanity of the bodily or mentally disabled. For if the body is so necessary, how may we affirm, with solid arguments, that the spirit survives the death of the body, or, with more than good sentiments, that the bodily differences between races or sexes are unimportant? Besides, the body as accident of the spirit is for me the principal philosophical base of the Baha'i principle of the unity of the races and the sexes, the social and political consequences of which are evident: whatever the bodily differences, there is no difference in the quality of the spirit.

WHAT IS A MAN?

I find it necessary, if the coherency of the whole of the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Baha is to be preserved, to affirm the existence of man, body, soul and spirit, ever since the Big Bang, and not simply as a potentiality. So far no other theory seems to me to answer adequately to this necessity for coherency.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Human Rights, the UN and the Bahā'īs in Iran. By Nazila Ghanea. Oxford: George Ronald (ISBN 0-85398-479-4), £24.95, and The Hague: Kluwer Law International, (ISBN 90-411-1953-1), \$47.95, 2002. x, 628pp. including appendixes, bibliography and index.

One of the most fundamental and perplexing issues in international law is the effectiveness of the UN human rights enforcement system. Unlike other legal relations that are sustained by the reciprocal exchange of rights and obligations among states, the victims of human rights abuses are usually nationals of the same states that commit violations against them. In the absence of interests that would compel influential states to intercede on their behalf, vulnerable groups are left to their own devices in the national context, save what measure of protection they can gain from weak international institutions or the nebulous pressures exerted by world public opinion. The dearth of vigorous implementation mechanisms in the UN human rights system is a reflection of this disparity in power. Unlike the European and Inter-American human rights courts, there is nothing resembling a judicial body that can exercise compulsory jurisdiction and render binding decisions against states. Instead, there is a complex, multi-layered, and often overlapping admixture of institutions and ad hoc measures ranging from quasi-judicial periodic reporting procedures before expert committees to diplomatic opprobrium before political bodies such as the Human Rights Commission. Some of these bodies and procedures derive their authority directly from the UN Charter, whereas others are treaty-based and thus exercise oversight functions only with respect to signatories. Thus far, the practical ability of these mechanisms to constrain the conduct of delinquent states has remained largely a matter of theoretical speculation. Furthermore, recent attempts at empirical analysis have given rise to considerable debate and controversy.¹

The book under review, *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahā'īs in Iran* by Nazila Ghanea, is a valuable contribution to the scholarly literature on the UN human rights system. This work stems from Dr Ghanea's doctoral research at the University of Keele, and is the fruit of many years' labour. It is essentially a case study, 'a comprehensive account of the interaction between the United Nations human rights system and a particular human rights situation – that of the Baha'is in Iran' (p. 2). The author observes that this situation 'provides a particularly good test case for international human rights law owing to its clarity. The Baha'is do not demand self-determination, they hold obedience to government as one of their religious tenets and they have not taken the law into their own hands by engaging in any use of force in their demand for rights' (p. 8). Thus, this represents a rather authentic

¹ See, for example, Oona A. Hathaway, 'Do Human Rights Treaties Make a Difference?', *The Yale Law Journal* 111 (June 2002) 1935, asserting that a quantitative analysis of 166 nations over a forty-year period leads to the conclusion that 'although the practices of countries that have ratified human rights treaties are generally better than those of countries that have not, noncompliance with treaty obligations appears common. More paradoxically, controlling for other factors that affect practices, it appears that treaty ratification is not infrequently associated with worse practices than otherwise expected.' For a response and contrary perspective see, for example, Ryan Goodman and Derek Jinks, 'Measuring the Effects of Human Rights Treaties', *European Journal of International Law* 14 (2003) 171, suggesting that while 'it is unsurprising that some states continue to commit substantial human rights abuses even after ratifying human rights treaties', it is 'startling to suggest that treaty membership – including the labelling, monitoring and reporting of abuses – actually increases violations.' The authors argue that there are serious deficiencies in Hathaway's 'empirical findings, theoretical model and policy prescriptions'.

human rights situation, unadulterated by many of the moral ambiguities that often accompany competing struggles for power.

The temporal frame of the study coincides with the initial emergence of this situation on the agenda of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1980, shortly after the Islamic revolution in 1979, until the narrow defeat of the Iran human rights resolution before the Human Rights Commission on 19 April 2002. As Dr Ghanea observes, the case of the Iranian Baha'is has posed a particular challenge to the UN human rights machinery, both because it concerns religious persecution and because it transpires within a radical political context. She observes that the freedom of religion or belief is an area 'to which numerous international mechanisms allude but which has not generated its own particular treaty and oversight mechanism, as in the case of racial discrimination and other fields' (p. 3). Thus, even such limited modes of implementation are considered desirable, and the assumption is that the establishment of mechanisms with a particular focus on religious persecution would enhance the prospects of enforcement. Dr Ghanea further notes: 'that this case relates to a group proclaiming a post-Islamic revelation, historically emerging from Iran...provides its own implications' (p. 3), in an apparent reference to the Shi'a eschatological tradition which considers the exercise of all authority provisional pending the appearance of the Twelfth Imam. The coincidence of the period under study with the emergence of a radical revolutionary theocracy 'goes yet further to bring into focus attempts by the international community, within the UN setting, to bring human rights standards to bear within a particularly precarious and defiant political context' (pp. 3-4).

The book is multidisciplinary in orientation and examines this situation from theoretical, legal, institutional and political dimensions. Dr Ghanea, although empirical in approach, is cautious and modest about the scope of her study, which she describes as 'an attempt at assessing the contribution of the UN human rights system in preventing the *worsening of*, and possibly even *ameliorating*, the human rights situation of the Baha'is in Iran' (p. 4, italics in original). Thus, there is no pretension of a formal quantitative analysis measuring the precise impact of particular interventions, but more a 'soft empiricism' or broad gauge as to the possible influence of international mechanisms in a complex and multifaceted context.

Dr Ghanea's work itself is 232 pages, while the remaining 396 out of 628 pages consist of appendixes, a bibliography and an index. There are 5 useful appendixes containing: UN legal texts on freedom of religion or belief; excerpts from the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran; details of interventions relating to the Baha'i case at the UN Charter and Treaty-based bodies between 1980 and 2001; UN Charter-based bodies and the pattern of key decisions regarding Iran, UN resolutions adopted on Iran, and visits of Special Rapporteurs and Special Representatives to Iran; and charts of the treaty body report due from Iran. There is also a thorough 44-page bibliography containing very useful reference sources.

The 232 pages of analysis are divided into 8 chapters within 4 sections. Section I is an introduction and sets forth the case study, with a particular focus on the implications of the Baha'i claim of a 'post-Islamic revelation in the aftermath of an Islamic revolution'. This, she suggests, 'gives the case a particularly acute human rights focus, with the theological implications and rapidly changing political context greatly aggravating the already inhospitable context' (p. 10). Section II discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the study. In light of the theological controversies surrounding this case, chapter 2, entitled 'Faith in Human Rights, Human Rights in Faith', examines the linkage between religion and human rights as the theoretical framework, and considers whether and how religious and secular law can be reconciled. This, she explains, 'contextualizes the subject matter of this project as

one example of an encounter between a religious world view and modern human rights law' (p. 11). Her examination invokes strands of post-modern philosophy and leads her to conclude that the challenge is to allow human rights to transcend subjectivities and particularism while mediating universal standards through the prism of cultural diversity, calling for 'a global joint venture and not an attempt to universalize a particular cultural or religious model' (p. 53, footnote omitted). By the same token, she asserts that the transformation of human rights from mere legal compulsion to internalized belief, or the creation of a universal culture within which such norms can be sustained, implies an important role for religion. Chapter 3 considers the doctrinal treatment of freedom of religion or belief under international human rights law. Dr Ghanea concludes that although the principle of non-discrimination is the unimpeachable core of human rights law, the collective rights of religious minorities or other belief communities, and the right to change religion or belief, remain problematic. She also points out that although 'the time is unfortunately not yet ripe for elaborating the [non-binding] Declaration into a [legally binding] Convention...the alarming range of encroachments on freedom of religion or belief make the need for the international community to respond to existing tensions relating to religion or belief not only unavoidable but increasingly urgent' (p. 95).

Section III is a thorough analysis of the Iranian Baha'i case in the UN human rights system. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the treatment of this issue before UN Charter-based bodies such as the Human Rights Commission and the Sub-Commission on Minorities, including the Special Rapporteurs appointed by the Commission as independent experts to conduct in-depth studies of particular themes or country situations. As previously mentioned, these are bodies the mandate of which derives from mere UN membership of a state, as distinct from ratification of a particular treaty providing for monitoring powers. Chapter 7 in turn considers treaty-bodies such as the Human Rights Committee, established under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). States party to the ICCPR are under an obligation to submit periodic reports to the Committee on compliance with human rights standards, and the Committee may issue appropriate 'recommendations' in response. The focus is very much on the Charter-based bodies, which appear to have greater political impact compared to the more secluded proceedings of treaty-based committees, which work best with states already committed to human rights protection. Chapters 4 to 6 correspond to the three phases of the Islamic revolution; namely, the period under Ayatu'llah Khomeini from 1979 to 1988, the period under President Rafsanjani from 1989 to 1997, and the period under President Khatami from 1998 to 2002. Each period coincides with a relative liberalization of the Islamic Republic.

In her overall assessment, Dr Ghanea's conclusion is that despite the relatively favourable treatment of the Baha'i case in the UN system, the protections provided are inadequate to effectively redress the scale and gravity of the violations:

The unfortunate pressure for causes and cases vying for attention at UN Charter bodies makes the fact that Iran was brought to account for its treatment of the Baha'is as early as 1980 at the Sub-Commission and 1982 at the Commission very encouraging. However, having made it to the agenda until 2002, to be the subject of merely 'annual consideration' . . . seems hardly sufficient (p. 152).

She notes with concern Iran's success in removing itself from the agenda of the Human Rights Commission in April 2002, suggesting that despite some improvements, 'the record of Iran's persecution of Baha'is gives no guarantee that the present level of abuse against them could not be stepped up once again to the level of "gross" violations. It is for this

reason that the international community needs to be vigilant' (pp. 153-154). Despite these evident shortcomings, however, in terms of measuring the effect of oversight and condemnation, she notes approvingly,

...the lengths Iran consistently went to in order to defend its human rights record in the Commission on Human Rights between 1982 and 2002. All this, despite the early years of revolutionary fervour and in spite of almost a decade of fervent rejection of the international community's right to interfere, and notwithstanding its persistent resistance towards all the Special Representatives of the Commission appointed to examine its human rights situation.

This she concludes 'is ultimately a signifier of the power the Commission still yields, in spite of all obstacles and appearances to the contrary' (p. 154).

Finally, Section IV of the book contains the overall conclusions, contained in a single chapter. The effectiveness of the UN-Iran interaction is briefly analysed, together with an assessment of whether any changes can be detected in the situation of Iranian Baha'is as a result. Dr Ghanea suggests that current reformist developments in Iran may indicate the beginnings of a process leading to the resolution of the Baha'i issue, though continued vigilance and the pivotal role of the UN are still necessary. She makes specific recommendations, ranging from changes in the Iranian legal system to broader policies aimed at integration of the Baha'i community into Iranian public life.

Dr Ghanea's book is thoughtful, sophisticated, well written and comprehensively researched. Although primarily a work of international human rights law, it steers clear of jargon and formalism and is thus accessible to a wide audience, and it will prove to be useful for the general reader as well as the expert. It provides a much-needed collection and synthesis of the origins and evolution of the 'Baha'i Question' within the UN human rights system. It is an ambitious undertaking, demonstrating intellectual creativity and courage, and it provides a solid foundation for further study and scholarship in the various areas that are touched upon. Some reflections on these are briefly discussed below.

Dr Ghanea correctly observes that because of a claim to post-Islamic revelation, the persecution of Baha'is is linked to theological questions, and that contrary to the restrictive interpretations of Shari'a relied upon by Iran's clerics, Islam allows for alternative more tolerant views which respect the freedom of religion or belief. It should be considered, however, that the theological question, while clearly relevant, is not necessarily the dominant factor in understanding the underlying causes of persecution. As with racism, ultra-nationalism, and other forms of political hate-mongering, the collective stigmatization of Baha'is may be more a reflection of elementary power dynamics that are merely clothed in religious garb for the sake of expedience. As noted by the renowned scholar Leo Kuper at the height of persecutions in 1985, the 'threatened genocide against the Baha'i minority in Iran' is an archetypical example of a mass atrocity 'perpetrated against vulnerable minorities who serve as hostages to the fortunes of the dominant groups in the state ... as scapegoats for the woes of the present regime'.² Another astute scholar, Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, points to the historical roots of contemporary anti-Baha'i sentiments, observing that

the scapegoating of Babis was actively promoted by the Qajar state at a time when it faced a serious crisis of legitimacy. To win over the Shiite

² Leo Kuper, *The Prevention of Genocide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 152

seminarians and ulama, the Qajar statesmen initiated a well-orchestrated public anti-Babi campaign. By concurrently ‘othering’ Babis and stressing some national religious traditions ... the Qajar state actively promoted Shiism as the core of modern Iranian identity’.³

Perhaps the central issue is not theological divergence between Shi‘a Islam and the Baha’i Faith as is commonly assumed. Rather, it is the expression of authoritarian power and cynical self-preservation in a political system with an influential religious establishment. In other words, theological differences need not necessarily result in violent persecution. As Tavakoli-Targhi points out, ‘instead of encountering the Babis in a seminarian style of dialogue and debate, and thus fostering the formation of a national democratic public sphere, the Shi‘a hierarchy opted for a violently repressive mode of encounter with Babis and Baha’is’. Accusations of Babism, he observes, were utilized ‘as an effective instrument for silencing the voices of dissent in the formative phase of modern Iranian polity’. Thus, the political construction and consequent campaign to eliminate this ‘heresy’ allowed for a ‘joint state-clergy project’ in which Shi‘a clerics and the monarchy became ‘co-architects of a repressive and authoritarian political structure’.⁴ The depiction of Baha’is as the perfidious and alien ‘other’ – immoral agents variously of Russian, Ottoman, British, American, and Israeli designs against Islam and the unity of Iranian people – is primarily an ideological reflection, a sort of theocratic superstructure, of underlying authoritarian power structures and cultural patterns threatened by the onslaught of modernity and liberalism. Recognition of this dimension is important not least for situating the emancipation of Baha’is in the broader context of democratization in contemporary Iran.

Despite her sober appreciation of the limited impact of the UN human rights system, Dr Ghanea seems to place considerable importance on monitoring machinery specifically focussed on discrimination based on religion or belief (see, for example, p. 218). While further elucidation of the freedom of religion or belief, and in particular the rights of minorities to profess their faith in a collective context, would be a valuable contribution, the proliferation of yet more implementation mechanisms in an already overburdened system with several bodies of overlapping competencies may be of questionable merit. The consolidation of existing mechanisms into a more centralized system may be the most effective means of strengthening human rights enforcement. Consider, for instance, the final report on enhancing the long-term effectiveness of the United Nations human rights treaty system, prepared by independent expert Philip Alston at the request of the UN Human Rights Commission.⁵ The report observes that ‘non-reporting has reached chronic proportions’ before human rights treaty bodies,⁶ and concludes that ‘the existing reporting system is unsustainable’. He recommends among various options, ‘adoption of some far-reaching reforms’ including the preparation of ‘consolidated reports’ and ‘a consolidation (reduction) of the number of treaty bodies’.⁷ Dr Ghanea does recognize, however, that a ‘focusing’ or ‘unifying’ mechanism needs to be adopted so that there is a less narrow and compartmentalized progression of escalating responses corresponding to the degree of

³ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, ‘Anti-Baha’ism and Islamism in Iran, 1941-1955’, *Iran Nameh*, 19/1-2 (Winter/Spring 2001) Persian text 151-64, this quotation from English abstract p. 6.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ UN Doc E/CN.4/1997/74 (27 March 1997).

⁶ *ibid* para. 112.

⁷ *ibid* para. 120.

violations and the amount of time a delinquent state has had in order to remedy a situation (pp. 218-219).

Another aspect of any study of the intersection between the UN human rights system and the case of Iranian Baha'is is the central role of the Baha'i International Community. In certain respects, a study of the unique role of this highly organized body and its interaction with the disproportionately influential world community of Baha'is may be as significant as a study of the UN human rights system. According to learned commentators such as Leo Kuper, the most important factor behind the effective mobilization of the UN human rights system 'was the role of the Baha'i International Community in conducting a skilful campaign, in the nature of an international alert, sharply focused on the United Nations'. He notes that

... there are Baha'i communities in many parts of the world whose members are native born, highly dedicated in their commitment to the unity of mankind, and willing to sacrifice their lives for their religious beliefs. Their dedication and idealism evoked a sympathetic response from the ruling groups they petitioned in their own societies and enabled the Baha'i International Community to gain the support of European states, both within the European community and in the United Nations.⁸

While Dr Ghanea does make ample references to the interventions of the Baha'i International Community within the UN system, it is difficult to appreciate the unusual influence of this non-governmental organization in shaping world opinion. Its institutional response to the unprecedented challenge posed by the persecutions in Iran also shaped the community itself. The enhanced functioning of the community's global administrative order, its emergence from obscurity and its unprecedented prominence on the world stage, including its now highly developed external affairs capacities, are in many respects a direct outgrowth of the response to the persecutions in Iran. The capacity of the numerically small Baha'i community to expeditiously mobilize world opinion on such a scale, together with the resulting transformation of the community in the process, is itself worthy of a serious and comprehensive study in a future scholarly work.

Finally, Dr Ghanea lists several recommendations for resolution of the situation of Baha'is in Iran. These measures of a legal and policy nature are intended to bring Iranian laws and practices into compliance with international human rights standards. It would have been appropriate to also consider the emerging accountability paradigm which links future respect for human rights with remedies for past violations ranging from victim compensation and truth commissions to lustration and criminal prosecutions, whether before national courts or international tribunals. Beyond human rights violations, the widespread and systematic persecutions of minority groups on religious grounds amount to crimes against humanity, as recognized in several international instruments, from the 1945 Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nürnberg to the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Under contemporary international law, state responsibility for violations of such scale and gravity extends to the genuine investigation and prosecution of responsible persons, irrespective of their official capacity. Shifting the human rights discourse from state responsibility to individual criminal responsibility may have far-reaching consequences on the impact and role of international norms and institutions. The post-conflict transformation of countries as different as Argentina, Cambodia, Chile, East

⁸ Leo Kuper, *The Prevention of Genocide* 163.

PAYAM AKHAVAN

Timor, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the former Yugoslavia have amply demonstrated the fundamental incompatibility of impunity for serious human rights abuses with an effective democratization process. There is no reason to believe that Iranians, whether Baha'i, Muslim or of any other persuasion or background, deserve anything less.

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Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahā'ī Thought. Seena Fazel and John Danesh (eds.). Studies in the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faith, vol. 13. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2002. 243 pp. ISBN 1-890688-20-7 (pbk) \$29.95

Anthony Lee and Kalimat Press have earned a great deal of appreciation from the Baha'i community for publishing 13 volumes in the series *Studies in the Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, including this recent addition under the title *Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahā'ī Thought*. While the studies in this volume do not represent new directions in the thinking of some Baha'i scholars, they do offer the reader the opportunity to reflect afresh on topics and issues that have interested and challenged many of those interested in Baha'i studies. All but one of the papers presented here were previously published in *Baha'i Studies Review*.

The volume opens with Udo Schaefer's cogently argued consideration of questions regarding infallibility conferred upon the central institutions of the Baha'i Faith. He examines the functional meaning of infallibility in the Baha'i administrative order under the title 'Infallible Institutions'. He asks what the limits are to the infallibility of the central authorities and their successor institutions, and how such claims can be successfully argued. This is the first persuasive, rational, and dispassionate foray into this matter that I have encountered. It is remarkably brief, candid and challenging. He contrasts and defines the infallibility conferred upon the Universal House of Justice with that inherent in the messengers of God and that conferred upon their appointed interpreters. He argues that the infallibility conferred on the institution of the House of Justice is a functional infallibility restricted to legislation and the resolution of difficult problems. The sacred scriptures of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha confer a restrictive infallibility that provides needed flexibility to its decision-making process and allows changes over time. Schaefer's purpose is to provide and promote a rational discussion of these issues 'in order to attain a better understanding of the provisions of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha and a rationally satisfying answer to a crucial question. My only purpose . . . [is] to make the Faith and the authority of the House invulnerable against the attacks and the cynical criticism of those contemptuous of religion, and against the ridicule of critics, by offering an interpretation that is unassailable and can be accepted as reasonable by people of good will.' Schaefer's analysis contributes substantially toward such a goal.

Senn McGlinn follows with a lengthy article entitled 'Theocratic Assumptions in Baha'i Literature'. McGlinn maintains a straightforward, careful argument in an attempt to disabuse readers of secondary Baha'i literature of the impression that Baha'u'llah and Shoghi Effendi advocated the establishment of a Baha'i theocracy in some distant and utopian era. His article makes the case that a theocracy is contrary to the spirit and letter of Baha'u'llah's writings and Shoghi Effendi's interpretations. He examines several powerful passages from Baha'u'llah's tablets to advance this claim, most notably the following statement from *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh*, pages 220-221: 'Kings are the manifestations of the power . . . of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain. Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is the decree of God . . .'. McGlinn suggests that some writers have exercised selective misunderstanding of Shoghi Effendi's writings on world order under the influence of a mythology rooted in American and European Christianity. He challenges the Baha'i community to reconsider the wild statements some have made either to each other or in print. This alone makes it useful reading. McGlinn's effort to address the issues from a textual basis is quite helpful. However, he fails to adequately consider the multiple valences

of the texts under consideration. With the recent publication of *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, new material is available in English translation. It affords the opportunity for further examination of the subject. McGlinn's study clarifies important questions that need to be asked and challenges certain beliefs and assumptions many have held. An open, unbiased and thorough inquiry into Baha'i ideas about the role of religion in governance and institutional relations is greatly needed. Though McGlinn does not meet this need, his work contributes a valuable perspective.

Franklin Lewis accomplishes what several have attempted before him: at once he argues the significance of the cultural and literary context of Baha'u'llah's remarkably beautiful Arabic and Persian writings, and proves the importance of understanding this dimension so that we may better read and comprehend these texts beyond their surface signification. He begins with a few couplets of Italian verse by Petrarch that closely parallel a passage that thousands of Baha'is could recite from memory without hesitation. This little revelation is a rejoinder to anyone who might think that literary studies are merely a handmaid to good historical study and theological analysis of Baha'i texts or, worse yet, unimportant to the 'average Baha'i', a creature I have yet to meet.

Moojan Momen's article on 'Fundamentalism and Liberalism' provides timely reading. In these dark days of religious warfare and armed ideologues, he undertakes gentle and sober consideration of this polarization of religious expressions. He briefly describes the categories, both their similarities and differences, and summarizes some of the literature on fundamentalism. He shows how differences shift over time. He then suggests that liberalism and fundamentalism have a psychological basis, that they represent diverse modes of thought and perception. 'In psychological terms, we may characterize fundamentalism and liberalism as two different ways of thinking, two cognitive styles.' 'The fundamentalist mentality is characteristically one that sees things in terms of black and white, in terms of clear-cut boundaries which determine what is and what is not acceptable belief, who is and who is not in the community.' 'Another way of describing this would be to say that one of the underlying differences between fundamentalists and liberals is that the former are driven by a desire for certainty.' Momen proceeds to examine implications for the Baha'i community.

This article offers a fresh approach to these issues of religious outlook and practice. Momen examines them in great depth and range in his book *The Phenomenon of Religion* (Oneworld, 1999). He demonstrates the difficulty in defining the categories of fundamentalism and liberalism in doctrinal terms. A desirable next step would be to integrate his psychological approach with an analysis of the social and political forces that make use of them. It could take account of the will to power in contemporary religious movements, and of abuses by the leadership of these movements that play on these modes of thought and the particular needs he identifies.

Sholeh Quinn finally puts in print her delightfully precise and illuminating understanding of historical methodology and shows how well such a method serves the Baha'i community. She concludes with this poignant note: 'Given the broad call by the Universal House of Justice to all Baha'is to develop Baha'i scholarship and to welcome all who wish to be involved in it, that welcome should include professional academic historians, who along with other academics, form just one small subgroup of all people engaged in Baha'i scholarship.'

Christopher Buck discusses the possibilities for including native legends and spiritual traditions in Baha'i accounts of revealed religions and for recognizing the sanctity of native prophets and messengers. His discussion addresses the problem for Baha'is of including their names in lists of divinely appointed messengers and prophets of God. Buck examines the tension between what he calls 'Baha'i universalism' and the limits of specificity in

Baha'i scripture. He implicitly exposes the false dichotomies of native and non-native, written and oral, Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic. It is unfortunate that he fails to address these dichotomies directly. Following his method of historical criticism, he arrives at this conclusion:

At issue here is not the question of the *existence* of other messengers of God not attested to and listed in the Baha'i writings, but the problem of designating them by name. In principle, a Baha'i can certainly affirm that messengers of God have been sent to all peoples, according to Baha'i belief, but that there is simply no authoritative way to attest the historicity of legendary culture heroes individually. Thus, Baha'i authorities may consider adding the *category* of (rather than *names* of) messengers of God to First Nations, or messengers of God to indigenous peoples.

It is not at issue, because Buck has effectively demonstrated this point, but he has avoided the extra-textual issues of attitudes and prejudices that need to be overcome. Even so, he has provided us with valuable references with which to confront such difficulties. He directs our attention to the rich possibilities in the sacred traditions of native peoples. His article demonstrates the value of further research and analysis of Baha'i scripture – that it can enhance our respect and appreciation of the divine sources of First Nation cultures. Even in the Islamic scripture we find the statement that 'to every people there is a messenger'.

Christopher White presents an excellent article on prayer as the mental, spiritual and physical enactment of remembering God in the divine-human relationship. He examines how prayer functions in Baha'i devotional practice. Bryan Graham suggests exciting possibilities for economic studies of Baha'i teachings. Geeta Gandhi Kingdon's article on 'Women, Education, and Development' rounds out the collection of articles. She gives a compelling overview of the current social and economic status of women and the dramatic impact of education on not only the conditions of women, but also the economic advancement of their communities.

Each article in *Reason and Revelation* is well worth reading, regardless of any shortcomings. The book is an excellent resource for discussion and references on important topics that arise in conversations among Baha'is and others. This volume serves to place before its readers a few fair fruits of Baha'i scholarship, each of which rewards us with the satisfaction of serious endeavour. Perhaps the subtitle of this volume is a wish that will be realized in many a locality, that we can encourage new directions in Baha'i thought. We look forward to further volumes in the series.

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Bahā'īs in the West. Peter Smith (ed.). *Studies in the Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, vol. 14. Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press. xii, 307pp. ISBN 1-890688-11-8 (pbk) \$32.50

The current volume in *Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions* continues the series' contribution to Baha'i scholarship and, specifically, to the history of Baha'i communities in the West. This volume consists of several parts, containing an overall sociological survey of the growth and spread of Baha'i communities, episodes in the history of the Baha'i Faith, and a section on the histories of two national Baha'i communities and one local community. The editor is fortunate to have had the contributions of scholars, all of them versed in the systematic study of the Baha'i community.

Peter Smith offers an excellent foreword about Baha'i studies. Typically in his analysis, he divides the Baha'i world into three zones of development, namely the Iranian Shi'i world of the origins of the Baha'i Faith, the Western World, and the 'Third World'. There are, especially in the first two 'Worlds', shared cultural characteristics that spill out into shared Baha'i patterns of activity, participation and development. Hence the logical basis of this particular volume is to include only episodes and histories of the West. Smith's analysis of the academic study of the Baha'i community is familiar to all those who engage in such study; despite its growth, academic work remains to be done on the history and culture of the Baha'i Faith in America. Only a few countries have been studied (i.e. Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand and the United States). We only have a few scholarly biographies of Western Baha'is. A large and diverse collection of regional, national and local histories remains unpublished or can be found only on the Web; some of them are scholarly, many are not.

The reading of the eight chapters leaves one affirming what Smith avers in his foreword: there is little research, if any, done on the relationship between the Baha'is and their surrounding culture; there is little comparing the growth and formation of the Baha'i community with those of other religions; and little examining the particular role of the Western Baha'i communities in the Baha'i diffusion to other parts of the world, and so on.

One would think that every effort to close the gap in Baha'i scholarship would be greeted with an instant desire to publish and disseminate these works. As Smith points out, most of the essays in this volume were prepared in 1988, but the volume was published 16 years later, in 2004. There is an uncanny resemblance between publishing Baha'i scholarly works and establishing Baha'i local governing councils ('local spiritual assemblies') in the Arctic: they each take about as long and are marked by both setbacks and sudden flushes of growth.

Peter Smith's chapter, 'The Baha'i Faith in the West' (2-60), represents a valuable overview of the growth and changes in western Baha'i communities, offering not only descriptive and analytical insights, but also statistical and demographic information up to 1988. Readers who are not Baha'is (and even Baha'is who are not accustomed to thinking in cross-Western terms) will welcome this chapter.

Moojan Momen's chapter (62-106) on John Esslemont's efforts to write a piece on the 'Progress of the Baha'i Movement' is unique in that it gives an analysis of how a prominent early believer saw the development of the worldwide Baha'i community at that time (1919-1920), and of what sources of information were typically available. While Esslemont did not publish his findings, we still become privy (thanks to Momen) to Esslemont's historiography. The chapter offers brief explanatory comments, but it consists mainly of the full text of Esslemont's materials, arranged by regions of the world. One of the strengths of this chapter lies in Momen's endnotes that amplify or explain the events and persons described by Esslemont.

György Lederer's account (108-126) of Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Budapest is interesting in that it delves into the influence of Abdu'l-Baha on the press, something that previous accounts of his visit to Budapest have ignored. In several respects, Lederer's findings parallel my own account of Abdu'l-Baha in Montreal (in *The Origins of the Bahā'ī Community of Canada*, 1996) when I discovered that later Baha'i accounts ignored the stories of Abdu'l-Baha in the French-language press and the 'initial optimism about the number of Baha'is' in the visited city 'is not supported by any facts' (121). Ismael Velasco, in a later chapter in this volume, describes a similar finding in relation to Edinburgh. The lesson that Lederer proffers is this: do not rely on the customary Baha'i accounts of Abdu'l-Baha's visits to cities, but amplify them by sorting through local contemporary press accounts.

The late R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram's contribution to this volume (128-153) rests on the premise that the official account of the 1910 Baha'i Temple Unity Convention in the United States does not entirely reflect what happened at that Convention, in particular the 'extraneous matter' that the Convention report refers to in passing. There is nothing unique about this assertion; postmodern scholars are not surprised that accounts privilege one voice over the other. In reconstructing those events, Armstrong-Ingram believes that one can broaden the picture of the Baha'i community of the time. Henry Clayton Thompson was the centre of an altercation that involved his declaring that he was founding a religious organization built on a new idea of faith, in effect proclaiming himself as a new prophet. The sources upon which Armstrong-Ingram has reconstructed the events consist of reports in the press. Aside from Armstrong-Ingram's own explanations about the Baha'i community, namely that Thompson 'exemplified several strands of development and ideology in the American Baha'i community of the time' (such as the acceptance of psychic communication and the tendency to take at face value a literal translation of Eastern linguistic hyperbole (143-144)), the reader is left more with the fact that Thompson was misguided than with what the Baha'i community was like. Nonetheless, this chapter portrays a singular instance of the influence of the Baha'i Faith on an individual and his dismissal from the records of the 1910 Baha'i Convention.

Loni Bramson's piece, 'The Plans of Unified Action' (154-197), represents her continuing interest in early administrative practice in the American Baha'i community. The conception of expanding and developing the Baha'i community by using strategic plans (1925-1934) seems to have originated in the mind of Horacy Holley, one of the most prominent Baha'is of the day. Bramson nicely locates these plans in the context of Baha'i administrative development. Of the 14 items in the bibliography (i.e. excluding works by the central figures of the Baha'i Faith and Baha'i institutions) at least 5 postdate 1988. The gaps in dated bibliographic sources do not, however, indicate that Bramson was inattentive to more recent developments in the field – she is well acquainted with the new scholarship. Rather, it demonstrates the basic problem in Baha'i publishing, namely the long delays in getting work published.

Graham Hassall's chapter on the Baha'i Faith in Australia, 1920-1947 (200-226), is an outgrowth of Hassall's voluminous scholarly works on the Baha'i Faith in Australasia. (He is currently working on the Baha'i history of Switzerland, which would have been a welcome addition to this volume.) The chapter details periods of 'complete obscurity and episodes of internal stress' (221). **It is an instructive piece, not only about how to go about Baha'i scholarship, but also for the Baha'i community as a whole, which will derive fresh insights from its own past.**

Margit Warburg's chapter, 'From Circle to Community: The Baha'i Religion in Denmark, 1925-2002,' (228-263) is vintage Warburg. She correlates the development of the Danish community with the overall developments of the Baha'i Faith after World War II,

and suggests that Denmark ‘in many respects typifies the historical development of several European Baha’i communities’ (229). More than any other piece in this volume, this chapter also connects the Baha’i developments in particular to sociological theory, namely Joachim Wach’s description of the development of the founded religions. She soft-pedals the theoretical portion of her argument; it is not an unwieldy harness. While no doubt parts of the Baha’i community are averse to this sort of reductionist reasoning about the developments of their religion, her marshalling of descriptive facts and observations make for an in-depth analysis of the evolution of a small and struggling Baha’i community. What is more, her analysis does not betray her sympathetic feelings for this community. That the chapter is based on a previously published work is apparent from the confusing running head, ‘The Circle, the Brotherhood, and the Ecclesiastical Body’, which does not match the title of the chapter.

The final chapter, by Ismael Velasco (his name appears as ‘Valesco’ on the back cover of the book) concerns the beginnings of the Baha’i community in Edinburgh, 1946-1950 (264-307). He makes extensive use of unpublished, archival sources. In addition, he contextualizes the history of the Baha’i community in Edinburgh in terms of attempts to diffuse the new faith in the United Kingdom at a broader level. Velasco probes behind the official records to ascertain the engagement of those first Scottish converts with the struggling Baha’i community, a formidable task given the paucity of personal records and the preponderance of official records. Despite these disadvantages, Velasco’s care has resulted in a fine account. The appendix gives a summary (up to 1997) of the Scottish Baha’i community (such as demographic information, conversion rates – the Scottish rate is above the national UK rate – geographical distribution, and pattern of activity).

Where to now? Something urgent remains to be done about the publishing of Baha’i scholarship. The present situation with interminable its delays results in dated academic accounts and what I would call ‘sandwich’ scholarship; it is quite common now to find chapters or articles that have elements of work published elsewhere but with additional data. Thus, the study of a particular Baha’i phenomenon, community or episode is stretched out across several venues, but it is unusual for authors to explicitly state how the particular piece is different from earlier ones. A previously written work might well appear in print well after a later-written piece. Thus, it is almost unavoidable that the same work might be repeated in two different venues. Five of the eight chapters in this volume have appeared earlier, in more or less revised form. The current state of Baha’i publishing makes it impossible for authors to carefully and systematically develop themes in their research; they can never be sure when or where a piece will find its way onto the printed page. While chapters are waiting on the shelf to be published, other related works appear. For example, Peter Smith’s survey in this volume omits mention of the piece by Seena Fazel and Graham Hassall surveying 100 years of the Baha’i Faith in Europe (*Baha’i Studies Review*, vol. 8, 1998). I would make clear that my comments are not criticisms of either the authors or of Kalimat Press. On the contrary, I much appreciate their perseverance in stepping into a realm where publishing outcomes are extremely uncertain.

Whatever the shortcomings of our state of publishing, Baha’i scholars and academics have good reason to be satisfied that the current crop of about 60-80 writers worldwide is making a steady contribution so early in the history of the Baha’i Faith. However, we desperately need contributions from scholars in the non-Western world (I do not suggest that the non-Western world can be treated as uniform: developments in South America are quite different from those in Africa, and within Africa there are dissimilarities). We also need substantial scholarly work on the Baha’i community’s relations with the wider world (as Peter Smith emphasizes). Some good examples are Leonda Kenison’s work on Baha’i cross-racial friendships, Chelsea Horton’s research on Baha’i-style activism on aboriginal reserves

in Canada, the work of N.T. Feather *et al* on Baha'is and non-Baha'is in Australia, and Bozorgmehr's study of 'internal ethnicity' in Los Angeles.

Many of the volumes in the series *Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions* highlight the relevance of probing beyond the official Baha'i record of events and, as such, have prepared Baha'is for recognizing that there are multiple voices in Baha'i accounts, whether formal or informal. The best scholarship seems to come from those who recognize this multiplicity of voices, who frankly acknowledge that tensions might sometimes accrue in trying to use these different voices, and who admit that the scholar's is just another voice, albeit one that is fair and conscious of its own limitations, contributing to a vigorous discourse among scholars and among Baha'is generally.

While one could complain that there is no index and no description of the contributing authors, as well as some unfortunate typos (e.g. 'the 'ading Room', as opposed to 'the Reading Room' (p.14)), I commend the volume for its readability, for its inclusion of 36 illustrations, mostly photos, that enhance the text, and for drawing our attention to a number of new pieces of research. Although Baha'i scholars may already be familiar with a number of the contributions, readers, both Baha'is and others, should welcome Kalimat's latest effort to make Baha'i research more available to them. It looks like the saga about the social dynamics of the beginnings and growth of a new religion will continue for a long time into the future.

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Biographical Notes

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Robert Wilson is an author of several books, including one novel. As an artist, his paintings are exhibited in galleries in Northwest USA. He met Mark Tobey in the early 1960s and has lectured on Mark Tobey at art museums and for private organizations. He has been a member of the Baha'i Faith since 1963 and has served as secretary of the National Teaching Committee. He and his wife reside in Kent, Washington, USA.