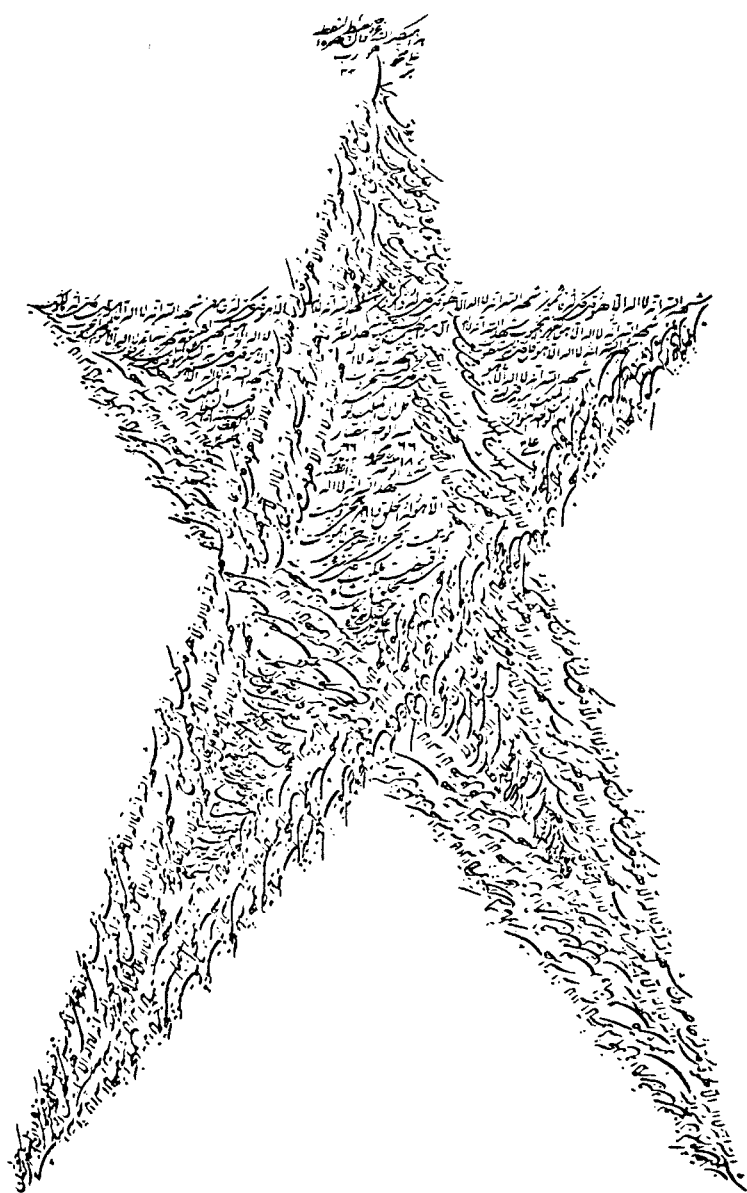


STUDIES IN THE BĀBĪ AND BAHĀ'Ī RELIGIONS

VOLUME FIVE





TABLET IN THE FORM OF A STAR
in the hand of the Báb.

STUDIES IN THE
BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS
(formerly Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History)

VOLUME FIVE

STUDIES IN HONOR OF
THE LATE HASAN M. BALLYUZI

Edited by
MOOJAN MOMEN



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NOTE

All dates in this volume are given as either B.C.E. (Before the Christian, or Common, Era) or C.E. (Christian, or Common, Era) in place of B.C. and A.D., respectively. This usage has been adopted by many in the field of religious studies because it avoids the theological implications of the latter (B.C. = Before Christ, and A.D. = *anno domini*, In the year of our Lord), which believers in non-Christian religions may not find acceptable.

M. MOMEN

FOREWORD

In the range of Bahá'í literature that has been published in recent years, there has been a great deal of historical work done—biographies of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith, general histories, biographies of prominent Bahá'ís, as well as the series *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History* and various papers that have appeared in scholarly periodicals. This upsurge of interest in Bahá'í history was to a large extent prompted by the work of Hasan Balyuzi, whose contribution to Bahá'í studies is commemorated in this volume. Other areas of Bahá'í studies have not, however, received so much attention. In this volume, the aim is to broaden this stream of scholarly material so that it will include areas of study other than history. The reader will note that, in keeping with this purpose, the title of the series has been changed.

The first paper takes us on to textual studies. It has always been assumed, particularly by Western scholars, that when Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad Shírázī took on the title of the Báb (Gate) at the beginning of his ministry, this title referred to those earlier Báb's, who in Shí'í history had acted as intermediaries between the occulted Twelfth Imám and the believers. Todd Lawson has, however, carried out a careful study of Shí'í literature in the tradition of which the Báb was writing, and he demonstrates that the term *báb* more usually referred to the Imám himself, as does the associated term

dhikr (Remembrance) which the Báb also used to refer to himself in his early writings. Lawson goes on to examine the text of the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* which was written in the first year of the Báb's ministry. He produces further evidence here which suggests that the Báb claimed a station equivalent to that of Muḥammad or to that of the Imáms from the very beginning of his ministry, albeit his claim was somewhat camouflaged initially.

The second paper also explores the field of textual studies. Stephen Lambden examines the manner in which the episode of Moses' encounter with the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai has become, in the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, a typological theme which serves to denote the manifestation of the deity on the earthly plane. Lambden's detailed study shows that Bahá'u'lláh uses this imagery to expound his teachings on this subject and also to defend himself against charges of having claimed to be God.

The third paper explores the area of Bahá'í metaphysics. Very little has been written on this subject in the past. This paper attempts to show that there is a good reason for this, since the Bahá'í position is that it is not possible to obtain any absolute knowledge of metaphysics. All metaphysical statements are purely relative to the person who makes them. Hence even seemingly contradictory positions can be simultaneously "true." This metaphysical relativism serves as the theoretical foundation for the Bahá'í position on the essential unity of all religions.

In a volume commemorating Hasan Balyuzi, it would not be appropriate to have included no history at all, since this was his main area of interest. Therefore, the last two papers are historical ones. One of these deals with a subject that was close to Hasan Balyuzi's heart, the history of the British Bahá'í community. More specifically, Phillip Smith examines the way British Bahá'ís saw themselves during the first two decades of the present century. Although the presentation of the

Bahá'í teachings in literature from this period may seem similar to what is expounded today, Smith argues that the Bahá'ís themselves viewed their Faith very differently. The Bahá'í movement was, to many of the Bahá'ís of that time, not a separate and independent religion. Rather, it was a revival of mankind's religiosity, a revival that could occur within the context of established religious forms.

Times of transition are critical periods in the history of any religion. In Bahá'í history, a number of these critical periods have been associated with the transfer of religious leadership. Loni Bramson-Lerche examines one such period (from the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá into the beginnings of the institution of the Guardianship) from the viewpoint of what occurred within the American Bahá'í community. As with other critical periods, the spectre of schism and disintegration arose. In this case, it was associated with opposition to Shoghi Effendi's efforts to establish the Bahá'í administrative system.

In all, it is hoped that the publication of this volume will serve both to develop Bahá'í history and at the same time to widen the field of Bahá'í studies. Although an effort was made to include here papers on Bahá'í theology and philosophy, these essays were not completed in time. They will, it is hoped, be included in subsequent volumes in the series.

M. MOMEN
BEDFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND
DECEMBER 1987



HASAN M. BALYUZI
as a young man.

HASAN M. BALYUZI (1908–1980)

A Bio-bibliographical Sketch

Hasan Muvaqqar Balyuzi was born into a distinguished Iranian family on 7 September 1908. His forebearers had been merchants on the Gulf Coast of Iran. His father, Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad Khán, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, had received part of his education in England and had risen to high office on his return to Iran, becoming governor of Bushihr and the Gulf Ports and later Minister of Public Works until his death in 1921. When the British occupied Bushihr in 1915, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, who was then the governor, and his family were exiled to India. Thus, Hasan Balyuzi received some of his early education in English at Poona. Later, after spending some time in Tehran and Shiraz, Balyuzi traveled to the American University at Beirut to continue his studies.

The links between the family of Balyuzi and the Bahá'í Faith were strong. His father was one of the paternal relatives of the Báb, and his mother was a relative of the Báb's wife. Although both of his parents were Bahá'ís, the restrictions on openly discussing the new religion in the presence of servants and others in the household meant that Hasan learned little about the Bahá'í Faith in his childhood years. But later, his reading of a few Bahá'í books, and in particular his meeting with Shoghi Effendi in Haifa in 1925, while on his

way to take up his studies in Beirut, turned him into a confirmed believer.

His initial studies were in chemistry, but when it came to post-graduate work, he chose the field of history. In 1932, he came to London where he pursued his study of history at the London School of Economics. He obtained a master's degree and was proceeding with his doctorate when the outbreak of the Second World War interrupted his studies. He thereafter took up an appointment with the newly formed Persian Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation. His numerous broadcasts included talks on Iranian culture, Western history and culture, translations into Persian of many classics of English prose and poetry, as well as features on current affairs, and interviews with Iranian personalities. His talks were greatly admired by the Iranian audience of the BBC over the course of more than twenty years. Some of his translations of English literature were published in Iran.

During the Second World War, Hasan Balyuzi married Mary (Molly) Brown (the daughter of Kathleen Brown, later Lady Hornell), who was a member of Sadler's Wells Ballet. They lived temporarily in Evesham, where the BBC Persian Service had moved for the duration of the war. They had five sons. Balyuzi was, by this time, very fully involved in the work of the British Bahá'í community. From 1933, he had been elected each year to the national administrative body, the National Spiritual Assembly. In 1942, he became its chairman, a position that he held almost continuously until 1960. In addition, he was appointed to numerous committees of this body, played an active role in the London Bahá'í community and traveled and lectured around the country. His Bahá'í responsibilities greatly increased when, in 1957, he was appointed by Shoghi Effendi as one of the Hands of the Cause of God, the highest rank of service and honor in the Bahá'í community. His responsibilities included the propagation and protection of the Bahá'í Faith; but the full range of the role of the

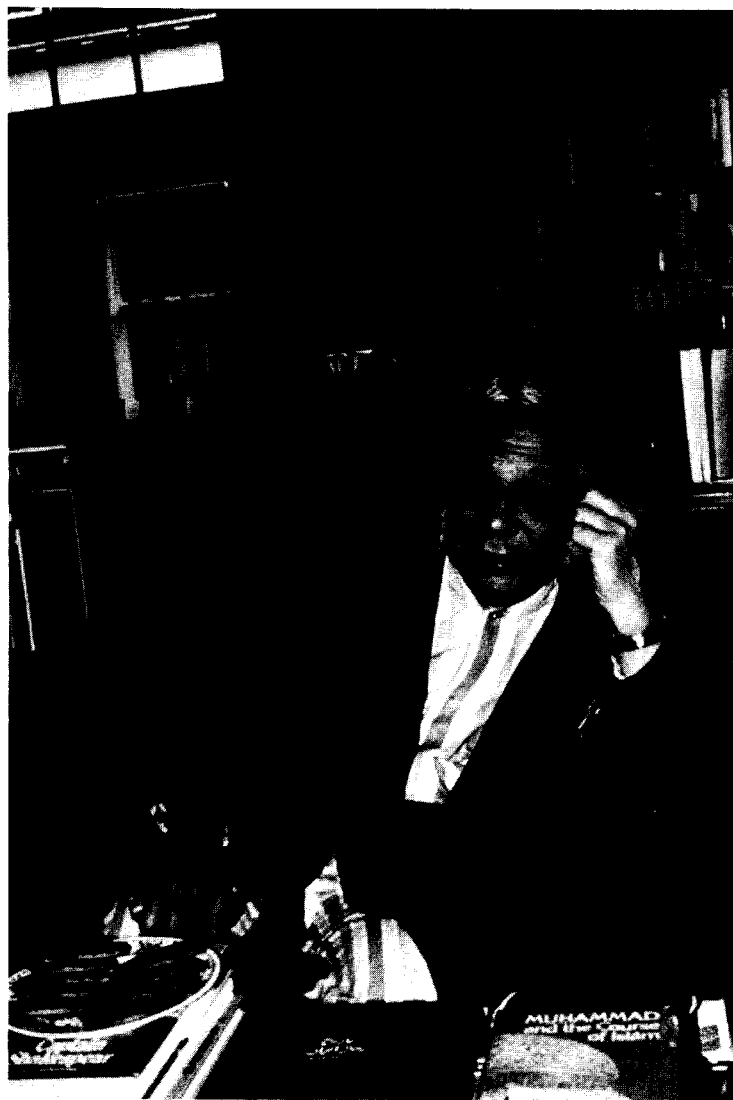
Hands was only revealed by the death of Shoghi Effendi one month after Balyuzi's appointment. Since Shoghi Effendi had named the Hands of the Cause as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth," it fell to them to organize the affairs of the Bahá'í Faith in the period from 1957 until the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963.

It is, however, as an author and scholar that Hasan Balyuzi is most remembered. To appreciate the importance of his work, it is necessary to understand the situation in the 1960s when his books began to appear. The work of Balyuzi began the process of correcting three major deficiencies that existed at this time in the range of literature about the Bahá'í Faith. First, although more than half a century earlier there had been much research done on Bahá'í subjects by scholars such as Prof. E. G. Browne, and the Russian scholars Baron Rosen and Capt. Tumansky, this effort had not been followed up by subsequent generations of scholars and almost nothing of an academic nature had appeared for fifty years or more. There was, therefore, a pressing need to revitalize the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith. Second, in 1960, the only information that most Bahá'ís had about the history of their religion came from a very few books. The history of the Bábí period was covered at length in Shoghi Effendi's translation of Nabíl's narrative, *The Dawn-Breakers*, and popularized by William Sears in his *Release the Sun*. But for information about subsequent periods, the Bahá'ís only had the masterful but sketchy outline in Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By*, the relevant chapters in Esslemont's *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, and a few narrative and anecdotal works such as Lady Blomfield's *The Chosen Highway* and May Maxwell's *An Early Pilgrimage*. The earlier works by scholars such as Browne were by this time out of print and, in any case, they were mainly concerned with the earlier Bábí period. Even in the Persian language, there was no comprehensive history of the Bahá'í Faith in print.

There had been several attempts to produce such a work, but all of these were either incomplete, unpublished, or out of print. It was, therefore, urgent that someone do the research necessary to bring out a readable, concise but comprehensive account of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Third, since the death of George Townshend in 1957, very little good new material of any kind had been published on any aspect of the Bahá'í Faith. There was a dearth of first-rate authors who could produce a flow of books, and this lack was keenly felt by the Bahá'í community.

When Balyuzi published a brief essay on the life of Bahá'u'lláh in 1938 (an enlarged version of this work appeared in 1963), Shoghi Effendi encouraged him to continue this work by adding essays on the lives of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But his numerous other pressing duties prevented him. During the period from 1957 onwards, grief at the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the burden of his responsibility as a Hand of the Cause took a heavy toll on Balyuzi's physical and psychological health. During the course of these years ill health caused him to give up full-time work at the BBC, which led to financial problems and increased the strain on him. When in 1963, ill health also forced his premature retirement from an active, public life in the Bahá'í community, he determined to return to the project of completing his trilogy on the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Confined to his home, he produced a series of books that were published over the next twenty-two years.

The first book was a biography of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He had completed some of the preliminary work twenty years earlier after receiving Shoghi Effendi's encouragement to write his trilogy. As work progressed on this book, however, it became clear to him that the subject of Prof. Browne's relations with the Bahá'í Faith required a separate monograph if he was to avoid a "diversion" of a "magnitude that was inappropriate"¹ in his book on 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thus it was that *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* was published in 1970, while



HASAN M. BALYUZI
relaxing in his study, c. 1978.

the publication of *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Center of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* was delayed until 1971.

As he started to write *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days*, the book that completed his trilogy, Balyuzi was concerned that his book should not be merely a rewriting of Shoghi Effendi's translation of Nabíl's narrative. His problem was resolved when documents from the British Public Records Office relating to the period of the Báb were made available to him. His book became "the first in the range of Bahá'í Faith literature to make extensive use of official documents from governmental archives."² It was published in 1973.

Muhammad and the Course of Islám (published in 1976) was the next book. He wrote this because he felt that there was no history of Islam available that combined accuracy and scholarship with a sympathetic approach to the religion. He also felt that it was essential for Western Bahá'ís to obtain a better grasp of Islam to improve their understanding of their own religion.

Having completed his trilogy of the central figures, it became clear that the relatively small and sketchy nature of the volume on Bahá'u'lláh was inappropriate when compared with the much fuller volumes on the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Balyuzi therefore decided to begin research on a more detailed biography of Bahá'u'lláh, even while he was writing his book on Islam. It was always his practice work on several projects simultaneously.

For *Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory*, Balyuzi read every source he could obtain. He planned from the start to make this project more than one volume. But as he wrote and came across more and more material, so the projected size of the work increased to four volumes. Then in October 1979, he suffered a heart attack. He appeared to make a good recovery, and his energy and enthusiasm increased. But, in the event, he had completed only one volume and had written most of a second when he passed away in his sleep on 12 February 1980.

Balyuzi had hoped to publish a series of small booklets on the lives of prominent members of the Afnan family, the family of the Báb. After his death, a short volume on the wife of the Báb, *Khadíjih Bagùm*, the first of these, was published in 1981, while the material written for the second was incorporated (as Chapter 17, on Núri'd-Dín Afnán) into the second volume of his series on Bahá'u'lláh, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, published in 1985. He had left written instructions that a trust, the Afnan Library Trust, be set up which would form a Bahá'í Faith research library, and to this he donated all of his Bahá'í books and papers. This trust was established. It is hoped that it will eventually fulfill his wish and develop into a research library for all scholars.

Of Balyuzi's character and ability, it must be left to future writers to assess these adequately. Only the passage of time will allow them to be justly appreciated. Much of his writing ran counter to present-day styles of scholarly prose. But his work is imbued with two qualities which will cause it to be remembered long after much other material written to such standards has been forgotten. First, was his assiduous pursuit of truth. He would take endless trouble to track down even the most minor fact or date. He would write several letters in pursuit of just one piece of information which might take up only one line in his book. He did not hesitate to discard large sections of his manuscript if his researches left any doubt as to the truth of what he had written. *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* was rewritten three times because new facts emerged that caused him to reconsider his earlier versions.

Second, was his integrity. There are no hidden motives in his writings. He wrote nothing for fame or self-advancement. He wrote only what he thought correct after due consideration. His books clearly show him to be a Bahá'í, but nothing is concealed or distorted to protect the Bahá'í Faith, or anyone, or anything. He always maintained that it was best to tell it "warts and all."

Another characteristic that marked him out was his generosity with the materials in his possession. Not for him to jealously guard his sources to prevent others from using them before he could get into print. He lent whatever he had freely and without hesitation. He was particularly anxious to promote Bahá'í studies, and it was to this end that he arranged for the establishment of the Afnán Library Trust. He had an extensive knowledge of the history of Iran, as well as a profound grasp of the undercurrents of Iranian affairs. He could recount biographical information and family background for almost any notable of the last two hundred years of Iranian history, particularly if the person hailed from his native Shiraz.

To those who knew him, he was warm, witty, urbane, a keen follower of current affairs (his family still possesses an enormous collection of newspaper cuttings extending over many years), and much given to recounting stories (particularly if these were amusing). His gentle, unassuming nature would perhaps have led him to go unnoticed in a group, had he not had great natural dignity and nobility. He held a warm affection for all aspects of Iranian culture, and particularly for those emanating from his beloved Shiraz. But he also appreciated the cultural achievements of the British and other nations. Towards the end of his life, events occurring in Iran caused him great pain, none more than the destruction of the House of the Báb in Shiraz by the revolutionary government. His interests were wide-ranging and he could converse on almost any topic, but he never made a pretence of knowledge in areas where he had none.

The following passage from the writings of Mírzá Abú'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, whom Balyuzi much admired, sums up well the philosophy that imbued the character and writings of Balyuzi himself:

Although the author is a believer in the holy path of the Bahá'í Faith, God is my witness—and He suffices as a witness—that I

have not been unduly influenced in the writing of this history by my love or faith. My devotion to Bahá'u'lláh has not deflected me from the path of fairness. For the station of a historian is beyond that of love and devotion and too sacred to be defiled by bias and prejudice. A historian must put to one side his love or hate for various groups when writing about historical events and must with the utmost justice and equity record what he knows. For truthfulness is a precious gem and the fairness of human beings is their purest ornament.

The following is a list of his publications:

English Works:

- Bahá'u'lláh*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938.
A Guide to the Administrative Order. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941.
Bahá'u'lláh: A Brief Life, Followed by an Essay on the Manifestation of God entitled: The Word made Flesh. London: George Ronald, 1963.
Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith. London: George Ronald, 1970.
'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. London: George Ronald, 1971.
The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days. Oxford: George Ronald, 1973.
Muhammad and the Course of Islám. Oxford: George Ronald, 1976.
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory. Oxford: George Ronald, 1980.
Khadíjih Bagum: The Wife of the Báb. Oxford: George Ronald, 1981.
Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.

Persian Works:

- Nábarádari*. Tehran: Chápkháníh Tábán, 1351.

Tundbád Havádith. Tehran: Chápkháníh Fárús, 1353.

Vázhih-háy-i Farsí dar Zabán Ingilísí. Tehran: Chápkháníh Fárús, 2535.

M. MOMEN

NOTES

1. *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. xi.
2. *The Báb*, p. xi.

STUDIES IN THE
BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS

VOLUME FIVE



DR. WILLIAM CORMICK (1820-1877)

personal physician to Násiru'd-Dín Mírzá, governor of Tabriz (later to become shah). In 1848, he became the only Westerner known to have conversed with the Báb when he was called upon to attend the wounds to the Báb's feet inflicted by the bastinado after his trial in Tabriz.

(See E. G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, pp. 260-64; and M. Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 74-75, 497-98.)

The Terms “Remembrance” (*dhikr*) and “Gate” (*báb*) in the Báb’s Commentary on the Sura of Joseph

by B. Todd Lawson

The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph (*Tafsír súrat Yúsuf*), also known as the *Qayyúm al-asmá* and the *Aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ*, was composed at the very beginning of the career of Sayyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad Shírází, the Báb. It was begun on the evening of 22 May 1844 (5 Jumádá 1260), during the important interview with Mullá Ḥusayn in the course of which the latter, a young student of the late Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, acknowledged the claim of his host, ‘Alí Muḥammad Shírází, to be the promised one for whom he had been searching.¹ It has been studied by several Western scholars, all of whom agree that it is one of the Báb’s works, that it is obscure in several places, and that it is not a *tafsír* in the usual sense of the word.

Many scholars have alluded to the importance of this work for a proper understanding of the development of the Báb’s ideas. They have also agreed that one of the most obdurate problems the text presents is the question of voice. Who is actually speaking the words? There are at least four possible choices: the first, is that the speaker is ‘Alí-Muḥammad Shírází, the young merchant; second, that the speaker is actually

the Hidden Imám, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarí, who has chosen ‘Alí-Muḥammad Shírází to be his mouthpiece, and as a result of which the “merchant” is thus elevated to the rank of the Remembrance (*dhikr*) or Gate (*báb*) of the Imám; third, that the speaker is ‘Alí-Muḥammad Shírází as the Imám himself; and fourth, that the speaker is God. A solution to this problem is suggested in the following pages: that the Báb claims through the use of a complex of symbols and imagery to be the Imám himself, and therefore his words are the words of God. Prof. Browne, who was the first to study this problem, was fairly certain on this point:

Of himself he speaks often, but in various, and often very enigmatical ways. Thus in one place he calls himself “This well-favoured Arabian youth, in whose grasp God hath placed the kingdom of the heavens and the earth”; in another he says, “O people of the earth! hear the voice of your Lord, the Merciful, from the tongue of celebration of this Arabian youth, the son of ‘Alí the Arabian”; a few lines further on he describes himself as . . . “This Arabian youth, of Muhammad, of ‘Alí, of Fāṭima, of Mecca, of Medina, of Baḥá, of ‘Iráq.” In another passage he alludes to himself as “called by the Persians a Shírází.”²

Here Browne cites Rosen’s related observation:

Ce jeune homme, qui est tantôt ‘Arabí, tantôt, ‘Ajamí, Madaní, etc. revient très-souvent dans le courant du livre (. . . presque sur chaque feuillet), sans que l’on puisse comprendre exactement son rôle.³

Browne continues:

I have no doubt myself that [the Báb] is throughout speaking of himself. He calls himself “*Muḥammadí*,” “*‘Alawí*,” “*Fāṭimí*,” because as a Seyyid, he is descended from these. That he should describe himself as a *Shírází* is only natural, as is the use of the

epithet 'Ajamí (Persian); but it is harder to see for what reason he calls himself "Makkí," "Madaní," "Íraqí," etc. I can only suppose that on account of his visits to Mecca and Medína, and his sojourn at Kerbelá, he considers himself entitled to apply these titles to himself.

In other places he speaks of himself in a manner entirely mystical, as "the Light on Sinai, and Sinai in the rising-place of the manifestation" (*fí maṭla' iz-zuhúr*); "the (letter) *Bá* which permeates the water of the Letters, and the Point which stands at the Gate of the two Alifs."⁴

Browne thought this usage an allusion to the universal intelligence, and quotes what he believed to be Ibn 'Arabí's *tafsír*:

Here is a subtle point, which is this, that the prophets . . . have placed the letters of the alphabet in correspondence with the degrees of Existences . . . and therefore it is said, "*Existences [al-mawjúdát] emerged from the Bá' of Bismi'lláh*," since that is the letter which follows the *Alif* which is placed to correspond with the Essence of God. And it (i.e., the letter *Bá*) signifies the First Intelligence, which was the first thing which God created.⁵

The Shaykhí leader, Sayyid Kázim Rashtí (d. 1259A.H./1843 C.E.) has taken the symbol of the *bá'* a bit further in a passage of one of his most famous and important works, the *Sharḥ al-qaṣída al-lámiya*.⁶ Here he does in fact quote the *ḥadīth* cited above from the *tafsír* attributed to Ibn 'Arabí, and goes on to say that the *bá* is the "preserved tablet, the hidden book (*al-kitáb al-mastúr*)"; "the place to which all divine realities return"; and the "locus of all the divine names and attributes." It is also "the place of the manifestation of the glorious one (*al-jalíl*)"; the "pen which details (*qalam at-taṣṣíl*)"; and the "starting place of all divine proofs and reasons," because it is associated with absolute *waláya* (divine authority invested in a prophet or imam), which is "the place where the power for everything in creation, whether potential or actual (*al-akwán*

wa'l-a'yán) appears." This may also be called "the gate to God for creation, and the gate to creation for God: That except through which the bounty of God reaches no-one." It is the "absolute gate" and the "true *walí*" (*al-walí al-ḥaqq*).⁷

Finally, Browne quotes a similarly obscure allusion in which the Báb refers to himself as:

The mystery (which is) in the Gospel Syrian, and in the Pentateuch Hebraic, and the mystery concealed in the *Ḳur'án* (which is) of Muhammad. (*As-sirru fi'l-Injíl Suryání, wa's-sirr fi't-Tawráat rabbání, wa's-sirru'l-mustasirru fi'l-Furḳán Aḥmadí*).⁸

While Browne is undoubtedly correct in his assumption that all of these allusions intend the Báb himself, he also appreciates the difficulty they present. Most of the scholarship which has dealt with the Báb's *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* has been characterised by a degree of puzzlement, usually because of a lack of familiarity with those very cryptic statements of the Imáms from which much of this obscure terminology derives. For example, *as-sirr* and *as-sirr al-mustasirr* both had precise intentions for *Shaykh Aḥmad*⁹; the Báb here appears to be "improvising" on a familiar theme. However, Browne writes:

I only hazard a guess at the meaning of these passages, especially the last two, which are very obscure. Indeed as they stand they appear to contravene the rules of grammar.¹⁰

Regarding the style of the commentary, Rosen's assessment was somewhat more severe. In his description, he speaks of "this strange work" and alludes to its incomprehensibility.¹¹ He refers to Chapters 49 and 50 (both named *Súrat al-aḥkám*), as being the most intelligible, because they include what Rosen calls "renseignements positifs sur les doctrines exotères de l'auteur du livre." In fact, these two chapters present an example of the frequent running paraphrase of

long, consecutive sections of the Qur'an so characteristic of the commentary. In the case of Chapter 49, the paraphrase includes material from Qur'an 2:183 to 2:245, and a few verses from other sections of the Qur'an (e.g., 5:2-5:6). In the case of Chapter 50, the quranic material treated, in addition to the appropriate verse of Sura 12, includes Qur'an 5:87, 4:176, 5:38, 5:96-97, 6:151-2, and so forth.¹²

A much better example of this, and one which Rosen might have, therefore, considered even more intelligible than the examples he cites, includes all of the text of the commentary between Chapters 80 and 91,¹³ which more or less consecutively incorporates much of Qur'an 10:57-16:66. Examples of this type could be greatly multiplied, but these two will suffice. They illustrate another way in which the Báb attempted to appropriate and participate in the spiritual power (or charisma) of the Qur'an in order to invoke his own spiritual authority—by recasting the existing revelation in a new form. While much of the legislative content of the Qur'an remains unchanged here, the Báb, by taking obvious liberties with the Book, nevertheless asserts his own authority over it. This in itself is perhaps evidence enough that, while the Báb refers to his station in allusive and ambiguous terms, there can really be little doubt that he considered himself as holding a rank equal to that of Muḥammad. This, I think, is also conclusively borne out by the quranic form of the work: the use of suras, verses, "mystical letters," and so forth.

Others who have examined this work are not so ready to accept that the Báb, at this stage of his career, was claiming divine revelation, the rank of Imám or Prophet (which are functionally equivalent insofar as it is through them that the divine will is made known or manifest).¹⁴ MacEoin, for example, describes three phases of the Báb's career. The first includes the period up to 1848, during which his movement grew rapidly and the Báb presented himself as the agent of the Hidden Imám, precisely as *báb*. During the second, from

1848–9, the Báb “proclaimed himself the promised Mahdí in Person.” The third phase is characterized by the Báb’s “assumption of the role of an independent prophet or divine ‘manifestation’ directly empowered by God to open a new religious dispensation after Islam, to reveal new scriptures and to ordain a new legal system.”¹⁵

However, MacEoin has, in his discussion of this commentary, acknowledged the complexity of the question. Rightly pointing out that the work is “much more” than a *tafsír*,¹⁶ he mentions its being modeled on the Qur’an, but appears not to appreciate the significance of this as an emblem of authority and divine revelation. He does say that this imitation of the Holy Book led to accusations that the Báb had written a false Qur’an, citing Tunakabúní and others.¹⁷ In view of the Islamic article of faith, which is more or less universally held, concerning the miraculous nature of the Qur’an (*i’jáz al-Qur’án*), the significance of such a charge cannot be overemphasized. What it means, at the very minimum, is that those who leveled the charge had accused the author of claiming for himself an evidentiary miracle on a par with the sacred book of Muslims, quite apart from whatever those who made the accusations actually thought about such a claim.

Furthermore, as has been suggested here, given the quranic form alone, it would seem that the charge was in all ways accurate.¹⁸ While those who made the accusations did not perhaps appreciate the full implications of the Báb’s claims at the time, it is wrong to say that the response was “superficial.”¹⁹ Such a response is, in fact, precisely to the point. To illustrate the apparently ambiguous claims of the Báb, MacEoin cites a series of passages from the commentary:

At the very beginning of the book, it is made clear that the twelfth Imám had sent it (*akhraja*) to his servant (the Báb, frequently referred to as “the remembrance”—*al-dhikr*); he has been sent these “explanations” from the “*baqiyyat Alláh*, the exalted

one, your Imám." To be more precise, "God has sent down (*anzala*) the verse upon His Proof, the expected one," who has, in turn, revealed them to his remembrance. In different terminology, the Imám inspires (*awhá*) the *báb* with what God has inspired him.²⁰

MacEoin's assessment of these expressions is important.

The role of the Imám here appears to be very similar to that of the angel Gabriel in the Qur'anic theory of revelation; thus, for example, he has inspired the Báb just as God inspired the prophets of the past. The process is not, however, quite so simple, for the bulk of the work seems to be intended as the words of the Imám speaking in the first person, while there are a great many passages in which either God or the Báb is intended as the speaker, and others in which it is not at all clear as to whom is intended.²¹

As a matter of fact, in the Báb's earlier Commentary on the Sura of al-Baqara, it is quite clear that the Imám, and specifically the Imám as Qá'im (or Mahdí, the Promised One), was regarded by the Báb not only as similar to Gabriel, but as Gabriel himself. In one particular context, it is pointed out that Gabriel represented a principle which served as a link between the heart (*fu'ád*) and mind (*qalb*) of Muḥammad.²² It is therefore reasonable to suspect that this same principle operates in this commentary, but with the important difference that it is now the heart and mind of the Báb (rather than the Prophet Muḥammad) between which this angelic principle serves as a link. MacEoin acknowledges that the present work is meant to symbolize the appearance, or reappearance, in the world of one who is invested with great spiritual power and authority:

It is, nevertheless, manifest that the book is represented as a new divine revelation of sorts, comparable to the Qur'an. Thus the Imám is "made known" through "the new verses from God,"

while God speaks "in the tongue of this mighty remembrance (i.e., the Báb)." It is stated that "this is a book from God" and that "God has sent down (*anzala*) this book," while the Báb is summoned to "transmit what has been sent down to you from the bounty of the Merciful." In this respect, a comparison is drawn from the Qur'an which goes beyond mere [!] form: God has "made this book the essence (*sirr*) of the Qur'an, word for word," and one will not find a letter in it other than the letters of the Qur'an"; this book "is the Furqán of the past," and is referred to repeatedly as "this Qur'an," "this Furqán," or one of "these two Furqáns," while reference is made to "what God has sent down in His book, the Furqán, and in this book." As in the case of the Qur'an, a challenge is made to men to produce a book like it, for it is held to be inimitable. As such, it is in itself the evidence of the Imám to men. It contains the sum of all previous scriptures, abrogates all books of the past, except those revealed by God, and is the only book which God permits the 'ulamá to teach.²³

In view of the passages from the book referred to in this statement, it seems highly unlikely that the magnitude of such challenges and claims to a new revelation would have been lost on any Muslim who read them.

Elsewhere, in an unrelated context in which he denies charges that he had shown favoritism to one of his early followers whom he had chosen from among several others to accompany him on his pilgrimage, the Báb makes the following statement:

Not that special grace was shewn to him [. . . Ḥájí Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí of Bárfurúsh, afterwards called *Jenáb* or *Ḥazrat-i Kud-dús* . . .], for that same grace was shewn to all, though they veiled themselves therefrom. For in that year of the "Manifestation" [A.H. 1260] the Book of the Commentary on the *Súra-i Yúsuf* reached all.²⁴

Elsewhere, in speaking of the veiled nature of his claims in the early period, the Báb wrote:

Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, "I, in very truth, am God," identified Himself as the Gate (*báb*) for the advent of the promised Qá'im, a descendant of Muḥammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'an, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being.²⁵

This important passage was written by the Báb later in his career in a work entitled *The Seven Proofs (Dalá'il-i sab'a)*. MacEoin has confirmed that the work was written in Máh-Kú in 1264/1848, laying to rest earlier uncertainties as to the date of composition.²⁶ The *Seven Proofs* was apparently written for a Bábí who was experiencing doubt about the more explicit claims made by the Báb at this time. The passage is self-explanatory and is undoubtedly conditioned by the nature of the questions put forth. This may explain the apparent contradiction between it and the first one quoted, where the Báb says that there was ample proof in his *Commentary on the Sura of Joseph* for everyone to properly recognize his station. It is possible that the Báb is referring not only to the contents, but to the form of the work as well. Again, and at the risk of monotony, the significance of the casting of this work in the form of the Qur'an cannot be overemphasized as an emblem of the appropriation by the author of spiritual authority. One reiterates this point because it seems not to have been fully appreciated in the past. The medium here is indeed the message.

While the problem of who is speaking in the *Tafsír sūrat Yūsuf* appears to be greatly complicated by the various titles or epithets which populate the text, from all that has been

cited so far it would seem that there can be no question about the "voice" of the commentary. Regardless of who is presented as speaking, the Báb, the Imám, or God (see the translations below), the author of the commentary becomes tinged by the spirit of either the Imám or God in the process of transmitting the words. The same thing occurs, for example, in the Qur'an, particularly in those many verses which begin with "Say" (*qul*). With this single imperative, it is made clear that Muḥammad has been chosen by God as a divine messenger—what Muḥammad says in such a context is therefore divine. In other words, by being directly addressed by God, Muḥammad's own authority is underscored.

But beyond this "merely" rhetorical aspect, the existence of various speakers in the commentary points to a spiritual principle which has characterized and continues to characterize Islamic religion. Very briefly, and taking the most useful example, in Sufism the basic elements of spiritual and religious discourse center on two principles: the master and the student. The relationship between the two is paramount in the spiritual quest. The student or disciple is expected to surrender himself entirely to his master for the duration of the training period. This is one of the main reasons why Sufism was, and is, so mistrusted in very orthodox circles, whether Sunni or Shí'í. In any case, the purpose behind this surrender or submission is to enable the student to assimilate as much as possible the master's habits and knowledge. In some cases, this imitation of the master or shaykh would become so complete that the disciple or student would hear the master's voice in his own speech.²⁷

Orthodox Shí'í doctrine and the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad agreed that it was very dangerous to choose a spiritual master apart from the fourteen Pure Ones (Muḥammad, Fátima, and the twelve Imáms). Thus, for the Shí'a and the Shaykhiyya (and the Báb) the highest point of focus was either the entire holy family or one particular member of it. During the time

the Báb was writing, the most prominent member of the holy family would have been the Qá'im or the Twelfth Imám. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the Twelfth Imám functions for the Báb in much the same way that the Sufi shaykh functions for his disciple. The spiritual relationship would be the same. Whereas the Sufi student would eventually acquire as much of the shaykh's knowledge and habits as his own capacity would allow, the Báb, through meditation and communion with the spiritual principle of the Twelfth Imám would acquire as much of this identity as his capacity would allow. The complete identification of the Báb with the Twelfth Imám indicates that this capacity was vast indeed.

Dhikr.

Among the various titles found in the commentary, two in various combinations, stand out as the most frequent: dhikr and báb. Hasan Balyuzi, to whose memory this essay is dedicated, signalled the importance of the former (dhikr) as one of the titles by which the Báb was known. In his invaluable study of the life and mission of the forerunner of the Bahá'í Revelation, the following statement appears:

By Dhikr, he means Himself. Repeatedly in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá'*, the Báb refers to Himself as Dhikr, and was known to His followers as Dhikru'lláh-al-A'zam (Mention of God, the Most Great), or Dhikru'lláh-al-Akbar (Mention of God, the Greatest), and sometimes as Ḥaḍrat-i-Dhikr.²⁸

In what follows, some of the Islamic background of the word, together with a few of the innumerable contexts in which it appears in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph, will be presented in an attempt to better understand some of the implications of this title—something of what it meant, or could have meant, to both the Báb and his followers.

This word has a long and multiform history in Islamic religious literature and practice and is perhaps most encountered in connection with the Sufi practices sometimes called "audition" (*samāʿ*). Of interest in this work is the usage of the term which is perhaps less well known, namely as the designation of a person. Throughout the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph the Báb refers to himself as *adh-dhikr* (the Remembrance), *dhikr alláh* (the Remembrance of God), *dhikr alláh al-akbar* (the Most Great Remembrance of God), or *dhikr alláh al-ʿalí* (the Exalted Remembrance of God), in addition to other similar combinations.²⁹

Browne has remarked in several places that the term *dhikr alláh*, "the Remembrance of God," was used by the Báb's followers in referring to him.³⁰ MacEoin also notices that the term was widely used by the Báb at this time.³¹ Amanat says that the claim to *dhikriyya*, the quality of being the Remembrance of God (or of the Prophet and the Imáms), as well as *bábiyya*, the quality of being the Gate of God (or of the Prophet and the Imáms) "were assumed with a vague sense of deputyship or delegation from the Concealed Imám."³² The title Remembrance of God itself is derived first of all from the Qur'an, where several verses refer to the "remembrance of God." Some idea of the way in which the term is used by the Báb may, therefore, be thought to involve the several meanings which these quranic passages contained for the Akhbári exegetical tradition, a tradition of reading the Holy Book of Islam with which the Báb's own reading had much in common.³³ And so, a brief synopsis of some of this material will not be out of place.

One work which summarizes much of the interpretation of the Qur'an which is said to come directly from the Imams is the introduction to a work entitled *Tafsír mir'át al-anwár* by Abú al-Ḥasan al-Isfahání (d. 1138/1725-6). Isfahání begins by saying that the word *dhikr* may have several possible references. The first is the Qur'an itself, followed by the Prophet (*an-nabí*), 'Alí, the Imáms, *waláya* (divinely sanctioned guar-

dianship), and *imāma* (divinely sanctioned leadership; both terms imply absolute obedience to the Imām), and finally the act of reminding people of God's blessing and beneficence. This last possibility is, however, applicable only in the case of the Prophet and the Imāms. Iṣfahānī then cites the appropriate verse, together with its explanation by one of the Imāms, for each of these possibilities.³⁴ The epithet *adh-dhikr al-ḥakīm* (Qur'an 3:58) is said to apply both to 'Alī and the other Imāms. These latter, according to 'Allāma al-Ḥillī,³⁵ are referred to as *adh-dhikr* because they mention those things which benefit mankind, like the sciences of divine unity (*'ulūm at-tawḥīd*), the return (*al-ma'ād*), and the other verities which are connected with *walāya*. Iṣfahānī cites another tradition from aṣ-Ṣādiq in explanation of Qur'an 20:124 ("but whosoever turns away from my remembrance"). The Imām said: "That is (*ya'ni*) from the *walāya* of 'Alī."³⁶ Iṣfahānī quotes the seventh Imām, Mūsā, as saying that the *walāya* of 'Alī is the password (*tadhkira*, i.e., to enter paradise) for the godfearing. Iṣfahānī says that, in general, all of the interpretations (*ta'wīlāt*) of the word *dhikr* refer either explicitly (*ṣarīḥān*) or implicitly (*ḍimnan*) to the *walāya* of 'Alī.³⁷ Iṣfahānī closes his discussion of this word, with the following statement:

In *al-Kāfī*, aṣ-Ṣādiq is quoted as saying about the verse [Qur'an 39:45], "When God is alone mentioned, then shudder the hearts of those who believe not," that is [this phrase should be understood to mean]: "When God is remembered through obedience to that member of the family of Muḥammad [i.e., the Imām] whom all were commanded to obey." And he said about Qur'an 41:12 "when God was called upon only, you disbelieved,"³⁸ "That is, [disbelieved] in the *walāya* of him for whom God commanded *walāya* . . ." This is why the Imāms are the only possessors of the remembrance (*ulū adh-dhikr*), as in the statement of aṣ-Ṣādiq: "We are the possessors of the remembrance and the possessors of knowledge . . ." And thus they are the ones who follow the Remembrance, as aṣ-Ṣādiq is quoted in *al-Kāfī* on the verse: "Thou warnest only him who follows the Remembrance . . ."

[Qur'an 36:11] where all of the interpretations which were applied to the other verses are applicable, according to [aṣ-Ṣādiq's] statement: "That is to say, 'Alí is the explanation (*bayán*) of the *ta'wíl* of *dhikr*.'" So understand.

... It is possible, from what we have said, that the *ta'wíl* of *tadhkir* and its like, may be as a synonym for admonition (*tanbīh*) and contemplation of the truth (*tadabbur fī 'l-ḥaqq*) which is the *walāya*, viz, that obedience must be to the people of the House, and that one must abandon allegiance to everyone else. . . . As for *adh-dhikr*, this word also signifies 'Alí, and there is no doubt that it includes the Imáms and even their perfect *shí'a* [*shí'atuhum al-kummál*]. Thus in one of the *ḥadīth* 'Alí said: "In the Qur'an I am designated by several names, try to master them and beware that you do not err." Then he mentioned several of them and said: "I am *adh-dhikr* implied in the verse: "Those who remember God." [Qur'an 3:191].³⁹

The above clearly illustrates a cardinal principle of all Shiism: the two sources of religious authority, the Qur'an and the Imáms, function in a complementary manner—to such a degree that their respective titles are interchangeable. *Dhikr* may designate either the written scripture (the Qur'an), or the human form which has been designated as the bearer of divine authority (the Prophet, or one of the Imáms). Often the former is referred to as the "silent Book" (*al-kitáb aṣ-ṣámit*), while the latter is referred to as the "speaking Book" (*al-kitáb an-nátiq*).⁴⁰ In the same way, both the written text and the human bearer of authority may be referred to as *imám*.⁴¹ These categories and their mutual dependency derive from, among other statements, the *ḥadīth ath-thaqalayn*, in which the Prophet says that his legacy to the community consists of "two important things": the Qur'an and his descendants. The underlying assumption of this *Shí'í* principle is that a text, in this case the Qur'an, is susceptible to multiple interpretations, and that in order to minimize disharmony within the community resulting from conflicting interpretations, a single interpreter must be established and recognized.⁴²

In this regard, the principle or *rukn* ("pillar," "support") of *walāya* contains within it profound implications for the principles of interpretation, as a result of which the preeminent function of the *walī* (who may be, in this case, either the Prophet or one of the Imāms) is precisely that of interpreter (*mutarjim*) par excellence. This function is designated in early Ismā'īlī literature by the epithet *an-nātiq al-wāḥid* (the single speaker), a term which bespeaks the absolute authority (ontological, eschatological, hermeneutical, legal, and political), involved in the office of *imām/walī*.⁴³ For the present discussion, it is important to note that the idea of a "single speaker" resurfaced in more recent years, with all of these implications, in the writings of the *Shaykhīs*. The distinguishing feature of the *Shaykhī* concept of *waḥdat al-nātiqa*, however, resides in the very fact that its bearer must remain unknown. The *nātiq wāḥid* occupies the summit of the *Shaykhī* spiritual hierarchy of categories of believers such as *abwāb*, *nuqabā'*, and *nujabā'*, who are likewise unidentifiable during the time of the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. Corbin states:

The *shaykhs* of the *Shaykhī* tradition have always affirmed that in every age this *nātiq wāḥid*, the "perfect *Shi'ī*" and supreme *bāb* of the Imām exists; but none among them have ever pretended that it was himself, nor pretended to be recognized as such. Far from it. They have affirmed his *existence*, because it is impossible that the human world, earthly humanity, be deprived of this existence, but they have likewise affirmed the impossibility of his manifestation, that is to say, the impossibility of men having the capacity to recognize him, to "determine" him, or proclaim the name of him in person.⁴⁴

The idea of an anonymous spiritual elite is, of course, a very old one,⁴⁵ and as the above quotation, which is Corbin's summary of the doctrine as explained by Abu'l-Qāsim Ibrāhīmī, Sarkār Āqā (d. 1389 A.H./1969 C.E., the fifth successor of *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī), indicates, it is also a very durable one. That it is in some measure faithful to the spirit of early

Shaykhism is confirmed by a similar statement, written by the Báb himself, in the Commentary on the Súrat al-Baqara. In this statement, the Báb refers to the Shaykhí doctrine of the four supports: *tawhíd*, the unity of God; *nubúwa*, prophethood; *wişáya*, the successorship of the Imáms; and the fourth support, *al-rukn al-rábi*, the connection between the Qá'im (Hidden Imám) and the believers:

God has caused these three [confession, respectively, of *tawhíd*, *nubúwa*, and *wişáya*] to appear because of man's need for them, but He has veiled one [the fourth, "*al-ism al-maknún al-makhzún*," "*al-rukn al-rábi*," the name of the Qá'im, and by implication, his spokesman or *báb*] on account of man's incapacity (*li-'adam ihtimál al-khalq*).⁴⁶

The existence of such a statement in this earlier work by the Báb, contrasted with the proclamation contained in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph written only a few months later, indicates a profound change in the Báb's attitude. Whereas before it was imperative that the name of the 'Qá'im remain hidden "in the souls of the Shí'a,"⁴⁷ it is now incumbent upon all men to recognize him speaking in the person of the Báb. That the Báb intended that he be regarded as the exclusive representative of the Qá'im is confirmed in the quotations cited below. The claim of the Báb to be either the personification of the heretofore more or less abstract principle of the Gate of the Imám, or of the Imám himself, could not but be received as a scandal and profanation of an old Shí'í doctrine, which had long since been "metaphorized" beyond any danger of vulgarization, or perhaps more importantly, politicization.

The irreconcilable nature of these two attitudes is reminiscent of a similar oscillation in Sufism. On the one hand, there is the above-noted doctrine of the "hidden elite," and on the other hand, the tendency among some mystics to make various grandiose claims to spiritual authority. An example of the

latter may be found in the early figure of Sahl at-Tustarí (d. 283 A.H./896 C.E.),⁴⁸ or later in the writings of Ibn 'Arabí (d. 638A.H./1240 C.E.).⁴⁹ At-Tustarí's claim to be the "proof of God" (*ḥujjat alláh*) is interesting in itself as a case of Sufi/Shí'í terminological confluence, particularly in view of the fact that the claimant lived ten years into the period of the Shí'í "lesser occultation." It is during this period, which began in 260/873-4, that according to tradition, the preeminent Shí'í *ḥujja*, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-'Askarí, the Twelfth or Hidden Imám, became inaccessible to the main body of believers.⁵⁰ Even more striking is the gloss anonymously provided for this statement: "[He means] the pole (*qutb*) around which revolves the millstone (*raḥan*)."⁵¹ The similarity between this statement and the opening line of the *Khutbatu'sh-shiqshiqiyya* ascribed to 'Alí is too striking to be ignored.⁵² At this time, however, one can do no more than note in passing such Sufi/Shí'í cross-fertilizations.⁵³

At some point, there occurred a radical change in the Báb's writing on this subject. That such a change should occur in a single individual, as opposed to the above doctrinal differences which the history of Sufism as a whole records, is a phenomenon of some significance. In addition, the fact that so many of the Báb's early followers were members of the Shaykhí school⁵⁴ indicates that a similar change occurred in their attitude as well, insofar as they had previously held that the Qá'im, or his representative, must remain unknown.⁵⁵ It may be assumed that the transition from being a follower of Sayyid Kázim Rashtí to being a champion of the Báb was brought about, at least partly, by what was perceived to be a certain continuity of theme between the teachings of the two masters. Corbin and Sarkár Áqá may have been repulsed by the rupture of the "eschatalogical hope,"⁵⁶ (which appears to function for both of them as *the* creative tension of individual spirituality) represented by the phenomenon of *le bâ-bisme*. However, the historical fact that the Báb's message

(including presumably, that part of his message which invoked those venerable Shí'í symbols, such as *dhikr*, *báb*, and the like) was enthusiastically embraced (and by Shaykhís) indicates that the power which resided in such words was too great to be monopolized by philosophy.

Several factors seem to have played an important role in effecting this change: the visions which the Báb claims to have received prior to writing the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph; the credibility lent to such claims by the Báb's saintly character which was universally acknowledged⁵⁷; the disarray in which the followers of Sayyid Kázim Rashti found themselves upon the death of their leader⁵⁸; and perhaps most importantly, the intense atmosphere of messianic expectation which permeated the Shí'í world at this time.⁵⁹ A somewhat cynical interpretation suggests that the Báb and his writings were manipulated by more sophisticated men, dissatisfied with the political and religious status quo.⁶⁰ This calls to mind early orientalist interpretations of Islam, in which any possible explanation for Muḥammad's prophecy (and therefore the subsequent success of Islam) was preferable to one which simply acknowledged that Muḥammad, and those who followed him, sincerely thought that he was a prophet. That the Báb considered himself as having been "chosen" to fulfill the Shí'í prophecies seems clear.⁶¹

For textual evidence of this transformation in the nature of the Báb's claims, reference may be made to statements in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph like the following unequivocal one, which is in the form of a general address by the Báb on behalf of the Hidden Imám:

O servants of the Merciful! Take not friends from among the disbelievers as opposed to the *sábīqín* [i.e., the "Letters of the Living"] from the believers. He who comes to God disbelieving in the Book and in this Remembrance of ours (*dhikriná hádhá*) will have nothing from God.⁶²

Earlier in the same chapter, the Báb has written, again in the voice of the Imám:

Indeed, We have sent down this Book with the truth from God to our Servant⁶³ and have made all the verses in it clear (*muḥkamát*), not ambiguous (*mutashábihát*). And none knows their interpretation (*ta'wíla-há*) except God and whomsoever We desire from among the sincere servants of God. Therefore, ask the Remembrance their interpretation (*ta'wíl*). Indeed, as decreed in the Book, He has, through the bounty of God, knowledge of all its verses.⁶⁴

Quite apart from identifying the author as *dhikr*, this passage is a good example of the way in which the Báb improvised on quranic material.⁶⁵ In this case Qur'an 3:7, which establishes the hermeneutical categories for all Qur'an interpretation, has been radically changed. Whereas in the Qur'an, "the Book," (i.e., the Qur'an proper) has been described as containing two basic types of verses, the Báb (or the Hidden Imám) annuls one of these categories, namely that of "ambiguous verses" (*mutashábihát*). One of the implications of this is that the true meaning of the Book, particularly insofar as it foretells the advent of the Qá'im and the events surrounding his return, is completely, that is to say "unambiguously," accessible through the interpretations of the Báb. In addition, the "clear verses" (*muḥkamát*) are also subject to interpretation. This differs from the quranic original which can be interpreted as stating that a number of qualified persons (*al-rásikhún*), "those whose knowledge is sound," are capable of interpreting the verses.⁶⁶ In the present case, it would appear that it is the Remembrance alone who is qualified to comment on the text.

Following the above quotation, the Báb has written:

Those who disbelieve in the Most Great Remembrance of God, neither their wealth nor their children will avail them . . .⁶⁷

It is, of course, possible that in this passage the "Most Great Remembrance of God" (*dhikr alláh al-akbar*) refers to the Book, rather than to the Báb. However, it seems clear from the above that *dhikr* refers to a person, in this case the person of the Báb.⁶⁸ In the same chapter the Báb has written, paraphrasing Qur'an 3:14:

Indeed God has appointed an excellent abode for those who assist the exalted Remembrance of God (*dhikr alláh al-'alí*) with their hands and their tongues and their wealth for the love of God, the Self-Sufficient.⁶⁹

It is important to note the reference here to the Báb's own name ('Alí) in the epithet. This provides further support for the identification of the Báb with the *dhikr*. The following passage, which combines frequent quranic images, also tends to support this reading:

In the origination of night and day and their appearance (*ibláju-humá*), and the bringing forth of the living from the dead, and the bringing forth of the dead from the living are signs (*áyát*) for this Most Great Remembrance of God (*li-dhikr alláh al-akbar hádhá*). Thus it is recorded in the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-hafíz*) in the presence of God, the Exalted (*al-'alí*).⁷⁰

The following extended final excerpt is a good example of the way in which the language of the Qur'an and the "Akh-bárí code" are combined:

O People! If you believe in God alone then follow me in the Most Great Remembrance of God (*fí dhikri alláh al-akbar*) from your Lord that God might forgive you your sins. Verily, God is Forgiving and Merciful to the believers. Verily, We have chosen the messengers through Our Word and preferred some of their progeny over others through the Great Remembrance of God (*dhikr alláh al-kabír*), and concealed it as decreed in the Book. And We

have given to Thee [i.e., the Báb] the authority of the Gates (*ḥukm al-abwáb*) by the permission of God, the All-Hearing. And God is a witness over all things. And We sent down Our spirit upon Mary and We accepted from the wife of 'Imrán her vow to God, the Exalted (*al-'alí*). And God is apprised of his servants, the believers. And We gave to the Prophet Zachariah the glad tidings (*dhikriyan*) of Our name Yahyá [John the Baptist], confirming this Most Great Word of God (*kalimat alláh al-akbar hádhá*), and thus We appointed him a chief (*sayyid*) and a chaste one in the Mother Book. Indeed, the likeness of the creation of the worlds in the sight of God is as the likeness of Our cause (*amruná*). When it is Our wish, We but say to it, "Be thou," and it is called into being (*naqúl la-hu kun fa-kána*) in the precincts of the fire in the Book of God, the All-Praised (*al-ḥamíd*). Verily, God has taught Thee the knowledge of the Book from the *furqán* and the Gospel and the Torah and the Psalms, and whatever is beyond them of the Scriptures. And in the estimation of Thy Lord, Thou art abiding at the gate of the point of the hidden *bá'*. Verily, We have revealed unto Thee (*awḥayná*) Our hidden tidings and sent down unto Thee this book through the power of Truth. We have forbidden unto Thee unlawful deeds and decreed goodly deeds that the people might believe in Thy word (*bi-dhikrika*) . . . Verily, those who fancy that they can compete with Thee to any degree in knowledge, sink from the sky to a wretched earth. God is witness over all things. God has touched Thy Being (*dhát*) with Our Beings [a reference to all the Imáms] and Thine Essence (*kaynúna*) shineth with the light of the Essence of God, the Ancient, Our Lord. And God is powerful over all things. And the infidels (*mushrikún*) themselves have plotted against Thy word (*dhikrika*), but they harm only themselves. Indeed, God fulfills His Covenant, and I have purified Thee and made my claim on Thee and raised Thee up to God, the True One, so that Thou rulest by the permission of God, on the Day of Resurrection, about that wherein mankind disagrees concerning the exalted Remembrance of God (*dhikr alláh al-'alí*). And God is witness over all things. Some of the people of the city have said: "We are God's helpers." But, when the Remembrance came suddenly upon them, they turned away from assisting us. Indeed God, My Lord and Thy Lord, is the True One, so worship Him.

And this is a high road (*ṣirāt 'alī*) in the estimation of Thy Lord—straight. Ere long will God judge among mankind with the Truth, then they will not find themselves any sanctuary from the rule of God, the Pure. Indeed, this command is ordained in the Mother Book.⁷¹

This passage, as in the case with so many others in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph, is developed around a section of the Qur'an. By seizing upon a key quranic word or phrase, usually in existing quranic sequence, the Báb elaborates his own particular message through paraphrase. This method, by which the Báb weaves his own words into the fabric of the Qur'an, is analyzed elsewhere⁷²; this particular chapter, the *Súrat al-Īmán*, of the Báb's *tafsír* is constructed around the *Súrat Āl-i 'Imrān* of the Qur'an (3:1–60 approximately). In any case, the above passages, which are typical of those found in each of the other one-hundred-ten chapters of the work, seem to indicate that the Báb is intended by the Hidden Imám (his alter-ego) to be regarded as the personification of the remembrance of God. As we have seen, a source for such personification may be found in the works of Akhbárí *tafsír*, where the Prophet and Imáms are identified either individually or collectively as *dhikr*.

Quite apart from the rigorous effort of the *Shaykhís*, and others before them (e.g., Mullá Ṣadrá, and apparently the Báb himself in *al-Baqara*) to insulate belief from the harshness of the world, such terms as *dhikr* and *báb* are seen, especially here in this work of the Báb, to have a life of their own. The ideas which they convey: savior, guide, refuge, and so forth, are finally simply too appealing to remain in a philosophical realm to which the "common man" has no access. For the *Shaykhís*, particularly the post-Rashtí *Shaykhí* authors, mankind in general is now, and will be for an indefinite span of time, incapable of recognizing the spiritual grandeur of an actual theophany in the person of an Imám (*nāṭiq, báb, dhákir*,

or *dhikr*). This is so because such recognition necessitates a spiritual correspondence between the theophany and the one who recognizes it.⁷³ The *Shaykhís* imply that such a correspondence can be expected in only a few cases. On the other hand, the proclamation that such an Imám has appeared "in the world" suggests a view of humanity as not essentially flawed, but potentially perfect in all the ways that the Imám himself is perfect, namely as the locus for the appearance of the innumerable divine attributes of God. An announcement such as the one contained in the *The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph* refuses to accept that such a capacity is limited to an elite.⁷⁴

In addition, the *Shaykhí* belief, taught by Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, that the world was on the verge of entering a new cycle which would involve a new and higher level of man's spiritual maturity could have suggested to those numerous *Shaykhí* students who were to become followers of the Báb that it was no longer necessary, or perhaps even possible to rely on the argument of "incapacity" as a safeguard against the dangers (spiritual and political) inherent in recognizing an actual person as the bearer of *waláya*.⁷⁵

Báb.

Every writer who has made mention of the Báb has pointed out that this title assumed by him at the beginning of his mission signifies in Arabic "Gate" or "Door," but in specifying that whereunto he professed to be the "Gate" they are no longer in accord.⁷⁶

—E. G. Browne

The Imám, or Qá'im, was a prominent topic in the Báb's earlier commentary on *Baqara*. It has been argued that while in that work the Báb did recognize the Qá'im as a spiritual principle which had been "deposited" into the souls of the believers, he also spoke of the eventual government (*wizára*,

dawla) of the Qá'im.⁷⁷ Granted, these terms are susceptible of an esoteric or spiritual interpretation. But, it is important to note that among the Shaykhís the usual discussion of *qiyáma* ("resurrection") involved recourse to elaborate discussions of subtle and dense time as well as to such "imaginal" locations as *húrqalyá*, or the *'alam al-mithál*.⁷⁸ Neither of these terms appear in the commentary on *Baqara*, or, for that matter, in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph. It may be argued that either the Báb, as a student of Shaykhí philosophy, had taken all of these terms and the ideas which they implied for granted and, therefore, found it unnecessary to employ them in that work; or that, for whatever reasons, he did not subscribe to the theory which they suggested. If he did not subscribe to the theory, it seems plausible to expect that he, along with a number of his early followers, many of whom were avowed Shaykhís, anticipated the appearance of an actual person in the capacity of Qá'im—the return of the Hidden Imám. A third possibility, in line with Amanat's analysis, is that the Báb was far less influenced by the Shaykhís than is commonly believed.⁷⁹ At this point in the study of the Báb's life and work, this last possibility stands out as being the most likely of the three, although, as we have seen, there are clear points of agreement between the Báb and the Shaykhís in certain areas. It is, in any case, left open as to whether the Shaykhís, notwithstanding their terribly recondite theories of *qiyáma*, did not also expect an actual Imám to appear.

One of the most frequent titles assumed by or "bestowed upon" the author of this commentary is indeed that of "gate" (*báb*). Because of this, and because it is the title by which 'Alí-Muḥammad Shírází is best known, it is appropriate to treat in some detail what is undoubtedly a very important word. The better its use in the commentary is properly grasped, the better our ability to understand this rather difficult work. For if the term indicates, even at this stage of development of the Báb's message, something beyond a mere "herald" of future

events, namely a kind of prophethood, then the text, unusual as it is, must be read as a "new scripture" (as is in fact stated in the work).⁸⁰ In the face of new prophecy, we are well-advised to expect a departure from the rules.⁸¹ That those readers of the revelation who became followers of the Báb would have found in the work sufficient proof of such claims indicates that, however outlandish or bizarre the work might appear to Western readers, it undoubtedly had meaning for those who were perhaps in the best position to judge it.

The word *báb* occurs in almost every chapter of the text, usually several times. Sometimes it appears simply as *báb al-láh* (the Gate of God):

Verily, those who disbelieve in the sublime Gate of God (*bi-báb al-láh al-rafi'*), indeed We have ordained for them a painful chastisement by the authority of God.⁸²

At other times, it appears as *báb imámikum* (the Gate of your Imám)

Did not the Remembrance and the Book come to you from all directions with the most great truth calling: "O people! I am the Gate of your awaited Imám . . ." ⁸³

or, as *hádhá 'l-báb* (this Gate)

Indeed, mankind is wrongfully neglectful and contentious concerning this Most Great Gate of Our mighty Cause. And He is God, the Exalted (*al-'alí*), the Great.⁸⁴

Dhálíka 'l-báb ("that Gate", "that is the Gate"; "this Gate", "this is the Gate") is also frequently encountered⁸⁵ and is seen to exploit the ambiguity associated with *dhálíka 'l-kitáb* [Qur'an 2:2].⁸⁶ Such a usage represents a particularly deft allusion to the Shí'í doctrine of the Imám as Book and the Book as Imám, discussed above.

Several times, the author is referred to as *báb alláh al-akbar* (the Most Great Gate of God), *al-báb al-akbar*, (the Most Great Gate), or *dhálíka al-báb al-a'zam* (that/this Most Mighty Gate).⁸⁷ These usages find their parallel in others, such as *adh-dhíkr alláh al-akbar* (the Most Great Remembrance of God), or *kali-mat alláh al-akbar (sic)* (the Most Great Word of God).⁸⁸ Other epithets, such as *báb alláh al-rafi'* (the Sublime Gate of God) are also found.⁸⁹ Several times the *ahl al-báb* (the people of the Báb) are referred to, indicating presumably those who have recognized the claims put forth:

Verily, your Lord God said: "I am truly merciful to those of My servants who are believers from among the people of the Gate."⁹⁰

Similarly, the *sabíl al-báb* (the path of the Gate) or some variation is often read:

He is God, the Truth, He of whom [it is said] "There is no God but Him." He has desired only that you serve sincerely in the path of this Gate.⁹¹

A most important usage of the term appears in the following:

inna hukm ad-dunyá wa'l-ákhira 'alá khátam al-abwáb fí nuqṭati 'l-báb hawl an-nár qad kána fí umm al-kitáb maḥtúman.

Indeed, the rule of the world and the hereafter [devolves] upon the Seal of the Gates in the Point of the Gate in the precincts of fire, and is firmly established in the Mother Book.⁹²

An indication of how the Báb meant these references to be understood is found in such statements as:

wa inná nahnu qad rafa'ná daraját al-abwáb bi-qudrat alláh al-akbar bi'l-ḥaqq wa inna adh-dhíkr hádhá la-huwa al-murád bi'l-'alím laday al-ḥakím wa huwa 'lláh qad kána bi'l-ḥaqq maḥmúdan.

We have elevated the rank of the gates through the most great

power of God. This Remembrance is He Who is intended as the Knower of all things (or, He who is intended by the divine name "learned") before Him Who is the All-Wise. And verily, He is God, the All-Praised.⁹³

Such a statement appears to support the idea put forth elsewhere that as a result of the unrelenting negative theology of Shaykhism, the Imáms and the Prophet came to fill the "void" left by the *deus absconditus* (the hidden God).⁹⁴ By negative theology is meant the classical view of God as being beyond any human conception, including "pure being." Thus all that can be known of God is known through the Prophet and the Imáms, who represent, collectively, and individually, the *deus revelatus* (the revealed God). Clearly, the two terms *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus* refer to two modes of the divinity, rather than to two distinct entities.⁹⁵ In this context, the rank of *bábiyya* is elevated to fill the position otherwise occupied by the Imáms. Nonetheless, there appears to be a certain amount of reluctance in recent studies to acknowledge that the Báb at this time was claiming such an exalted spiritual rank.

While it is certainly true that the term *báb* can refer to those who represented the Hidden Imám during the period of the minor occultation (i.e., 260 A.H./873-4 A.D. to 329 A.H./941 A.D.) during which time he communicated to his followers through a series of four individuals who were known as "Gates," "Deputies," or "Emissaries" (*abwáb*, *nuwwáb*, or *sufará*), it is also true that the term has a great many connotations as a function of its use in various traditions ascribed to the Imáms and in other contexts.⁹⁶ Nicolas, in arguing that the title denotes spiritual authority beyond "mere" *bábiyya* (namely *imáma*), has discussed the importance of certain traditions which designate the Imáms themselves as "gates."⁹⁷

But there continues to be some equivocation about the significance of the term as applied to the Báb in this commentary. Amanat writes:

It is almost certain that references to the Concealed Imám in the works of the Báb are, even from the early stages, references to the status which inwardly he claimed for himself.⁹⁸

This statement may be thought to be supported by those passages in the *Tafsír súrat al-baqara*, which speak of the Qá'im as an esoteric principle, perhaps even ultimately accessible to all believers. Elsewhere, however, Amanat refers to the vagueness of the terminology in the commentary, or its ambiguity.⁹⁹ The conclusion put forth by him is that the *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* announces certain claims of the Báb, but not his "real" claims.¹⁰⁰ The point to be made in this article is that within the Báb's immediate literary and social milieu, such terms as *báb* and *dhikr* had acquired a sufficiently broad semantic range to accommodate a hierarchy of meanings. It would, therefore, be wrong to suppose that the Báb's perception of his spiritual rank had evolved or developed from seeing himself as a representative of the Imám, to possessing the rank of *imáma*, and ultimately to being a manifestation or claiming divinity, merely because his language became less ambiguous as time went by. To repeat, a study of the *Tafsír súrat al-baqara* has shown that the Báb's concept of spiritual authority was one in which the Prophet and the Imám could be equated, in some sense, with God. Moreover, one of the ontological levels of *imáma* was seen to be *bábiyya* or gate-hood, the level of the appearance of the principle of *imáma* to the believers.

For our purposes, this *ḥadīth* literature has been conveniently summarized in Iṣfahání's dictionary.¹⁰¹ The Akhbári commentator of the Qur'an says that both *báb* and *abwáb* occur in many traditions, meaning that the Imáms themselves are the gates of God, and the gate by which the believer approaches God. He quotes from the *Kitáb kanz al-fawá'id*,¹⁰² a tradition in which the Prophet, addressing Abú Dharr (an early hero of the Shí'a) says: "'Alí is the greatest gate of God (*báb*

allāh al-akbar), he who desires God let him enter the gate." As we have seen, the Báb has appropriated this very title to himself. Iṣfahání then quotes from the book of Sulaym bin Qays:¹⁰³

I heard Salmán al-Fárisí . . . say that 'Alí is a gate, God opens it and whoever enters is a believer and whoever goes out of it is a disbeliever (*káfir*).¹⁰⁴

Iṣfahání says that this meaning for the word *báb* will also be adduced in the reports he lists in his article on *al-bayt*, as well as in the famous *ḥadīth mutawátir* (a tradition which has no gaps in its chain of transmission, implying that it is very reliable) in which Muḥammad declared: "I am the city of knowledge and 'Alí is its gate." In addition, it occurs in some of the reports that cite the variant: "I am the house of wisdom and 'Alí is its gate."¹⁰⁵

Iṣfahání continues with material from the *Manáqib* of Ibn Shahráshúb,¹⁰⁶ which quotes 'Alí as having said: "I am the gate of God through which anyone who comes to God must enter prostrate." He then quotes aṣ-Ṣádiq from the *Ma'ání al-akhbár*:¹⁰⁷ "'Alí said, 'I am the gate of repentance (*ána báb ḥiṭṭatīn*, Qur'an 2:58). Iṣfahání says that this *ḥadīth* will come again on the article on *ḥiṭṭatun* and *safínatun* where the meaning is that the Imáms are like the "gate of repentance" of the *Banī Isrá'íl* mentioned in Qur'an 2:58. This statement also occurs in the course of the article on *as-súr* (wall) (Qur'an 57:13): "And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof (*báṭinuhu*) is mercy, and against the outward thereof (*ẓáhiruhu*) is chastisement." The commentator says that the "gate" is 'Alí, just as the word *gate* in Qur'an 15:14 is 'Alí. He adds that in some of the reports the Imáms are said to be the "gates to the Qur'an," the "gate of faith," the "gate of immortality" (*báb al-muqám*), the "gates of Paradise," "the gate of laws," the "most sought gate," the "gate of certitude," and finally the "gate of piety."

Iṣfahání then quotes the transmission of al-Kaf'amí from the fifth Imám, al-Báqir:

God is concealed from men by his prophet and the trustees (*awṣiyá*) who came after him to whom he gave all the knowledge men would require.¹⁰⁸ When the time came for the Prophet to give 'Alí the divine wisdom he said: "I am the city of knowledge and 'Alí is its gate." In any case, God had already made it obligatory upon men to submit to 'Alí in his statement: "And enter in at the gate, prostrating, and say, 'Unburdening (*hittatun*)!' We will forgive you your transgressions, and increase [reward for] the good-doers" [Qur'an 2:58], that is, those who do not doubt the excellence of the gate, and the loftiness of his power."¹⁰⁸

Returning to *Káfi*, where 'Alí himself is quoted, Iṣfahání cites the statement: "God appointed knowledge for a certain people and imposed upon the servants obedience to them through His statement: 'Enter the houses through their gates' [Qur'an 2:189]. The 'houses' here are the houses of the knowledge which had been entrusted to the prophets. 'Their gates' are the trustees of the prophets."

Iṣfahání closes this article with his own views. He says that these last two *ḥadīth* and their like, especially those in his article on *al-bayt* and elsewhere, indicate that the intention is according to the exegetical principle of spiritual metaphor (*al-murád at-tashbíhát al-ma'nawíyya*). "The prophets themselves are the gates of the religion (*dín*) of God, and the signposts of His religion (*ma'álim díníhi*),¹⁰⁹ and the means of passing through the gates to Him for men. At the same time, the trustees (*awṣiyá*; sing., *waṣī*) are the gates of the prophets, and the means whereby men approach the prophets." He then quotes the Prophet, who said to 'Alí: "You are the gate to me for whoever enters it, and I am the gate of God; any one but you who enters it has not attained me and will not attain God." Then God sent down the verse: "It is not piety to come to the houses from the backs of them . . ." [Qur'an 2:189]. Iṣfahání closes his discussion with the following:

It is obvious that the gate of the gate of God is the gate of God. In this sense, the ulama are the gates to the Imáms, nay, rather [they are] also the gates of God, according to this reasoning.¹¹⁰ And since such is the cause for the attainment of faith (*al-fawz bi'l-ímán*), and repentance of sins (*ḥaṭṭ adh-dhunúb*), and access to all the paradises, and the knowledge of the divine laws, they are named *gates*. 'Alí is the greatest gate (*al-báb al-akbar*), inasmuch as he is clearly given this name in many of the reports. Likewise, the *khulafá' al-jawr*, and their following, and the ulama of the opposition and their companions, are the gates of disbelief and deviation and hell. *Ta'wil* is applied to this word in all places accordingly; only God truly knows.¹¹¹

Curiously, the author of *Anwár* makes no mention of the historical four deputies (*nuwwáb*), or gates (*abwáb*) of the Hidden Imám. In summary, *báb* can designate the prophets in general, the Prophet Muḥammad in particular, the Imáms (especially 'Alí as *al-báb al-akbar*), and even the ulama. In light of the interchangeability in Shiism of the authority of Book and Imám, it is interesting that *báb* appears to be uniquely applicable to a person. A similar case is the word *walí*.¹¹² Apart from the single possibility of interpreting *báb* as designating the Imáms in their capacity as *báb al-Qur'án* (that is, as interpreters of the Holy Book), the Qur'an itself is not mentioned in Iṣfahání's discussion of the word.

Another work which has been shown to have a bearing on the study of Shaykhism and the writings of the Báb, is Rajab Bursí's compilation of Shí'í lore entitled *Masháriq anwár al-yaqín fí asrár Amír al-Mu'mínín*.¹¹³ Aside from referring to the recitation of the *fátiḥa* as a means of "opening" the gates of heaven to the believer,¹¹⁴ Bursí quotes (in addition to quoting some of those *ḥadīth* mentioned in *Anwár*) the following:

'Alí said: "O people! we are the gates of wisdom and the keys of mercy and the masters of the community and the trustees of the book."¹¹⁵

The Messenger of God said: "When I went up to the seventh

heaven, and beyond it to the *sidrat al-muntahá* ["the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing" for the believer], and beyond it to the veils of light, my Lord called to me and said, 'O Muhammad, you are my servant, and I am your Lord, so humble yourself to me and serve me and trust in me and I will accept you as my servant and friend and messenger and will accept for you 'Alí as caliph and gate, and make him my proof against all my servants . . . To God there is a [particular] gate; whoever enters it is saved from Hell. [This gate] is the love of 'Alí. Indeed, he who loves 'Alí, God will give him, for every vein in his body and every hair thereon a city in Paradise.'" ¹¹⁶

Having examined what might be considered to be a synopsis of Akhbárí thought on the term *báb*, attention is now turned to some of the ways the title figured in some of the works of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kázim. It is important to note that both men were known by their followers as gates. ¹¹⁷ Rafati refers to a letter written by Ṭáhirih, who was one of the Letters of the Living (*ḥurúf al-ḥayy*), in which reference is made to Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kázim as the "two gates (*al-bábayn*)," and Sayyid Kázim himself as "the earlier gate of God" (*báb alláh al-muqaddam*). Sayyid Kázim was also referred to in this way by the Bábí historian al-Qatíl ibn al-Karbalá'í. ¹¹⁸ All of these sources, however, are written by Bábís who had previously been adherents of the Shaykhí school. So far, it has not been possible to locate a direct statement by either Shaykh Aḥmad or Sayyid Kázim, in which an explicit claim to *bábiyya* is made.

However, given the above range of meanings which the term *báb* was capable of bearing, it would not be surprising if these two scholars had tacitly accepted such a title as a possible metaphor for the function of the ulama. Such would offer an example of the moderate Akhbarism which the Shaykhí leaders propounded as a means of bridging the gulf between two antagonistic Shí'í trends. ¹¹⁹ It is also possible that the former followers of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kázim have

retrojected the title *báb* on to the first two masters of the Shaykhiyya, in order to emphasize a continuity between Shaykhism and the religion of the Báb. The Báb himself refers to them as gates in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph:

O ye peoples of the earth! During the time of My absence I, verily, sent down the gates unto you. However, the believers, except for a handful, obeyed them not. Formerly I sent unto you Aḥmad and more recently Kāẓim, but apart from the pure in heart amongst you, no one followed them.¹²⁰

The grammatical dual plural of *báb* is found in several places throughout the commentary, and it may be thought that wherever it occurs, it may on some level, refer to the first two leaders of the Shaykhí school.¹²¹ However, the dual plural is so widely used throughout the commentary that it should be considered a separate subject. Suffice it here to say that such high frequency of the dual form is an allusion to the language and content of the famous "Sermon on the [Two] Gulfs."¹²²

To return to the term *báb* in Shaykhí thought, commenting on a verse of a traditional Shí'í prayer of visitation: "May peace be upon you, O people of the House of Prophecy!",¹²³ Shaykh Aḥmad says that this means that the Imáms are the people of the house of prophetic knowledge because they preserve it, and this knowledge is from divine revelation (*waḥí*). In the esoteric interpretation, the "house" is the Messenger of God himself in whom *nubíuwa* was put, and the separate "houses" are all of the family of the Messenger. "However, the Prophet is the greatest house, nay rather he is the city and they are the gates." He quotes al-Báqir: "The family of Muḥammad are the gates of God and the path to Him and the summons to Paradise." He then quotes the celebrated *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says that he is the city of knowledge and 'Alí is its gate, and that no one enters this city except through

its gate. Shaykh Aḥmad also says that it is related that the Prophet said: "I am the city of wisdom."¹²⁴ In this case, wisdom means knowledge. He then quotes the *Kitāb al-iḥtijāj* of Ṭabarsī, which contains the statement of 'Alī commenting on Qur'an 2:189, about which he says: "We are the houses which God commanded to be entered by their gates, we are the gates of God and the house which should be entered thereby. He who pledges allegiance to us and confesses our *walāya* will have entered these houses through their gates, but whoever opposes us will have entered the houses from behind." Shaykh Aḥmad then cites several of the traditions which were cited by Iṣfahānī, indicating his own veneration of the Akh-bārī tradition.¹²⁵ This veneration was either already shared by, or passed on to, his successor Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī.

Sayyid Kāzīm speaks of the "Gate of God" in various ways. In one place, he refers to Muḥammad himself as the *bāb allāh*, from which those who claim to be independent have turned away.¹²⁶ Elsewhere he speaks of the divine bounties (*al-fuyūdāt*) as being the gate of God to creation (*bāb allāh ilā al-khalq*).¹²⁷ And in another passage, relating the three categories of *abdāl* ("substitutes," "saints")—*arkān*, *nuqabā'*, and *nujabā'*—to the idea of gate, he says that they are three, but one in essence (*fi 'ayn kawnihā wāḥidatun*).¹²⁸

The first is the place where divine unity appears (*mazḥar at-tawḥīd*) in the *maqām at-ṭābi'iyya*. The second is the place where prophecy appears (*mazḥar an-nubūwa*) in the same *maqām*. And the third is the place where *walāya* appears (*mazḥar al-walāya*) in the same *maqām*. Each one is a *mazḥar at-tawḥīd*, *nubūwa*, and *walāya*, and each is [simultaneously] a manifestation of the part (*mazḥar al-ba'd*) and a manifestation of the whole (*mazḥar al-kull*).¹²⁹

The inspiration for this statement is the quranic reference to the "single command (or cause)" of God, as is clear from the portions of verses immediately quoted in rapid succession as follows:

And Our command (*amrunā*) is but one (*wāḥidatun*) . . . Thou can see no disharmony (*tafāwutin*) in the creation of the Merciful . . . If it had been from any other than God they would have seen therein much disharmony.¹³⁰

So he who recognizes only one aspect is one-eyed (*a'war*), and he who recognizes [only] two aspects in one is cross-eyed (*aḥwāl*). But he who recognizes them all in one aspect, and not in three, is a true seer (*baṣīrun kāmīlun*). . . . Know that the gates of the gate and the aspects of the threshold are all one, when you consider what is inside the "house" or the "city."¹³¹ But if the sight is turned to the gates as such (*ilā nafs al-abwāb*), then the gate will disappear and the threshold becomes blocked.¹³² It is as if the gate were the same as the "house."¹³³

Here is an instance of the important theme of simultaneous veiling and revealing. If attention stops at the gate itself, then that to which it leads is lost sight of, or veiled. This is a clear warning about indiscriminant attachment to the "personality" of the person who functions as the gate. On the other hand, this same gate when approached as a means of leading beyond itself, reveals.

Elsewhere Sayyid Kāzīm, quotes the following *ḥadīth* from the tenth Imām, 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Hādī al-'Askarī (disappeared 254 A.H./868 C.E.):

When you approach the gate recite the creed (*shahāda*)¹³⁴ twice, for the gate of God is not known unless God is remembered [mentioned] near it. And if God is brought to mind near it (*'indahu*), then it is [truly] the gate, and the proof (*ad-dalīl*) and the threshold, and the path. And if God is not brought to mind in his/its presence (*'indahu*) in neither His name nor attribute, then that [particular] gate is not the gate of God.¹³⁵

The intention here of the *ḥadīth* (and of Sayyid Kāzīm) seems to be quite straightforward: if someone claims to be the "gate of God" and God is in fact not "brought to mind" when in the presence of such a claimant, then the claims are false.¹³⁶

In several places Sayyid Kázim appears to use the terms *gate* (*báb*) and *veil* (*ḥijáb*) interchangeably. Thus, in speaking of the *fátiḥa*, he says that a proper reading of it will name the one who is the “gate of gates” (*báb al-abwáb*) and the first veil of “the breath of the Merciful” (*an-nafas ar-rahmánt*).¹³⁷ Here, *báb al-abwáb* is one of the many names of the Holy Spirit, who as a primordial creature (and also as a creative principle) recites “both books”—the “book” of creation and the Qur’an proper. Commenting on the verse of the ode: “This is the curtain of the city of knowledge away from whose gate is led the one who has not entered” (*hádhá riwáq madínat al-‘ilm al-latí min bábi-há qad dulla man lá yadkhulu*), Sayyid Kázim says that three words are important here: curtain (*ar-riwáq*), city (*al-madína*), and gate (*al-báb*), the exoteric meanings of which require no interpretation.

I will mention that which has overflowed to me from the sea of Light (*baḥr an-núr*) and that which has come to me through the praise of God from the world of felicity (*‘álam as-surúr*) which has not been mentioned before, except by way of allusions.¹³⁸

He then defines “curtain” (*ar-riwáq*) as “threshold” (*janáb*), “gate of the gate” (*báb al-báb*), and “veil of the veil” (*ḥijáb al-ḥijáb*). Further, he calls it:

The pole around which the days revolve, the full moon which illumines the darkness (*badr aẓ-ẓalám*) . . . the one who combines [in his person] those teachings (*jámi‘ al-kalim*) about piety and justice, which refute, on behalf of true religion, the corruption of the exaggerators (*taḥríf al-ghálín*), . . . the judge over the flock and the rightful successor of the Imám (*khalífat al-imám*), . . . the tree of piety (*shajarat at-taqwá*), he without whom the traces of prophecy would have been effaced and without whom the pillars of *waláya* would have crumbled. . . . [He is] the one who knows, without having to learn (*al-‘álim bi-ghayr at-ta‘allum*), the understander (*al-‘arif*) of all the mysteries of Being in both the invisible and visi-

ble worlds, the dawning place of the [single] point of knowledge (*maṭla' al-'ilm*) which the ignorant have multiplied. . . . [He is] the one who knows the secret of the one and the many . . . and the secret of integration (*sirr al-jam'*) and the integration of integration (*jam' al-jam'*) and the mystery of reward and punishment . . . and the mystery of that soul, which if known, God is known.¹³⁹

One of the more important features of this passage is, of course, the reference to unlearned knowledge, sometimes referred to as *'ilm laduní* (cf. Qur'an 18:65), which was one of the credentials the Báb was eventually to claim. Sayyid Kázim continues in the same vein at some length, adducing similar equivalents for the curtain of the door of the city of knowledge. Although no proper names are mentioned, it is possible that by the words "gate" and "city", the persons (or principles) of 'Alí and Muḥammad are intended. It may also be that Rashtí here regards himself as the curtain, which both conceals and provides access to the Imám. Given however, his own scholasticism, it is difficult to see how the qualification of unlearned knowledge could be appropriated by him, unless it refers to supernatural knowledge which he acquired from the kinds of dreams or visions which both Shaykh Aḥmad and the Báb experienced.¹⁴⁰ It is also explained that the term *curtain* (*riwáq*) is equally applicable to the *abdál*, namely those souls who qualify as *arkán*, *nuqabá*, and *nujabá* (whose numbers are often set at four, thirty, and forty respectively), who will serve in their capacity as *riwáq* until the day of judgement (*yawm al-waqt al-ma'lúm*).¹⁴¹

Another aspect of *bábiyya* comes a little later; in discussing the famous *ḥadīth* in which the seven grades constitutive of spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifa*) are mentioned,¹⁴² Sayyid Kázim makes the following statement:

The gates are the [former] prophets; they were the gates of God in worldly affairs (*tashrí'*), but our Prophet is the gate of God in both the metaphysical and physical worlds (*takwín wa tashrí'*).

Existence comes to no one except through his agency (*wásiṭa*) and the agency of the *awliyá* after him, particularly the Seal of Absolute *Waláya* (i.e., 'Alí; *khátam al-waláya al-muṭlaqa*) to whom leadership (*riyása*) and sovereignty (*salṭana*) befell from the Seal of Prophecy (*nubúwa*, i.e., Muḥammad).¹⁴³

Commenting on the word *satr* (now glossed as *hijáb*, veil), which occurs in another verse of the ode, Sayyid Kázim gives it a precise meaning:

[It is] the gate which connects the higher world with the lower (*al-báb al-wáṣil wa'l-wásiṭa bayna al-'alí wa'l-sáfil*) the one who interprets the meaning of the Qur'an (*al-mutarjim li't-tibyán 'inda ta'lím al-Qur'án*) . . . to whomever does not understand. This can only be the one who unites the two stations, the tenant in the two degrees, the matter between the two matters, the one who abides over the two gulfs, the one who surveys the two wests and the two easts (*jámi' al-maqámayn, khá'iz al-martabatayn wa'l-amr bayn al-amrayn, al-wáqif 'alá at-tutunjayn, al-názir fí'l-maghribayn wa'l-mashriqayn*).¹⁴⁴

Sayyid Kázim then says that the Messenger of God is the most great veil interposed between God and His creation, and the *awliyá'* and the *khulafá* are his veils which are interposed between him and his flock:

The *walí* is the veil and gate of the Prophet (*nabí*). And this *walí* also has a gate and they are the ulama who really know (*al-'ulamá' al-'árifún al-atyáb*) and the perfect spiritual guides. They are the gate of gates (*báb al-báb*) and the veil of veils (*hijáb al-hijáb*).¹⁴⁵

Apart from seeing in this statement a possible indication for an understanding of the idea of the Fourth Support, namely as the whole body of those from among the *Shí'a* who may be considered "perfect spiritual guides," we see in all of this material how closely Sayyid Kázim accepts the wide variety of meanings given to the word *báb* in those *akhbár* quoted in

Anwār. (Cf. especially the mention of *shī'atuhum al-kummal*, "their perfect *shī'a*," above, p. 15.)

This application of the term *gate* (*báb*) to prophets is reminiscent of certain Ismá'ílí texts, such as the work ascribed to Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yamaní (tenth century C.E.), supposed author of the *Kitáb al-kashf*. It may, therefore, represent an actual case of the often suggested Ismá'ílí influence (albeit through Akhbárí Qur'an interpretation) on Shaykhí thought:

The naming of the gates: One gate is Adam and his proof (*ḥujja*) is Seth; one gate is Noah and his proof is Shem, one gate is Abraham and his proof is Ishmael; one gate is Moses and Joshua is his proof; one Gate is Jesus and Simon his proof. The proof of Muḥammad is 'Alí. The proof of Ḥasan is Ḥusayn. The Proof of 'Alí b. Ḥusayn is Muḥammad his son al-Báqir, the proof of al-Báqir is Abú 'Abd Alláh Ja'far aṣ-Ṣádiq b. Muḥammad, and thus the Imáms from the progeny of Ja'far b. Muḥammad, one after the other, until the appearance (*ẓuhúr*) of the Qá'im.¹⁴⁶

This statement is important because it suggests that the term *gate* is used as a function of relation, and not as an absolute, as is the case with other such terms (e.g., proof, *ḥujja*). Corbin, in his study of other Ismá'ílí works, has spoken of a ten-tier hierarchy for the Ismá'ílí grade of *bábiyya*,¹⁴⁷ which indicates further the all-important relativity of the term. The *báb*, according to another early text, is precisely the last Imám, "*le Résurrecteur*."¹⁴⁸ While here in the *Kitáb al-kashf*, Muḥammad is not explicitly called a gate, it is implied in the context. The passage presupposes a kind of progressive revelation which the Báb, our author, most certainly subscribed to. For example, he says that the "day of resurrection" for one religion is the advent of a new religion which is destined to supplant it.¹⁴⁹ Thus the time of Jesus was the day of resurrection for the religion of Moses, the time of Muḥammad was the day of resurrection for the religion of Jesus, and his own manifestation represents the day of resurrection for Islam.¹⁵⁰

In this regard, and in particular connection with the sura of Joseph, it is of some interest to note that an eighteenth century Ismá'ílí commentary by the thirty-third Yemení *dá'í mut-laq*, Diyá'u'd-Dín Ismá'íl ibn Hibat Alláh, interprets the first part of 12:56 ("So We established Joseph in the land") as: "That is, by his attaining to the rank of gatehood."¹⁵¹ (*wa kadhálíka makkanná li-Yúsuf fi'l-arḍ . . . , ya'ní, bi-bulúghíhi bi-rutbatí'l-bábiyya*) Clarification of what is meant here by *bábiyya* is found elsewhere in the work, where one Abú Muḥammad *Aristátálís* is mentioned as being the *násút* (human form) of the mysterious prophet-figure *Khidr*, for whom he thus functions as a veil and the *báb al-abwáb*. In this way, his earthly sovereignty functions as "the Imamic Veil", (*al-hijáb al-imámiyya*). The implication is that whoever obeys this particular political leader also obeys the higher authority on whose behalf the earthly leader functions, at one and the same time, as a concealer and a representative.¹⁵²

This commentary need not have any direct connection with the Báb's for such shared semantic relationships to exist. Given the factor of geography alone, the possibility of the Báb (or even *Shaykh* Aḥmad) ever having read it is remote. The citation is interesting because it refers to the office of *báb* in connection with earthly sovereignty, and also as a veil. It also points to a specific case of Ismá'ílí doctrinal correspondence.

Commenting on another verse in which the word *báb* is used,¹⁵³ Sayyid Kázim says that the gate, as a veil, is an intermediary:

[*Báb*] means the saintly men (*ar-rijál al-abdál*). And because it represents two relationships (i.e., one to the higher world, the other to the lower) it is named "gate."¹⁵⁴

Sayyid Kázim says that *báb* is composed of three letters, two of which are the same, which indicates the joining of the two principles (i.e., "higher" and "lower"). The other letter stands between them and indicates the ultimate unity of

both worlds. The letter *bá'* which stands for this relationship, even though it appears to be two, is in reality only one. But if it is omitted, there ceases to be a gate. The first *bá'* indicates the principle of fatherhood. The second *bá'* is the *bá'* of the *basma*, from which all existing things came forth (analogous to motherhood).¹⁵⁵

This idea of the *báb* as veil is taken up elsewhere in *Qasída*, and it appears to be one of the more important themes of the book.¹⁵⁶ Representing, therefore, a principle which simultaneously reveals and conceals, the title *báb* was admirably suited to the uses put to it by the author of the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph.

Sayyid Kázim also equates "gate" with the face of God (i.e., the Imám)¹⁵⁷; the Fourth Support, which here is further defined as the perfect master (*al-murshid al-kámil*) and just teacher (*ash-shaykh al-'ádil*). This is a contrasting view to *Shaykhí* material discussed above, in which the Fourth Support is seen to refer to a group, rather than an individual.¹⁵⁸ He several times refers explicitly to the "city of knowledge" *ḥadīth*¹⁵⁹; and in one place says that the Qur'an itself is the "gate," an equivalence we have not been able to locate in the *Akhbárí* literature.¹⁶⁰ However, as was the case in that literature as summarized in *Anwár*, there seems to be no direct reference to the early emissaries of the Hidden Imám as gates, but confirmation of this would require further study of the work. What is clear is that the word is used in a variety of ways indicating prophecy and *imáma*.

Such is the immediate background for the manner in which the Báb's first disciples could have understood the term *gate*, particularly as used in those passages mentioned above, where the author of the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph is called the "most great gate of God." As such, I do not think that the word struck them as vague. It may be, however, that those persons who allied themselves with the movement and who did not come from a *Shaykhí* or other similar milieu did not perceive all of the manifold implications of the term. This

might explain why the Báb employed other, more universally recognized titles of authority, as his movement gained in popularity. But it seems clear that his assumption of the titles *báb* and *dhikr* did, in fact, put forth his real claims right from the beginning.

NOTES

On the spelling of the word *tutunjiyya*, see note at beginning of the references of Lambden paper, p. 160.

1. Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 65. Corroboration of this date may be found in the text of the commentary where the Báb mentions that at the time of writing he is twenty-five years old. (The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 16). See the discussion of the date of composition in MacEoin, "Charismatic," pp. 157-8.

2. Browne, "The Bábís," pp. 908-909: *hádhá al-ghulám al-'Arabí al-Muhammadí al-'Alawí al-Fátimí al-Makkí al-Madaní al-Abtáhi al-'Iráqí* (The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 225). While such an adjectival litany may be foreign to Western tastes, it is of course universally regarded as one of the pillars of style in older Arabic literature, e.g. as-Suyúfí refers to the 'Abbasid "quasi-Caliph" al-Muttawakkil as: *al-Imámí al-A'zamí al-Háshimí al-'Abbási al-Mutawakkilí*. (William Y. Bell, ed. & trans., *The Mutawakkilí of as-Suyúfí* p. 15, Arabic text).

3. Ibid., quoting Rosen, *Collections*, p. 186.

4. Browne, "The Bábís," p. 909. Browne's transliteration of this passage, which occurs in the *Súrat al-'abd*, (The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 226) is: *Al-Bá'u s-sá'iratu fí'l-má'il-hurúfín* (sic) *wa'n-Nuqţatu'l-wáqifatu 'alá bábi'l-Alifeyn*.

MacEoin thinks such passages containing references to Mecca and Medina (as in *Makkí* and *Madaní*) were written after (or at least during) the Báb's pilgrimage. This would, of course explain their otherwise perhaps somewhat mysterious use. (See MacEoin, "Charismatic," p. 158.) It is also possible that, by using such adjectives, the Báb was interested in invoking the purely spiritual connotations such terms would have in calling to mind highly venerated holy places in Islam in general, and in the case of Iraq, *Shí'í* Islam in particular.

5. Browne, "The Bábís," p. 909. Although Browne gives no reference for this quotation, it may be found in the recent edition of what is persistently referred to as Ibn 'Arabí's Qur'an commentary, but which is most certainly the work of 'Abd ar-Razzáq al-Káshání, *Tafsír al-Qur'án al-Karím*, v. 1, p. 8.

6. Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, *Sharh al-qaşıda al-lámiya*, (hereafter *Qaşıda*). The edition used here is unpaginated. Page numbers supplied are counted from the recto of the title page. The *qaşıda* (ode) was written by one 'Abd al-Báqí Afandí al-Múşilí (b. 1204 A.H./1789 C.E.-d. 1278 A.H./1861 C.E.). Al-Múşilí spent most of his life in Baghdad and was a distinguished poet and the author of several works on poetry and biography. This particular ode is devoted to the seventh Imám Músá Kázim (d. 183 A.H./799-800 C.E.), and was written on the occasion of the donation of a piece of the covering of the Prophet's tomb in Medina by Sulţán Maĥmúd II to be used for the Shrine of the Imám Músá located in Kázimayn. Rashtí wrote his commentary in 1258 A.H./1842 C.E. at the request of 'Alí Riđá Páshá, then governor of Baghdad. It is possible that the original *qaşıda* (as well as the gift) was motivated by anti-Wahhábí sentiment.

For brief references to Sayyid Kázim's commentary see Rafatí, "Development," p. 133 and references; MacEoin, "Charismatic," p. 104 and references. The entire work really needs to be studied thoroughly. Corbin seems not to have taken an interest in it. Nicolas, on the other hand, has translated a passage from it, part of which corresponds to a passage cited by the renowned Bahá'í apologist, Mírzá Abú'l-Fađá'il Gulpáygání in his *Kitáb al-fará'id* (pp. 575-7) where the object is to show that *Shaykhí* writings predicted the advent of the Báb.

7. Rashtí, *Qaşıda*, p. 82. "Walí" designates the one in whom divine authority has been invested. It may also be translated as "guardian."

8. Browne, "The Bábís," p. 909. (Browne's transliteration.)

9. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, pp. 186-99. Some of this material is translated and discussed in Lawson, "The Qur'an," pp. 115-22. Briefly, these terms refer to the lower two of four hierarchical levels of divinity and its manifestation.

10. Browne, "The Bábís," p. 909.

11. Rosen, *Collections*, pp. 180 & 181.

12. This corresponds to The Báb, *Joseph*, pp. 92-8.

13. The Báb, *Joseph*, pp. 160–86.

14. Corbin refers to this as “kathenotheism.” See *En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, pp. 205–6. The idea may be found in the teachings of the Imáms themselves, for example the following one quoted in *ibid.* from ‘Alí himself.

“I am to Muḥammad as light is to light.” *Shaykh* Aḥmad al-Aḥsá’í explained this statement as follows: “This light is totally in Muḥammad, it is totally in the Imám ‘Alí, totally in Fátima, totally in the Imám Ḥasan, totally in the Imám Ḥusayn, just as it is totally in each one of the remaining Fourteen Pure Ones (i.e., Muḥammad, Fátima, and the twelve Imáms). Despite its multiplicity, it is nonetheless one. This is what the Imáms meant when they said: ‘We are all Muḥammad. The first among us is Muḥammad. The one in the middle is Muḥammad. The last of us is also Muḥammad.’”

The Báb certainly subscribed to this view. See Lawson, “The Qur’án,” *passim*.

15. MacEoin, “Concept,” p. 93; “Reactions,” pp. 16–20.

16. But giving as reason for this the fact that the text is concerned with doctrinal reflections. The genre of *tafsír* is not conditioned by the absence or presence of doctrinal reflections.

17. MacEoin, “Charismatic,” p. 158.

18. See Momen, “The Trial.” This important article analyzes the precise charges of the proceedings against one of the Báb’s disciples and examines the relevant passages of the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph, the promulgation of which led to these charges. Momen’s conclusion is the same as the one put forth here: that the Báb was claiming revelation.

19. MacEoin, “Charismatic,” p. 159. Although it is clear that “the theory behind the *tafsír* was much more complex than mere imitation of the Qur’án.” (*ibid.*, emphasis added)

20. MacEoin, “Charismatic,” p. 159, where the author gives references to the Cambridge *ms*.

21. MacEoin, “Charismatic,” p. 159.

22. The Báb, *Baqara*, p. 239.

23. MacEoin, “Charismatic,” p. 159.

24. Translated by Browne, “Remarks,” p. 265. Part of this passage is cited in MacEoin, “Charismatic,” p. 157.

25. The Báb, *Writings*, p. 119.
26. MacEoin, "Sources," pp. 125-6.
27. Landolt, *Correspondance*, p. 21.
28. Balyuzi, *The Báb*, p. 231, fn. 11.

29. Because these terms are used with such frequency, it would be impossible to indicate all those hundreds of passages in which they occur. For those titles mentioned here, the first three may be read at The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 4 and the last may be found at The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 8.

30. Browne (trans.), *New History*, pp. 336, 359, 374, 376 (*jenáb-i dhikr*), 382, 394; *idem*, "Catalogue and Description," p. 303.

31. MacEoin, *Reactions*, p. 18.

32. Amanat, "Early," p. 173.

33. See Lawson, "The Qur'án," e.g., pp. 78-114.

34. *Anwár*, pp. 151-2; for *dhikr* as Qur'án: 43:44, *ḥadīth* quoted from *al-Kāfī* (see Kulaynī in bibliography) on the authority of aṣ-Ṣādiq; for *dhikr* as Prophet: 16:43, *ḥadīth* from aṣ-Ṣādiq; for *dhikr* as 'Alī: 62:9, from the *Kitāb al-ikhtisāṣ* of al-Mufīd, *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Bāqir (*Anwár*, p. 26); for *dhikr allāh al-akbar* as the Imāms: 29:45, *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Bāqir (*Anwár*, pp. 7-8). References in parentheses indicates that Iṣfahānī does not mention these reports in the course of his article, but refers to them as having already been cited in one of the three prologues to his *tafsīr*.

35. "*Qāla shaykhunā al-'allāma*," *Anwár*, p. 152.

36. A similar interpretation is given for Qur'an 18:101, 74:31.

37. *Anwár*, p. 152.

38. *Anwár* here misquotes the Qur'an, replacing *invoked* (*udi'ya*) with *mentioned* (*dhukira*). Nonetheless, such a reading is in line with Akhbārī commentary, cf. Bahrānī, *Burhān*, v. 4, pp. 77-8, #2 where the two verses are said to complement one another.

39. *Anwár*, p. 152. In the *Qaṣīda*, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī says "Each prophet is the embodiment (*ḥāṣil*) of one of the divine names which are specific to his station and rank . . . the names, from the point of view of unity and multiplicity, are as individual drops from the sea of absolute *nubūwa*, and the embodiment of this latter rank is the seal of the prophets (Muḥammad) . . . who is the bearer of the *ism al-a'zam al-'azam al-a'zam*, and the one who mentions (*dhākir*) the *dhikr al-ajall al-a'lá al-a'lá al-'alá*." (*Qaṣīda*, p. 66).

40. For a detailed study of this topic see Ayoub, "The Speaking Qur'an,"; see also Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, p. 16 and footnote.

41. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, v. 4, p. 23 quotes the following statement from as-Suhrawardí (d. 1191 C.E.): "le Livre est l'Imám muet, l'Imám est le Livre parlant." (Source unspecified.)

42. Cf. the characteristic argument from the Báb found in his commentary on the *Súrat al-kawthar*, affirming the necessity of what he calls "the hidden support." Briefly, the argument runs: it is not permissible to rely upon the ulama for guidance, because some of them are more qualified than others and they disagree amongst themselves. It is, therefore, necessary to choose only one for a guide, because "none but a single soul is capable of bearing the universal bounty from the Imám." The Báb, *Tafíir surat al-kawthar*, f. 36b.

43. Corbin, *Trilogie*, index, s.v. *Nátiq*.

44. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, v. 4, p. 283 summarizing Ibrahímí, *Fihrist*, v. 1, pp. 127-31.

45. Apart from the many *ḥadīth* from the Imáms that mention the mysterious categories of *nuqabá'*, *nujabá'*, and so forth, classical Sufism frequently speaks of a group of pure souls who are unknown to the generality of men. (See, e.g., Abú Bakr al-Kalábádhí (d. ca. 380 A.H./990 C.E.), *Kitáb at-ta'arruf* (English translation by Arberry, *The Doctrines*, pp. 10-11.) Cf. the later development in as-Suhrawardí of the idea of the "pole" (*quṭb*) discussed by Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, v. 2, pp. 67-80.

46. The Báb, *Baqara*, p. 52. On the *Shaykhí* doctrine of the four supports, see Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, p. 228.

47. The Báb, *Baqara*, p. 52.

48. Böwering, *Mystical*, pp. 237-8; n.b. also the famous statement of al-Halláj: "I am the Truth (*aná 'l-ḥaqq*)."

49. Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, e.g., pp. 178-9 and 203.

50. It is interesting, in this regard, to notice the exact phraseology of Sahl's claim: "I am the proof of God for you in particular (*khaṣṣatan*) and for the people in general (*'ammatan*)." (Böwering, *Mystical*, p. 237). This could be read in connection with the state of affairs in Shiism at the time. While the *Hujja* was indeed in hiding, he was nonetheless available to a select group of people, namely, the four gates or deputies (*abwáb*, or *nuwwáb*) mentioned below, p.

27. It is possible to read in Sahl's claim an attempt to correct what might have appeared to him to be an unsatisfactory religious situation, namely, that mankind be deprived of direct, authoritative guidance. In addition, it is interesting to bear in mind the later frequent Shí'í usage of the terms, *khaṣṣ* and *'amm*, in which the former refers to the Shí'ís and the latter refers to the Sunnís.

51. Böwering, *Mystical*, p. 237.

52. This *khuṭba*, preserved in the *Nahj al-balāgha*, is a favorite among the Shí'a because it offers a rare statement by 'Alí on the usurpation of the caliphate by Abú Bakr. It is referred to many times by the Báb in *Baqara* (see Lawson, "The Qur'án," passim). The opening line is: "By God! That man (i.e., Abú Bakr) snatched the caliphate as if it were a garment which could be put on by him, even though all the while he knew that my station was [like] that of the pivot of the grinding stone (*wa innahu la-ya'lamu maḥallí minhá maḥallu 'l-quṭb min ar-rahá*)." (*Nahj*, v. 1, pp. 30-1.)

53. One discussion of the relationship between Sufism and Shiism is Seyyid Husayn Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism: their Relationship in Essence and in History," *Sufi Essays*, (New York, 1977) 104-20. See also the related article in *ibid.*, 97-103: "Seventh-century Sufism and the School of Ibn 'Arabi." The standard reference for the whole topic, particularly as it concerns early Islamic history is *ash-Shaybí, aṣ-Silah*. The magisterial work by Gramlich (see bibliography) is a comprehensive study of Iranian Sufism.

54. Out of 145 "conversions" of leading Bábís before 1264 A.H./1848 C.E., seventy-five were of persons identified as Shaykhís. Smith and Momen, "The Bábí Movement," p. 60.

55. See, however, the view that the expectation of a new cycle, taught by al-Aḥsá'í and Rashtí (but not widely circulated) "heightened a sense of millenarian hope among some Shaykhiyya for the full disclosure of the new age through the guidance of the perfect Shí'ah, or possibly even the long-expected return of the Hidden Imam." (Scholl, p. 232).

56. "Quiconque se proclame publiquement le Báb de l'Imám, se met *eo ipso* en dehors du shí'isme, car il en profane le secret fondamental, viole la *ghaybat*, rompt l'attente eschatologique." Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, v. 4, p. 283, paraphrasing Ibráhímí, *Fihrist*.

57. Bausani, "Bábís," p. 33.

58. Amanat, "Early," pp. 148-51.
59. Amanat, "Early," pp. 56-99. The whole topic is the subject of MacEoin, "Charismatic," which provides many important insights.
60. Cf. the discussion of this in Amanat, "Early," pp. 175-6.
61. Amanat, "Early," pp. 171-5.
62. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 7. Much of the language of the *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* consists of variations on the same theme. Similar statements may be found on almost every page.
63. Note that the word servant ('*abd*') is one of the more frequent by which Muḥammad is referred to in the Qur'an (e.g., 2:23 and 8:41). This usage would connote to Muslims that the Báb was claiming the status which Muḥammad was accorded by applying the same word to himself.
64. The Báb, *Joseph*, pp. 6-7.
65. A detailed study of this distinctive technique is found in Lawson, "The Qur'an," pp. 362-96.
66. On the importance of Qur'an 3:7 see the recent discussion in MacCauliffe, "al-Razi". The interpretation of the verse is a major bone of contention between Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslims. For the nature and details of the argument, see Shah, "The Imám," p. 71.
67. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 7. Most of this passage is a direct quotation from Qur'an 3:10.
68. See also Isfahání, *Anwár*, p. 152 where it is said that the *ahl al-bayt* are precisely the Most Great Remembrance of God (*wa innahum dhikr alláh al-akbar*.)
69. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 7.
70. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 7.
71. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 8.
72. See note 65 above.
73. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, v. 4, pp. 286-300. The idea is that one is capable of understanding or perceiving those things or truths which corresponds to something like their analogues, which exist *a priori* in the soul or mind of the subject. This theory (*isomorphisme*) operates on all ontological levels, and may be seen as deriving from the famous quranic verse: "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it is manifest unto them that it is the truth." (41:53) This is similar to the nonquranic verse whose origin appears to be unknown, but which is quoted frequently

in *'irfání* and the philosophical literature, and for that matter is quoted by the Báb (*Baqara*, p. 54): "And in each thing there is a sign which proves that God is one (*wa fí kullí shay'in la-hu áyatun tadallu annahu wáhid*)."

A better example may be found in the writings of the Báb himself. In what is considered his oldest extant work, the Treatise on the Mystic Search (*Risála fí's-sulúk*) the Báb says that the human soul is composed of four elements: divine oneness (*tawhíd*), prophecy (*nubúwa*), guardianship (*waláya*), and finally, the principle of the community of believers (*shí'a*). This implies that it is because the soul is so constituted, the individual is able to know each of the four elements when they occur on the "outside." See The Báb, *Sulúk*, p. 73. The idea is a familiar one in Muslim spiritual philosophy and has been expressed in several different ways. For example, the famous theory of permanent individual "essential archetypes" (*a'yán ath-thábita*) propounded by Ibn 'Arabí, may be thought to share many of the same features.

74. It is suggested, furthermore, that Corbin's own profound pessimism, born of the example of twentieth-century European history, admirably predisposed him to sympathy for what might be called the benign anarchism implicit in Shaykhism.

75. Sayyid Kázim, in discussing these two major cycles, was quite specific:

The first cycle (*ad-dawrat al-úlá*), which was concerned with externals, ended with the completion of the twelfth century . . . The purpose of the present cycle (*al-karrat ath-tháníya wa ad-dawra al-ukhrá*) is to cause the hidden things to appear (*li-bayán aḥkám zuḥúr al-bawáṭin*) . . . The first cycle was for the training of bodies and the present cycle is for the training of sanctified spirits and pure souls. (*Qaṣída*, p. 356).

Sayyid Kázim's theory seems to parallel, in some respects, that of the earlier Ismá'ílí teaching involving two cycles: (1) the cycle of secrecy (*dawr as-satr*) and (2) the cycle of disclosure (*dawr al-kashf*). The first might correspond with Sayyid Kázim's *dawrat al-úla*, while the second to his *dawrat ath-thání*. See Corbin, "Divine Epiphany," pp. 106-107, "Cyclical Time"; Walker, "Eternal Cosmos." See also, Rafati, "Development," pp. 169-73.

76. Browne, *Traveller's*, p. 226.

77. Lawson, "The Qur'án," pp. 240-9.

78. On these terms, particularly as they appear in some of the writings of *Shaykhí* authors, see for example, Corbin, "Mundus imaginalis."

79. Amanat, "Early," p. 147.

80. Qur'an, e.g., The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 9: *inná nahnu qad nazzalná al-kitáb 'alá kulli ummatin bilisáni-him* [cf. 14:4] *wa qad nazzalná hádhá 'l-kitáb bi-lisán adh-dhikr 'alá 'l-ḥaqq bi'l-ḥaqq badí'an*. "We have revealed scripture to every community in its own language. In truth, We have revealed this scripture in the wondrous new language of the Remembrance." The single quranic reference to 14:4 is misleading. In actual fact, this single verse from *Joseph* alludes to many different verses. A single example will suffice. The opening phrase *inná nahnu qad nazzalná* could suggest to those fully steeped in the Qur'an the opening phrase of Qur'an 15:9: *inná nahnu nazzalná adh-dhikr*—"it is We who have sent down the Remembrance." Such examples from *Joseph* could be greatly multiplied.

81. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 12. The rules which the Báb's *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* breaks are quite obvious: it presumes to challenge the *i'jaz al-Qur'án* doctrine by its form alone; the Arabic language is stressed beyond the usual confines of usage, idiom, and grammar; the claim to spiritual authority (both implicit and explicit) was perceived as an outrage, and so on. Perhaps most importantly in the present context, is the flagrant disregard for the venerable rules of *tafsír* itself—e.g., proceeding in the commentary *seriatim*, establishing an exegetical unit through use of such words as "*ya'ní*" and "*al-murád*" ("this means"), providing lexical equivalents for single words, and so on, which were followed (however distinctively) by the Báb in the earlier *Tafsír súrat al-baqara*, but completely disregarded in the work at hand. This is important because it shows that the style of the Báb's commentary on the Sura of Joseph is quite deliberate, rather than the result of unfamiliarity with, or inability to function in, the discipline of traditional Qur'an exegesis.

82. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 6. This and the following examples represent only the smallest fraction of such material. As was the case

with the word *dhiḥr*, *báb* is employed in a wide variety of innovative and rhythmic phrases. Some idea of the effect this fluent invocation of such powerful words might have had on the reader/listener can be had only by examining an extended passage.

83. The *Báb*, *Joseph*, p. 111.

84. The *Báb*, *Joseph*, p. 13.

85. See, e.g., The *Báb*, *Joseph*, pp. 9, 12, 14, 17, 22, 25, 107.

86. Briefly, there is a very old argument among interpreters of the Qur'an about how this demonstrative should be translated. The literal meaning is "that is the book," and the verse continues "in which there is no doubt." This reading raised questions, however, about which book was intended. If it were the Qur'an that was meant, then why not the more likely demonstrative *hádḥá 'l-kitáb*, "this is the book." See Rippin, "The Quranic *asbáb al-nuzūl* Material," pp. 95-6. According to some Muslim exegetes, it should be translated as "that is the Book" rather than "this is the Book" because the remoteness implied by the former is more respectful."

87. The *Báb*, *Joseph*, pp. 11, 13, 14, 23, 32, 73, 77, 107.

88. e.g., The *Báb*, *Joseph*, pp. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, etc. The *sic* here refers to the apparent lapse in grammar: *al-kalima* is feminine, but the adjective, *al-akbar* is masculine. There are, however, several cases of an Arabic feminine noun being used as masculine: '*alláma*, (very learned), *khalífa*, (caliph), *ráwiya* (story-teller). More interestingly, however, is the precedent in Arabic for treating *kalima* itself as masculine. All Arabic translations of the New Testament, translate John 1:1 as: *fi 'l-bad' kána 'l-kalima wa 'l-kalima kána 'inda 'lláh wa kána kalimatu 'lláha* (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God). *Kána* (was) is in its masculine form, a more "grammatical" (but unacceptable) reading would be: *fi 'l-bad' kánat al-kalima* . . . The point is that *kalima* refers to Jesus and should therefore be treated as masculine. (My thanks to D. Aqiqi for drawing my attention to this biblical grammatical "anomaly.") The Imáms are frequently referred to in *ḥadīth* literature as the "Words of God."

89. The *Báb*, *Joseph*, p. 6.

90. e.g., The *Báb*, *Joseph*, pp. 17, 19, 20, 22.

91. e.g., The *Báb*, *Joseph*, p. 23; see also e.g., pp. 12 & 24.

92. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 40. Here the scribe first wrote (naturally enough) “*nuqṭat al-bá*’”, which has been corrected to “*nuqṭat al-báb*.” This corrected version appears in *F11*, f.35b. The occurrence of the plural *abwáb* in this chapter is directly related to the quranic verse under which it was written, Qur’an 12:23: “Now the woman in whose house he was solicited him and locked the doors on them.” It may be that one of the features which commended the *Súrat Yúsuf* as a subject for commentary to the Báb, is the comparative frequency in it of the word *báb*.

93. The Báb, *Joseph*, p. 192. Note the rare use in this work of the exegetical technical term *al-murád*.

94. Lawson, “The Qur’án,” passim.

95. This type of theology is, of course, quite familiar to Bahá’ís.

96. The four representatives of the Hidden Imám, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarí recognized by Twelver Shiism were: ‘Uṭhmán al-‘Amrí, his son Abú Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn ‘Uṭhmán, Abú al-Qásim Ḥusayn ibn Rúḥ al-Nawbakhtí, and Abú al-Ḥusayn ‘Alí ibn Muḥammad as-Samarrí. See Momen, *Shi‘i Islam*, pp. 162-4.

97. Nicolas, *Le Báb*, pp. 9-11.

98. Amanat, “Early,” p. 197.

99. Amanat, “Early,” pp. 143, 173.

100. Amanat, “Early,” p. 433.

101. Or *clavis hermeneutica*, as Corbin prefers (*Annuaire*, 1965-6, p. 108). The following citations are from *Anwár*, p. 91.

102. Probably the *K. kanz al-fawá’id* of Abú’l-Futuh Muḥammad bin ‘Alí bin ‘Uṭhmán al-Karájakí, the student of Ibn Shádhán al-Qummí, (cf. Majlisí, *Bihár*, v. 1, p. 18); possibly: *K. kanz al-fawá’id fí ḥall mushkilát al-qawá’id* by ‘Umídu’d-Dín ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, (cf. Majlisí, *Bihár*, v. 1, p. 21).

103. Majlisí, *Bihár*, v. 1, p. 15 refers to this work simply as *Kitáb Sulaym bin Qays al-Hilálí*.

104. Iṣfahání, *Anwár*, p. 91.

105. Iṣfahání, *Anwár*, p. 91.

106. This work is published: Abú ‘Abd Alláh Muḥammad ibn Shahráshúb, *Manáqib Ál Abí Tálíb*, 3 vols., Najaf, 1376 A.H./1956 C.E.

107. This book was written by Ibn Bábúyah (d. 991 C.E./381 A.H.)

and recently printed in an edition by 'Alí Akbar Ghaffári (Tehran, 1379 A.H./1959 C.E.).

108. This notion of God being concealed by the Prophets and Imáms plays an important role in Ismá'ílí and Shaykhí thought. It depends upon the idea that revelation is that which simultaneously conceals and reveals. (See below.)

109. See the Báb's use of this expression in *Baqara*, p. 242.

110. Such a statement suggests that the author was perhaps a moderate Akhbári. It is suggested further that his interpretation of these *ḥadīth* would not necessarily be rejected by the *uṣūliyya* (Momen, private communication). By characterizing him as an Akhbári I wish to emphasize the extreme veneration of the Fourteen Pure Ones found in his work and which is shared by the Shaykhiyya, the Bábís, and (at least in theory) the Bahá'ís.

111. Iṣfahání, *Anwár*, p. 91.

112. See Iṣfahání, *Anwár*, pp. 337-9. Many other quranic nouns which are susceptible of the kind of metonymy which has become so familiar are equally applicable to the Book and the Imám or Prophet, as we have seen in the case of *dhikr*. Two examples will suffice: *ḥabl* (rope; see Iṣfahání, *Anwár*, p. 129) and *núr* (light; Iṣfahání, *Anwár*, p. 315). A study of those nouns which can and cannot be used interchangeably for the Book, and the Prophet or Imám (that is to say, a person), would probably shed more light on the Shí'í attitude towards scripture.

113. See bibliography. Rafati, "Development," p. 133 mentions that the versions of the famous "Sermon on the [Two] Gulfs" which Sayyid Kázim comments upon in his famous *Sharḥ al-khuṭba at-tutun-jíya*, is the one found in Shaykh al-Bursí's collection. Lawson, "The Qur'án," esp. pp. 181-3, points out that some of the Báb's technical vocabulary is the same as that found in *Masháriq*.

114. Bursí, *Masháriq*, pp. 23-4.

115. Bursí, *Masháriq*, p. 51.

116. Bursí, *Masháriq*, pp. 60-1.

117. Rafati, "Development," p. 148. Mentioned also by Amanat, "Early," pp. 47 & 173.

118. Amanat, *Early*, p. 137.

119. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, v. 4, pp. 249-53.

120. *Writings*, p. 51. Cf. The Báb, *Joseph*, "Súrat al-anwár," pp. 45-8, this passage occurs on p. 46. This particular chapter is distinguished by the mention in it of proper names (apart from those of the Imáms who are, in any case, mentioned but very infrequently in the work). In the course of an exhortation to the ulama to the effect that the study of any other book than this work is forbidden and designating it as the *kitáb alláh*, the Báb writes the above passage. He then says: "We made the two gates as two signs, around the water, effacing the sign of night and establishing the sign of day." He then writes: "O Qurrat al-'Ayn! Say to the great scholar Ja'far al-'Alawí: 'Truly, if you were to prostrate before the Gate of God, you could be accounted as praiseworthy in the Mother Book . . . If you were to follow His Cause, we would make you a pillar (*rukhn*), exalted above all scholars, and in the Hereafter you would be with Us . . . ' O dear friend, say, by permission of God, the Most Great, to our servant 'Abd al-Kháliq, the scholar: 'God has brought you to His most great Remembrance during the known months, but you perceived nothing of His most perfect Cause (*amrihi al-aqwam*) in His most mighty acts, and God has seen you committing *shirk* against certain aspects of his most perfect Cause . . . ' O Qurrat al-'Ayn! Say to al-Shaykh al-Kabír al-Ḥasan al-'Arabí [of the family] of ál 'Uşfúr, whom God has caused to dwell in *jazírat al-bahr* (Búshíhr): 'Verily you are from your Lord, the Truth, so assist our Word, and His book, the Truth, and summon the people to the pure religion (*al-dín al-khális*). (The Báb, *Joseph*, pp. 46-7.)

Ja'far al-'Alawí is possibly Mullá Ja'far Naráqí, cf. *Amanat*, "Early," p. 298, or Mullá Ja'far Qazvíní, *ibid.*, pp. 162, 307. But most likely, as Momen has suggested (private communication), since neither of these two were Sayyids (as al-'Alawí would imply), the reference is probably to Sayyid Ja'far Kashfí, illustrious father of Vahíd, the very important early follower of the Báb. 'Abd al-Kháliq is undoubtedly Mullá 'Abd al-Kháliq Yazdí, one-time student of Shaykh Aḥmad (*Amanat*, "Early," pp. 362-8). On the Ál 'Uşfúr family of Búshíhr and its connections with Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kázim, see *ibid.*, p. 129.

121. E.g., The Báb, *Joseph*, pp. 148, 161, 216, 226.

122. Lawson, "The Qur'án," pp. 329-60.

123. Al-Aḥsá'í, *Sharḥ al-ziyára*, p. 5. This is one of Shaykh Aḥ-

mad's most important works, the title may be translated as: "The Commentary on the Universal Prayer of Visitation." This refers to the prayer being suitable for use at the shrines of any one of the members of the Holy Family venerated by Twelver Shi'is. A recent edition of this prayer may be found in Qummí, *Mafátiḥ*, pp. 445-50. It is of some interest to note here what appears to be a tradition of regarding this prayer as something of a "Shi'í Qur'an." (See Lawson, "The Qur'an," p. 267.) This could explain why Shaykh Aḥmad felt he had already fulfilled the traditional obligation of a Muslim scholar to produce a Qur'an commentary (*tafsír*) by writing this work. So far, I have been unable to locate a *Tafsír al-Qur'an* ascribed to Shaykh Aḥmad (or to any other Shaykhí for that matter). This is somewhat unusual. In any case, the whole Shi'í phenomenon of regarding as the sacred book persons or texts other than the Qur'an proper is undoubtedly one of the solutions to the "problem" of the Báb's Commentary on the Sura of Joseph.

124. The Báb quotes this variant, *Baqara*, p. 190. Incidentally, a little before this part of that earlier commentary, the Báb makes what appears to be an allusion to his own special status. Here he says of Qur'an 2:56, that it refers to the "return" of the Family of God and only those who are "[divinely] deputized" (*yunayyabu*) can mention this." (The Báb, *Baqara*, p. 188).

125. al-Aḥsá'í, *Ziyára*, p. 7.

126. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 64.

127. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 61.

128. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 103. The author says that this is one of the doctrines of the "*ahl al-ishráq min ahl al-wifáq wa al-ittifáq*," which he seems to endorse. The identity of this group is not clear.

129. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 103.

130. Qur'an 54:50, 67:3, 4:72, respectively.

131. This is a reference to the "City of Knowledge" *ḥadīth*.

132. The Báb expresses this idea in his commentary on *al-Baqara*: "The greatest name" (*al-ism al-a'zam*) is "He" (*huwa*). It is the gate of union with Him (*báb i'tiláfihi*), even if the *wāw* is not fully pronounced [as in "*huwa*"], in that it causes [the believer] to enter upon God without looking to the gate (*báb*), because the gate is [merely] the pointer (*al-ishára*)." (The Báb, *Baqara*, p. 12)

133. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 103.

134. I.e., the Islamic declaration of faith: "There is no God but God, and Muḥammad is His Prophet." A distinctively Shī'ī declaration adds: "And 'Alī is the *walī* of God." See Joseph Eliash, "On the Genesis and Development of the Twelver-Shī'ī Three-tenet Shāhāda," *Der Islam*, v. 47 (1971) pp. 265-72.

135. Rashtī, *Qaṣīda*, p. 319.

136. This is also the classical Sufi theme of the *awliyā'*: they are the signs of God (see e.g., Landolt, "Walāyah," p. 322).

137. Rashtī, *Qaṣīda*, p. 28. "The breath of the Merciful" is a technical term from the ontology of Ibn 'Arabī. See Izutsu, *Sufism*, p. 131-3. While the *Shaykhīs* disagreed with Ibn 'Arabī on many points, most importantly on the problem of *walāya* and its rightful bearer, much of the terminology of their discussions, as indeed that of the discussions of most Muslim mystical philosophers of the last six hundred years, may be traced to the great Andalusian mystic. For an aspect of Ibn 'Arabī's thought found in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh, see Alessandro Bausani, "Note sulla circolarità dell'essere in Ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240)," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, vol. 56 (1982), p. 70.

138. Rashtī, *Qaṣīda*, p. 96.

139. Rashtī, *Qaṣīda*, p. 96. Similar language is found in the work of Ibn Abī Jumhūr (d. ca. 1400) with whose thought *Shaykh* Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāzīm were most certainly familiar (Rafati, "Development," p. 40). For example, Ibn Abī Jumhūr discusses the divine acts (*af'āl*) and says, quoting Ibn 'Arabī, that of the primordial divine acts, the second is called by the theologians, with justification, the gate of justice. Ibn Abī Jumhūr says that in this statement there is an allusion to the gate of *tawḥīd* ("divine unity," more exactly "affirming divine unity") in which, according to the Sufis, there are several stations: the station of *jam'*, and the station of *tafarruqa* ("disintegration") and the station of *jam' al-jam'*, and the *al-jāmi' li'l-jamī'* (Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *al-Mujlī*, p. 202). Elsewhere, he discusses the "City of Knowledge" tradition and the variant cited by *Shaykh* Aḥmad in explaining how the divine sciences are related to 'Alī (Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *al-Mujlī*, p. 371).

140. In any case, Sayyid Kāzīm, as one of the ulama, would be entitled to the title *bāb* in one of its interpretations. See below, Sayyid Kāzīm's reference to "the ulama who really know."

141. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 97.

142. Namely: (1) The level of divine unity (*tawḥíd*); (2) the level of positive, spiritual meanings (*ma'ání*); (3) the level of gates (*abwáb*); (4) the level of a leader invested with spiritual and temporal authority (*imám*); (5) the level of the pillars of religion (*arkán*); (6 & 7) the levels of two classes of spiritual elite known as the lieutenants and the nobles (*nuqabá*, and *nujabá*). These terms are discussed in Browne, *Traveller's Narrative*, pp. 303-4; MacEoin, "Hierarchy," pp. 113-5; and Lawson, "The Qur'án," pp. 115-86.

143. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 99. This is the Shí'í interpretation of Ibn 'Arabí's doctrine of *waláya*, the classical source for which is Ḥaydar Ámulí (d. after 787 A.H./1385 A.D.).

144. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, pp. 206-7. Apart from further defining *báb*, this passage is most important because of the series of dual nouns employed. As mentioned above, the Báb uses the dual number very frequently in *Joseph*, and sometimes in ways which would be very difficult to understand were it not for the precedents offered by this kind of expression in Sayyid Kázim's writings and elsewhere. An analysis of the Báb's use of such language (see note 65, above) further confirms that he was making the highest possible claim for himself at this relatively early stage of his career.

145. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 207.

146. Ja'far ibn al-Manṣúr al-Yamaní, al-Dá'í (ascribed), *Kitáb al-Kashf*, p. 14.

147. Corbin, *Trilogy*, p. 31.

148. Corbin, *Trilogy*, p. 180 and references. It is also known that the Ismá'ílí author, Mu'ayyad Shírází (d. 470 A.H./1077 C.E.), was the bearer of the title *báb* in at least one of its levels of meaning. (Corbin, *Histoire*, p. 113).

149. Mentioned by Goldziher, *Introduction*, pp. 246-7.

150. The Báb, *Writings*, pp. 106-8.

151. Ibn Hibatalláh, *Mizáj at-tasním*, p. 72. See also the German introduction, pp. 23-4.

152. Ibn Hibatalláh, *Mizáj at-tasním*, p. 182, ad 18:93-4. For earlier instances of the Ismá'ílí identification of *báb* with *hijáb*, see Corbin, *Trilogie*, p. 179 and references.

153. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 236.

154. Rashtí, *Qaṣída*, p. 239.

155. Rashtí, *Qaşıda*, p. 239.

156. Rashtí, *Qaşıda*, e.g., pp. 242, 265, and 320.

157. Rashtí, *Qaşıda*, pp. 323 and 358. The identification of "face of God (*wajh alláh*)" mentioned several times in the Qur'an (e.g., 2:115 and 272; 30:37), with the Imám is a very old and traditional Shí'í interpretation. See the appropriate article, "*wajh*," in Işfahání, *Anwár*, pp. 333-35.

158. Rashtí, *Qaşıda*, p. 95.

159. Rashtí, *Qaşıda*, pp. 137, 138, 156.

160. Rashtí, *Qaşıda*, p. 156.

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MOSES RETURNING FROM MT. SINAI

THE SINAITIC MYSTERIES: NOTES ON MOSES/SINAI MOTIFS IN BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í SCRIPTURE

by Stephen N. Lambden

Moses/Sinai motifs rooted in the Bible and the Qur'an loom large in the massive corpus of Bábí and Bahá'í scripture: the Persian and Arabic writings of Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad, the Báb (1819–1850), and Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí, Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892). In a large number of their many treatises and letters (or "Tablets," *alwáh*), motifs and events associated with the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic accounts of Moses' call to prophethood and his encounter with God at Horeb/Sinai, the "Mount" (*aṭ-ṭúr*), are drawn on and expounded creatively. Both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh expressed their own claims in terms of the Sinai theophanies and taught that, through their manifestation, Sinaitic events had (mystically or typologically speaking) again come to pass.

In this essay attention will largely be focused upon select writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh which relate to the Pentateuchal account of Moses' call (Exodus 3:1ff.) and request to see God's glory (Exodus 33:18–23), or the quranic parallels to these narratives. Key biblical and quranic texts lying behind Moses/Sinai materials in Bábí and Bahá'í sources will first be briefly surveyed. Only limited coverage will be given

to exegetical traditions contained in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic/Shaykhí literatures.

THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND¹

It was perhaps during the reign of Rameses II (13th century B.C.E.) that Moses, a Hebrew with an Egyptian name, "fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian" (Exodus 2:15) where he married into the family and kept the flock of Jethro the "priest of Midian."² According to Exodus 3:1 ff., it was while Moses was working as a shepherd that he encountered God and was called to "bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt":

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:1-6)

A good many modern biblical scholars regard these verses as being informed by two ancient streams of Israelite tradition: an allegedly northern "E" (Elohism) and a southern "J" (Yahwist) source. Hence, the variation in the use of the divine names—"God" translates the Hebrew *'Elohim*, and "LORD" the tetragrammaton YHWH (loosely, Yahweh or "Jehovah")—and the fact that "Horeb the mountain of God" (so "E," as

well as the "D," Deuteronomistic source) is elsewhere in the Pentateuch named Sinai (so "J" as well as the "P" or Priestly source).³ Etymologically Horeb signifies something like "desolate place." Not always indicative of a mountain, its exact location is unknown. This is despite the fact that at Exodus 3:1, Mt. Horeb is located "to the west side of [lit., "the back of"] the wilderness" in territory frequented by nomadic Midianites (south Sinai peninsula?).⁴

While in Exodus 3:2, it is an "angel of the Lord" (*mal'akh YHWH*; alternatively, messenger of YHWH) which appeared to Moses in a flame of fire of a burning bush, Exodus 3:4 implies that it was YHWH ("the Lord") who spoke directly to Moses. As the narrative unfolds, the mysterious angel is seen to represent God (*ha-'elohim*) who subsequently identifies himself as YHWH. (See Exodus 3:15.) This apparent confusion between God and his messengers is expressive of the mystery of the divine transcendence. Visually Moses had a real, though indirect, encounter with his Lord. His awareness of God was his indirect perception of Him through His messenger, who appeared in the ethereal formlessness of a flame of fire set in a burning bush which "was not consumed."

Jewish and Christian sources contain traditions of considerable interest about the identity of the divine Being(s) whom Moses encountered at Horeb/Sinai. In the Septuagint (LXX) and Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of Exodus 3:2ff., the "angel of the Lord" is distinguished from the transcendent Godhead. For Philo of Alexandria (d. c. 45 C.E.) the angel/messenger visioned by Moses was an "image of Being" or, so it seems, a manifestation of the divine Logos.⁵ According to Exodus Rabba II.5, Rabbi Johanna taught that the one who appeared in the burning bush was the archangel Michael (meaning, "who is like God," cf. Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1). Rabbi Hanina on the other hand, related Exodus 3:2 to an epiphany of Gabriel. Certain rabbis, furthermore, held that whenever Michael appeared the "glory of the Shekinah" (the

Divine Presence) was also present. At first an angel appeared and stood in the midst of the fire, and then the *Shekinah* (loosely, the "Divine Presence") presence descended and spoke to Moses (cf. Deut. R. II. 34).

Early Christian writers, including Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenaeus of Lyons, interpreted Exodus 3:2ff. Christologically. The angel/divinity manifest in the burning bush was regarded as an epiphany of Jesus Christ as God the Son.⁶ In his *Dialogue* (with the Jew Trypho; chs. 59-60; cf. 126-7), Justin insists that it was not the transcendent Father (God) who appeared in the bush, but Jesus the Son who is both the God (*theos*) and the angel (*angelos*) of Exodus 3:1-4, 17. In the same writer's *First Apology* (chs. 62-3), it is argued that the God who appeared to Moses was Christ the Son of God, Logos, and Godhead, who is also called an angel or apostle because (as one sent) he announced things that should be known.⁷ Gregory of Nyssa (d. c. 395 C.E.), in his magnificent *The Life of Moses*, understood Exodus 3:2ff. in terms of the doctrines of the incarnation and virgin birth of Jesus.⁸ Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 C.E.) came to develop a sophisticated trinitarian interpretation of these verses in the light of the Arian controversy. Though not averse to identifying Christ with the "angel of the Lord," he, in order to avoid Jesus being thought to be a created being, taught that "the angel was regarded as only representing the Son and speaking in his name."⁹

Many different interpretations have been given to the motif of the burning bush which was not consumed. The Hebrew word used for "bush," *seneh*, occurs only at Exodus 3:2 and in Deut. 33:16, where God is referred to as "Him that dwelt in the bush." It has a similar sound to the word Sinai and may be a deliberate literary allusion to Exodus 19:18, where God is said to have descended on Sinai "in fire." Since God and angelic beings are associated with fire in the Hebrew Bible, the burning of the bush without its being consumed is to be explained in terms of the celestial fire that accompanies the di-

vine theophany. It is the presence of the angel that causes the bush to burn and the supernatural nature of the theophany that prevents it from being consumed.¹⁰

Seneh ("bush" in the Revised Standard Version) is probably derived from a root meaning "thorny" or "sharp" and may, as some Rabbis believed, indicate a thorn bush or bramble. Though it is impossible to determine which species of bush was intended—not that this is a matter of great exegetical importance—many different suggestions have been made. For example, the wild jujube or *Zizyphus spina Christi* (Arabic, *nabs*), the bramble or blackberry (*Rubus sanguineus* [*sanctus*]), and the shrub *Colutea istria*. There may well be some connection between the Lote-Tree (*sidra*) mentioned in the Qur'an (53:14, 16; cf. 34:15, 56:27) and the biblical motif of the "burning bush."¹¹

In early Jewish exegesis, the burning bush incident was interpreted as "an allegory of the life of Israel, who, though sorely oppressed, could not be consumed."¹² Rabbi Eliezer associated God's revelation in the lowly thorn bush with His deliverance of the oppressed Israelites. (See *Exod. R.*, II. 5.) As a bramble, the burning bush represented Israel, and its thorns their sufferings. (See for example, Philo, *Vit. Mos.* I.67.) While the Christian writer Hilary of Poitiers (d. 367 C.E.) saw the burning bush which was not consumed as a type of the Church persecuted but not destroyed. The above-mentioned Gregory of Nyssa interpreted this motif as an expression of "the mystery of the Virgin" (Mary, mother of Jesus): "The light of divinity which through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush, even as the flower of her virginity was not withered by giving birth."¹³

Moses' response to God's summoning him from the burning bush, his "Here am I," is an expression of his readiness to serve and to obey. That he is commanded to remove his shoes is indicative of the holiness of the scene of the divine theophany. The expression "holy ground" (*adhmath qodhesh*; lit., "soil of holiness"), it has been observed, makes it difficult to

think of the rocky slopes of (the traditional) Mt. Sinai.¹⁴ Christian and Muslim exegetes have interpreted Moses' removal of his shoes as an allegory of his (or man's) turning away from things mundane in approaching God.¹⁵ So also has Bahá'u'lláh.¹⁶ God's declaration, "I am the God of your father[s], the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6a) was intended to enable Moses to realize that he had encountered the God (YHWH) who had always been worshipped by Israel's ancestors.¹⁷ In awe before the Lord, Moses "hid his face" in his cloak being afraid to look directly at Him. (Exodus 3:6b) Biblical tradition has it that no man can see the face of God and live. (See Exodus 33:20; Judges 13:22; I Kings 19:13; Isaiah 6:2; cf. John 1:18)

The text of Exodus 3:1-6, quoted and selectively commented on above, is followed by an account of the commission of Moses (3:7-12) and by verses expressive of the revelation of the divine name:

Then Moses said to God (*'elohim*), "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God (*'elohim*) of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God (*'elohim*) said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM (*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*).'" And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM (*'ehyeh*) has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD (YHWH) the God (*'elohim*) of your fathers, the God (*'elohim*) of Abraham, the God (*'elohim*) of Isaac and the God (*'elohim*) of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations (lit., this is my memorial for generation of generation).'" (Exodus 3:13-15)

Here Moses requests that God disclose His name to the end that his mission to the Israelites will be successful. From the burning bush, the God (*'elohim*) worshipped by Moses' ancestors first informs Moses that He is "I AM WHO I AM (*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*)" (alternatively, "I AM THAT [IS WHO] I

AM," "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE," or "I CAUSE TO BE WHATEVER I CAUSE TO BE." This mysterious phrase anticipates and throws light on the meaning of the subsequently disclosed name YHWH (see below), for the I AMs ('*ehyehs* [\times 3]) and this most sacred name are related to the same verbal root (*hayah* [*hawah*], "to be"). The implication may be that God is One who acts in sovereign freedom, One Who is self-existent, who makes Himself known in whatever way He chooses or, among other possibilities, One Who sustains existence, or Who cannot be properly known or adequately named.

The God ('*elohim*) worshipped by the patriarchs also gives a more direct reply to Moses' question about His name. He declares Himself to be YHWH, the tetragrammaton (Greek, "having four letters"). The four Hebrew consonants that make up the name of God YHWH (יהוה) are of uncertain pronunciation and meaning. After the Babylonian exile, Jews refrained from publicly uttering this holy name. It is sometimes represented by means of the well-known, artificial and hybrid transliteration *Jehovah*: which is the result of the combining of the consonants of YHWH with the vowels of the traditional substitute reading '*adónai* (Hebrew, "Lord"). Occurring more than six thousand times in the Hebrew Bible, YHWH may indicate God as "He Who causes to be, creates or brings to pass," "He Who is," or the "Sustainer," "Maintainer," or "Establisher." Among pronunciations of the tetragrammaton proposed by modern scholars the following may be noted: *YaHWeH* (*Yahweh*, most commonly; so the *Jerusalem Bible*), *YeHoHā*, *YeHóáh*, *YaHóH*, and *YaHúH*. Details cannot be gone into here.¹⁸ Worth noting at this point, however, is the fact that Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be the eschatological manifestation of YHWH. (For details, see below.)

At Exodus 6:2ff. there exists a tradition ("P" source) about a further revelation of God to Moses parallel to that recorded in Exodus 3:1ff. (See above.) After Moses' return to Egypt

and his failure to persuade Pharoah to release the Israelites, God reassures him by declaring:

I am the LORD (YHWH). I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*), but by my name the LORD (YHWH) I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners. Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, "I am the LORD (YHWH), and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians . . ." (Exodus 6:2b-6b)

It is here taught that YHWH used the name *'Elohim* ("God") before the time of Abraham, and then made Himself known as *El Shaddai* (loosely, "God Almighty") to Abraham and his descendants. Israel's ancestors worshipped the same God as Moses, but they did not know His name YHWH. The God who covenanted with the patriarchs with respect to the land of Canaan appeared to Moses as YHWH and, faithful to this covenant, announced the imminent liberation of the Israelites.¹⁹ In at least one of the Tablets (*alwáh*) of Bahá'u'lláh, Exodus 6:2ff. is given a mystical interpretation in the light of the mystery of *Bahá'* as the "greatest name" (*ism-i a'zam*) of God.²⁰

The account of God's revelation on Mt. Sinai recorded in Exodus 19ff. lies at the heart of the Pentateuch and of Jewish self-understanding. R. E. Clements has observed that these chapters contain three main elements: "(1) a theophany, or manifestation of God, upon the sacred mountain, (2) the making of a covenant between the LORD and Israel, and (3) the revelation of laws and instructions for worship."²¹ Though the accounts of the descent of YHWH on Sinai, and of the episode of the Golden Calf are of importance in view of their lying behind or having quranic parallels and Bábí-Bahá'í in-

terpretations, it must suffice at this point to quote and comment on Exodus 33:18-23.

The following account of Moses' request to see God's glory has a quranic parallel²² that informs a good deal of the Moses/Sinai theology present in Bábí and Bahá'í scripture and was born out of the problem of the continuing presence of God among the Israelites after their departure from Sinai:

[And] Moses said [to YHWH], "I pray thee, show me thy glory (*kabôd*)." And he [YHWH] said, "I will make all my goodness (*tôbah*) pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD' (YHWH); and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face (*pánim*); for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD [YHWH] said, "Behold there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory (*kabôd*) passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand and you will see my back (*'aḥorayim*, lit., [two] back parts); but my face (*pánim*) shall not be seen." (Exodus 33:18-23).

Here YHWH all but rejects Moses' request to see His "glory," the radiant fullness of His presence. It is possible for Moses to experience God's "goodness" (*tôbah*; the providential aspect of His being) and His "name" (YHWH, which is the locus of His identity), but direct perception of His presence or "face" (*pánim*) is not possible for mortal men. (Cf., though, Exodus 33:11 where it is taught that Moses' conversation with God was of such intimacy that it took place "face to face" [*pánim el pánim*].) Ultimately, the Israelite prophet is permitted, cloistered in the "cleft of a rock" (presumably on Sinai/Horeb) and initially shielded by God's "hand," to experience the passing by of God's "glory" (*kabôd*) and the vision of His "back parts." Moses had an intimate, though indirect, experience of God's presence.²³

It has been noted above that the holy mountain Horeb is (indirectly) equated with Sinai in the Pentateuch. Though it is the scene of Moses' call and the site of the revelation of Israelite law, both the meaning of Sinai and its location are uncertain. As a name, Sinai may be related to that of the Semitic moon god *Sin*. The biblical traditions relating to the location of Mt. Sinai are conflicting and inconclusive, as are ancient and modern attempts to locate its peak. Since early Christian times the traditional site of Mt. Sinai has been in the mountainous region to the south of the peninsula of Sinai, Jebel Musa (The Mount of Moses), Jebel Katarin (The Mount of [Saint] Catherine), and Jebel Serbal being the main contenders. A location further north, around Kadesh (fifty miles SSE. of Beersheba); or in Edom, Midianite territory; or in northwest Arabia have also been argued. The apostle Paul followed ancient Jewish tradition when he located Sinai in "Arabia." (See Gal. 4:21-31; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* II. 264, III. 76, *Against Apion*, II. 25.) But this need not be taken to indicate a location east of the Gulf of 'Aqabah. As with the "Apostle to the Gentiles," who equated Hagar (wife of Abraham) with Mt. Sinai, a plethora of allegorical interpretations of this mountain have been proposed by esoterically inclined writers among the "people of the Book."²⁴ Mystical interpretations of Mt. Sinai are quite common in the voluminous revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

THE ISLAMIC BACKGROUND²⁵

Moses is more frequently mentioned in the Qur'an (196 times) than any of the other messengers or prophets of God. He is an important figure in this Arabic holy book which was communicated piecemeal to the prophet Muḥammad between (roughly) 610 and 632 C.E. A good many of the events recorded in the book of Exodus about the mission of Moses and what took place at Sinai have quranic counterparts. By making frequent reference to the opposition encountered by

Moses, the Prophet no doubt intended to set forth object lessons for his own contemporaries. Informed by extra-biblical traditions and communicated creatively, the Moses/Sinai materials in the Qur'an sometimes go beyond the biblical data, and at certain points reflect the experiences and self-understanding of Muḥammad.

The biblical account of Moses' call (Exodus 3:1ff.) is paralleled or echoed in five Meccan suras of the Qur'an. Since each of these quranic pericopes contain details that are present in Bábí and Bahá'í scripture, they will be quoted in full along with occasional notes:

- 1) And mention in the Book, Moses; he was devoted, and he was a Messenger (*rasūl*) and a prophet (*nabí*). We called to him from the right side of the Mount (*min jānib at-tūr al-ayman*), and brought him near in communion. (Qur'an 19:52-53)

God is here said to have called Moses from the righthand side of Mount Sinai and to have communed intimately with him (from the "burning bush"?). As elsewhere in the Qur'an, Mt. Sinai (or Horeb) is simply called "the mount[ain]" (*at-tūr*, the common Aramaic word for mountain and a loan word in Arabic; cf. Qur'an 7:142 [cited below], the only occasion where the Arabic *al-jabal* [the mountain] is used for Mt. Sinai). The expression "Mount Sinai" does, however, occur twice in the Qur'an at 23:30 and 95:2 (as *tūr síná'* and *tūr sínín* respectively, Sinai existing in two Arabic forms).²⁶ The significance of the fact that God called Moses from the "right-[hand] side" of Mt. Sinai is not immediately obvious. This detail is probably rooted in Exodus 3:1 where Moses is said to have led Jethro's flock "to the west side" (Revised Standard Version) or simply "[far] side of the wilderness" (Hebrew, *achar ha-midbar*) in the region around Mt. Horeb/Sinai. It is implied that Moses saw the burning bush and was called by God from the righthand or western side of the holy mountain

as he faced it. (Cf., apart from the quranic texts cited below, Qur'an 20:80.) Some Muslim commentators have argued that references in the Qur'an to the "right side" of Mt. Sinai are figurative or indicative of the "right," or blessed, region around this mountain. Others, as will be seen below, have understood such details mystically in terms of the interior reality and state of Moses.

2) Hast thou received the story of Moses?

When he saw a fire (*nār*) he said to his family, "Tarry you here; I observe a fire. Perhaps I shall bring you a brand from it, or I shall find at the fire guidance." When he came to it a voice cried, "Moses, I am thy Lord (*'innī anā rabbuka*); put off thy shoes (*na'layka*); thou art in the Holy Valley Towa (*bi'l-wād al-muqaddas tuwā*). I myself have chosen thee; therefore give ear to this revelation, 'Verily I am God; there is no god but I' (*'innanī anā allāh lā ilāha illa anā*); therefore serve me and perform the prayer of my remembrance . . ." (Qur'an 20:9-14).

Details are contained (and a situation is presupposed) in these verses which are not explicit in the Hebrew Bible. Moses' family were with him on a journey when the Israelite prophet observed a fire some distance away. The group was apparently lost and in need of comfort and guidance. Approaching what evidently turned out to be the fire (*nār*) of the burning bush, Moses heard a voice—the voice of the Lord (*rabb*)—who proclaimed His identity, commanded him to remove his shoes in view of his being in a holy valley named (?) *tuwā*, declared His oneness, and called him to service and prayerful remembrance (cf. Exodus 3:3-6). The expression "Holy Valley" (*al-wād al-muqaddas*) can be explained in the light of Exodus 3:5b, where Moses is told to take off his shoes because he is standing on "holy ground," but the significance of the explanatory *tuwā* has long been and remains problematic (occurring only at 20:12, above, and 79:16, see below). Taken as a name of the (Sinaitic) "Holy Valley," it may be related to the Aramaic/

Syriac *ṭūrā* ("mount"; cf. the quranic use of *ṭūr* for Mt. Sinai).²⁷ The obscurity of the word has led to its being given a variety of nonliteral interpretations. Al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111 C.E.) understood the phrase "Holy Valley" to be symbolic of the "World of Holy Transcendence" as a mystic stage attained by prophets who have doffed the "[two] sandals" of the "two worlds" (the limitations of this and the other spiritual world).²⁸ The Shiite Sufi 'Abd ar-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. c. 1330 C.E.), expressing the views of Ibn al-'Arabī, the "Great *Shaykh*," interpreted Qur'an 20:12b in the following manner:

Take off thy sandals: namely, your soul and your body, or your two (temporal) forms of existence, since when one is free from soul and body, one is free from both (temporal) forms of existence. That is: As soon as one is free, through the spirit (*ruh*) and the inner mystery (*sirr*), from the properties and characteristics of the soul and the body, so that one is united with the holy spirit, then one is free from the soul and the body (also) through the heart (*qalb*) and the breast (*ṣadr*), since the general connection (with them) is severed, their actions are released, and one has escaped their properties and activities. God calls the soul and the body sandals and not garments. If one were not free from intimate contact with both, one could not become united with the sacred sphere. The condition (however, on which it depends) is that of becoming united. God gives to Moses the command that he is to devote himself exclusively to him, in the sense of his words: "And remember the name of thy Lord, and devote thyself completely to Him" (Sura 73:8). It is therefore almost as if the connection of Moses with the sandals (of the soul and the body) still exists. This connection permits his feet, that is, the lower self, just as the breast designates the place of the heart, to sink into the ground. Consequently, they stand back away from the spiritual and inner turning-point to the holy, and for this reason God commands Moses to free himself from them in order to enter the realm of the spirit. Appropriately, God gives a reason for the necessity of removing the sandals, in his words: *Thou art in the holy valley, Ṭuwā*, that is, in the world of the spirit, which is free from the actions of

linking (through the soul and the body) the characteristics of transient things and the material bonds. This world is called *Ṭuwá* because the stages of the kingdom of God (*malakút*) are concealed (*ṭuwá*) in it, while the heavenly and earthly bodies stand under it.²⁹

- 3) When Moses said to his people, "I observe a fire (*nár*), and will bring you news of it, or I will bring you a flaming brand (*shiháb qabas*), that haply you may warm yourselves." So when he came to it, he was called: "Blessed is He who is in the fire, and he who is about it (*búrika man fí'n-nár wa man hawlahá*). Glory be to God, the Lord of all Being! Moses, behold it is I, God (*'innahu aná alláh*), the All-mighty, the All-wise . . ." (Qur'an 27:7-9).

Here Moses' motive for approaching the "fire" (burning bush) he has observed is to "bring news" of its source or provide his company with a flaming brand with which to light a fire and warm themselves. Exodus 3:3, it is worth noting at this point, implies that Moses traveled in the direction of the burning bush in order to satisfy his curiosity; to see a "great sight" or determine why the bush was "not consumed."

The phrase apparently uttered by the Divine Being[s] in the midst of the burning bush, "Blessed is He who is in the fire, and he who is about it," could be translated such that a plurality of divine beings is associated with the Sinaitic fire. Either the initial, or both the initial and second occurrence of "he who" (*man*), in this phrase, could have a plural meaning. A certain ambiguity, reminiscent of that surrounding the mention of first an "angel/messenger" (*mal'akh*) and then God (*YHWH*) as the speaker from the burning bush (at Exodus 3:2ff.) seems to exist. In the light of such rabbinic interpretations of Exodus 3:2 as have been noted above, it is possible that God (the Shekinah presence) is intended by "He who is in the fire" and that angels (or an archangel such as Michael) is alluded to in the words "he/those who are [round] about it [the fire]." God alone might be intended, God and one or more angelic beings, or simply one or more angelic beings. George

Sale translated Qur'an 27:8 in the following way: "And when he [Moses] was come near unto it [the fire], a *voice* cried to him, *saying*, Blessed is he who is in the fire, and whoever is about it . . ." And he commented: "Some [Muslim commentators] suppose GOD to be intended by the former words, and by the latter, the angels who were [allegedly] present; others think Moses and the angels are here meant, or all persons in general in this holy plain, and the country round it."³⁰

- 4) . . . So when Moses had accomplished the term and departed with his household, he observed on the side of the Mount [Sinai] (*min jānib aṭ-ṭūr*) a fire (*nār*). He said to his household, "Tarry you here; I observe a fire. Perhaps I will bring you news of it, or a faggot (*jadhwa*) from the fire, that haply you shall warm yourselves." When he came to it, a voice cried from the right bank of the watercourse [valley] (*min shāṭi' al-wād al-ayman*) in the sacred hollow [spot] (*fī'l-buq'a al-mubāraka*) coming from the Tree (*min ash-shajara*): "Moses, I am God (*'innī anā allāh*), the Lord of all Being." (Qur'an 28:29-30).

Further details of interest are contained in this account of the call of Moses. It is pictured as having taken place after Moses had "accomplished the term" of his marriage agreement with Jethro. (See Qur'an 28:22-28; cf. Exodus 2:15b-22.) The burning bush is referred to as a "tree" (*aṭ-shajara*) and located at the "right bank" (*shāṭi'*) of the "watercourse" (or valley, *al-wād*) in a "sacred hollow" or "holy spot [place, region]." Coming from the "tree" the divine voice announced, "Moses, I am God, the Lord of all Being."

The Arabic word used for the burning "bush," namely *shajara*, occurs in various contexts some twenty-five times in the Qur'an. This word, for example, describes the Edenic "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Qur'an 2:33; 7:18, 21, etc.). Also, it seems, the "tree of life" as the "tree of eternity" (*shajarat al-khuld*, Qur'an 20:118). Mention is made of the infernal "tree of Zaqqūm" (*shajarat al-zaqqūm*, Qur'an

37:62ff; 56:52; 44:43) which has its "roots in hell" and of Jonah's "tree of gourds" (*shajara min yaqṭīn*, Qur'an 37:146; cf., Jonah 4:6ff.).³¹

Of particular interest are those quranic texts which associate various kinds of trees with Mt. Sinai. The Prophet Muḥammad not only swore, "By the Mount [Sinai] (*wa't-tūr*)" (Qur'an 52:1), but "By the fig (*wa't-tīn*) and the olive (*wa'z-zaytūn*) and Mt. Sinai (*wa tūr sínín*) and this land secure (*al-balad al-amin*)" (Qur'an 95:1-3). Reference is made in Qur'an 25:20 to a "... tree (*shajara*) issuing from the Mount of Sinai (*tūr síná*) that bears oil and seasoning for all to eat" (olive groves around Mt. Sinai?). The celebrated "Light Verse" reads as follows: "God is the Light (*nūr*) of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche (*mishkáh*) wherein is a lamp (*miṣbáh*), the lamp in a glass (*zujāja*), the glass as it were a glittering star (*kawkab durrí*) kindled from a Blessed Tree (*shajara mubáraka*), an olive (*zaytūna*) that is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil (*zayt*) well nigh would shine, even if no fire (*nár*) touched it; Light upon Light (*nūr 'alá nūr*)." (Qur'an 24:35) Though the evidence is inconclusive these verses have been taken as indicative of the view that the Sinaitic tree—the "burning bush"—was an olive. In the treatises of Muslim mystics and in Shí'í traditions attributed to the Imáms, the tree from which Moses heard the voice of his Lord has been symbolically interpreted; sometimes in terms of the mystic senses given to the "Light Verse" (cited above) and/or to the various quranic references to such trees as the "Lote Tree" (*sidra*) (See Qur'an 34:16; 56:8ff.; 52:27ff.; 53:1-18; cf. 14:24ff).³² In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Sinaitic tree is often equated with the tree that is "neither of the East nor the West" (of the "Light Verse") and with the "Lote Tree."

It is also worth noting at this point that the twenty-eighth sura of the Qur'an (cited above) contains passing reference to the call of Moses and its mysterious location: "Thou [Muḥammad] wast not upon the western side (*jānib al-gharbi*) [of Mt.

Sinai] when We decreed to Moses the commandment (*qaḍaynā ilā mūsá al-amr*, or "We decreed the commission to Moses"), nor wast thou of those witnessing . . . Thou [Muḥammad] was not upon the side of the Mount (*jānib aṭ-ṭūr*) when We called [to Moses] . . ." (Qur'an 28:44, 46a). The point is that the Prophet Muḥammad knew of sacred events of the past through divine inspiration.

5) Hast thou received the story of Moses? When his Lord called to him from the holy valley (*bi'l-wād al-muqaddas*) Towa (*ṭūwa*): "Go to Pharoah; he has waxed insolent. And say, 'Hast thou the will to purify thyself, and that I should guide thee to thy Lord, then thou shalt fear?' " . . . (Qur'an 79:15-19)

Exactly the same Arabic expression is used here to locate the scene of Moses' call as is used in Qur'an 20:12, "the holy valley Towa." Moses is commissioned to go to Pharoah and induce him to turn towards God to the end that the captive Israelites might be liberated. (Cf. also, Qur'an 26:10ff.)

There are, then, five major and a number of minor references to the first part of the biblical account of the call of Moses (Exodus 3:1ff.) in the Qur'an. Not all the details present in the Hebrew Bible are registered in the sometimes novel quranic midrash.

It is at Qur'an 7:143, that the biblical account of Moses' request to see the glory of God (Exodus 33:18-23) is partially paralleled:

And when Moses came to Our appointed time
and his Lord spoke with him, he said,
"Oh my Lord, show me, that I may behold Thee!"
Said He, "Thou shalt not see Me; but behold
the Mountain (*al-jabal*) if it stays fast in its place,
then thou shalt see Me."

And when his Lord revealed Him to the mountain
(*tajallá rabbuhu li'l-jabal*)

He made it crumble to dust; and Moses
fell down swooning.

So when he awoke, he said, "Glory be to Thee!

I repent to Thee; I am the first of the believers." (Qur'an 7:143).

Here Moses requests a direct vision of his Lord. It is not directly stated, as in Exodus 33:18a, that Moses asked to see God's "glory," though this may be implied. Exodus 33:19 (see above) is not paralleled, but the first part of the quranic version of God's response to Moses' request is in line with Exodus 33:20; direct vision of God is not possible. The biblical reference to Moses' standing "upon a rock," and being placed in "a cleft of the rock," when the divine "glory" passed by (Exodus 33:21-2) probably lie behind the mention of God's theophany before or "to the mountain" (*ilā al-jabal*; Sinai or a nearby peak?). The impossibility of Moses having direct experience of God is underlined by the fact that the mountain before which God was revealed was reduced to dust. Having witnessed this event Moses fell down in a swoon. On recovering his senses, he glorified his transcendent Lord, confessed his folly, and declared his long-standing faith.

In Qur'an 7:143, the mode of the Divine Epiphany before the mountain is expressed by means of the Arabic verbal form *tajallā* (derived from *jalā*, to make clear), which Arberry (cited above) translates "revealed Him." Particularly in view of the mention of the divine "glory" (Hebrew: *kabôd*) in Exodus 33:18ff., the use of this verb might imply the radiant glory of the divine disclosure.³³ The verse in which *tajallā* occurs has been variously understood by Muslim commentators and Western translators of the Qur'an. It is not entirely clear whether God's direct or indirect manifestation is intended; *tajallā* could imply God's personal appearance, the manifestation of His radiant "glory," or the epiphany of an angelic being representative of Him. George Sale translated the line under discussion as follows: "But when his LORD appeared with glory in the mount, he reduced it to dust."

In an important Shī'ī tradition attributed to Imám Ja'far aṣ-Ṣádiq (d. c. 705 C.E.), the theophany before the mountain is explained in terms of the appearance of an allegedly proto-Shiite cherub (or angelic being): "The Cherubim (*al-karúbiyyín*) are a [celestial] people of our party created in primordial times (*min al-khalq al-awwal*). God established them behind the [divine] Throne (*al-'arsh*). If the light (*núr*) of but one of them should be distributed among the people of the earth, it would assuredly suffice them . . . When Moses asked his Lord what he asked [i.e., to see Him], He [God] commanded one of the Cherubim and it manifested itself unto the mountain (*fatajallá li'l-jabal*) and reduced it to dust."³⁴ On similar lines is the exposition of Qur'an 7:143 in an Arabic recension of Muḥammad b. 'Abdalláh Kisá'í's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyá* ("Tales of the Prophets," c. 1200 C.E.): "God commanded the angels of heaven to present themselves to Moses, and they passed before him in ranks. As he witnessed their different forms and the magnificence of their shapes, fear and trembling overcame him; and Gabriel passed his wing over Moses' heart to quieten his fear. Then Gabriel stood on the summit of the mountain and ascended to heaven."³⁵ Moses, we are led to believe, witnessed the Sinaitic manifestation of a whole heavenly host, including Gabriel whose calming act should be viewed as an anti-anthropomorphic paraphrase of the biblical mention of God's shielding Moses from His "glory" with His own "hand." (Exodus 33:22b)

In literatures representative of Islamic mysticism, the Sinai epiphany outlined in Qur'an 7:143 has been given a variety of psychological, spiritual, or symbolic interpretations. Various Sufi exegetes have, from medieval times, understood this verse in the light of sometimes complex theories about the modes of the divine epiphany (*tajallí*) and of mystical states experienced by wayfarers on the spiritual path. In, for example, the *'Awárif al-ma'árif* of Shiháb ad-Dín Abú Ḥafṣ 'Umar as-Suhrawardí (1145–1234 C.E.), *tajallí* (theophany) is defined as "the manifestation of the sun of the reality (*ḥaqíqa*) of God

out from the clouds of humanity” and, as in many other Sufi writings, regarded as of three kinds: 1) the *tajallí* of the [divine] Essence (*tajallí dhát*), 2) the *tajallí* of the [divine] attributes (*tajallí šifát*), and 3) the *tajallí* of the [divine] actions (*tajallí af’ál*). In reverse order, the mystic wayfarer may have interior experience of these modes of the divine theophany. Suhrawardí comments on the *tajallí* of the divine Essence (*taj-jalí dhát*) in terms of Moses’ Sinaitic experience of God’s self-revelation (*tajallá*; in Qur’an 7:143), the Israelite prophet being archetypal of the advanced mystic. That Moses fell into a swoon as a result of the divine epiphany is related to the complete nullification or annihilation (*faná’*) of the qualities of existence, and the attaining of that abiding permanency (*baqá’*) at which the spiritual being beholds the essence (*dhát*) of the Eternal God through His Light. Having attained the state of mystical nullification (*faná’*), Moses’ request to see God signaled his attaining permanency in God (*baqá’*) as a result of the *tajallí* of the light of the Divine Essence (*dhát*) on the “Mount” (*ṭūr*) of the human aspect (*nafs*) of his existence.³⁶

At the beginning of Qur’an 7:143, it is said that God conversed with Moses: “and his Lord spoke with him” (*wa kalamahu rabbahu*), and at Qur’an 4:162 that: “. . . unto Moses God spoke directly” (*kallama Alláhu Músá taklímán*). (Cf. also Qur’an 2:254; Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10.) It was in view of these references that in Islamic literatures Moses came to be entitled “He who conversed with God” (*kalím Alláh*). This epithet is frequently accorded Moses in Bábí and Bahá’í scripture—apart from its being given to Bahá’u’lláh’s brother Mírzá Músá, Aqáy-i Kalím (doubtless because he was on intimate terms with Bahá’u’lláh and a staunch Bahá’í, as well as on account of his name).

In the light of the above, it will be convenient to note at this point that there exists a sermon attributed to Imám ‘Alí b. Abí Tálíb (d. 662 C.E.), the “Sermon of the [River] Gulf” (*al-khuṭba at-ṭutunjiyya*), which (in certain recensions) contains reference to the eschatological manifestation of God as the

One Who conversed with Moses³⁷: "Anticipate ye the revelation (*zuhúr*) of Him Who conversed with Moses (*mukallam Músá*) from the Tree [Burning Bush] upon the Mount [Sinai] (*min ash-shajara 'alá at-túr*)."³⁸ Regarded as authentic by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í,³⁹ and commented upon at length by Siyyid Kázim Rashtí,⁴⁰ as well as by the Báb,⁴¹ this apparently "extremist" (*ghuluww*), cosmologically-oriented sermon has contributed to the Bábí-Bahá'í theology of the Sinai theophany. In one of his epistles of the 'Akká period, Bahá'u'lláh quotes from it one sentence of particular interest and asserts that it was divinely inspired: "Say: 'O people! Hast thou forgotten that which was uttered by one of the chosen ones of old [Imám 'Alí] when he said, 'Anticipate ye the revelation of the One Who conversed with Moses from the Tree upon the Mount.' This is an utterance taught him [Imám 'Alí] by the Messenger of God [Muḥammad] on the part of He Who sent him and aided him through the Faithful Spirit.'"⁴²

The following lines from a Prayer of the Signs (*Du'á as-simát*) also attributed to Imám 'Alí and rooted in Deuteronomy 33:2 are likewise of importance to the student of the background of the Bábí-Bahá'í Sinaitic theology:⁴³

And by Thy glory (*majd*) which appeared on Mount Sinai (*túr síná'*) and through which Thou conversed with Thy servant and Thy messenger, Moses son of 'Imrán (Amram)! And by Thy rising up in [Mount] Seir (*sá'ir*) and Thy manifestation in Mount Paran (*jabal fárán*)! And by the myriads of holy ones (*ribwát al-muqaddasín*) and the hosts of the sanctified angels!⁴⁴

In this prayer, any hint of God's direct manifestation or communion with Moses is ruled out. It was through His "glory" that God appeared on Sinai and communicated with Moses. Mentioned in the Bible though not the Qur'an, Mt. Seir and Mt. Paran are spoken about in various Shí'í sources usually in connection with the missions of Jesus and Muḥammad. (Cf. Deut. 33:2; Habb. 3:3; Jud. 5:4-5)⁴⁵

THE SHAYKHÍ BACKGROUND

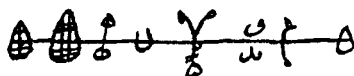
Bábí-Bahá'í doctrine and scriptural exegesis has its most immediate and central roots in early Shaykhism, a school of Shí'í theosophy deriving from the above-mentioned Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í (d. 1826) and Sayyid Kázim Rashtí (d. 1844). In certain of the books and treatises of these two learned Muslims Moses/Sinai motifs in quranic texts and traditions ascribed to the Imáms are variously interpreted. Often utilizing an allegorical or mystical hermeneutic their frequently imamologically-informed comments form an important background aspect to the Bábí-Bahá'í materials. The following few notes must suffice to give an indication of the richness of early Shaykhí exegesis.

In an epistle to a certain Mullá 'Alí Tawbalí (written in 1211 A.H., 1796/7 C.E.) Shaykh Aḥmad responded to a number of questions which required that he explain Moses/Sinai motifs.⁴⁶ Asked about the significance of various trees mentioned in the Qur'an he wrote:⁴⁷

And the Tree (*shajara*) which is in the "Holy Vale" (*al-wād al-muqaddas*) and the "Tree issuing from the Mount of Sinai (*tūr síná*)" [Qur'an 25:20] is the Primordial Reality (*al-awwalí*) through which the [divine] Word (*al-kalám*, or Speech) had precedence. The "Holy Vale" is the "Tranquil Soul" (*an-nafs al-muṭ-a'inna*) and the "Mount" (*aṭ-ṭūr*) is the obedient, patient body (*al-jasad al-muṭí' as-sábir*). And the "Holy Vale" is [also] the secure [or perfect] heart (*al-qalb as-salím*) and the "Mount" the upright intellect (*al-'aql al-mustaqím*).⁴⁸

Having thus indicated the mystical import of the Sinaitic "Tree," "Holy Vale," and "Mount," the Shaykh quotes a saying to the effect that the "Tree" planted on Mount Sinai is possessed of the essential human quality of reason (or animal rationality, *al-ḥayawání an-nāṭiq*). It is, he states, a "Tree" symbolic of the "substance (or essence) of Noble Man" (*ḥayúlá al-insán al-karím*). Drawing on some rather arcane tra-

ditions, the Shaykh also comments on the “Tree” of Qur’an 25:20, in the light of its having been set in the zodiac by Balṣiyāl[?] ibn Ḥūr, the bearer of the “Dome of Time.” An herbal substance (*al-ḥashīsha*) associated with this cosmic “Tree” (*shajara*)—represented by the obscure cryptogram



produces pure gold when treated alchemically.⁴⁹

After making detailed comments on the “trees” mentioned in Qur’an 14:24ff. Shaykh Aḥmad explains the significance of the “Holy Vale” and the “Holy Land.” Partly reiterating earlier remarks he writes:

... the “Holy Vale” (*al-wād al-muqaddas*) is the “Secure Heart” (*al-qalb as-salīm*) which is filled with contentment (*ar-riḍā*) and submission (*at-taslīm*). The “Holy Land” (*al-arḍ al-muqaddas*) is the “tranquil, satisfied, contented soul.” The “Holy Vale” is the “House of procreation and marriage” (*bayt at-tawlīd wa’t-tanākūḥ*) and the “Purple Lights” (*al-anwār al-firfiriyya*). The “Holy Land” is the “New Body” (*al-jasad al-jadīd*).⁵⁰

Reference is then made to a tradition in which mention is made of there being nine “evils” on earth; ten mountains; the mountain (*al-jabal*) on which God spoke directly with Moses (see Qur’an 4:164), sanctified Jesus, took Abraham for a friend (*khalīl*), and reckoned Muḥammad as one beloved (*ḥabīb*); four birds (cf. Qur’an 2:262); the thirty days completed with ten (see Qur’an 7:142); the shoes which Moses doffed (see Qur’an 20:12); twelve as the number of new moons; and the four sacrosanct months.

A great many symbolic senses are given by Shaykh Aḥmad to the “ten mountains.” They form an interrelated hierarchy of “realities” rooted in this world but so spanning celestial realms as to express a mystical cosmology. First and foremost among these “ten mountains” stands the “mountain” of the “heart of the believer,” the “Boundary of the cardinal

points" (*muḥaddad al-jihát*), the "Supreme Heaven" (*as-sáqúra al-'ulyá*), the "Vehicle of Causes" (*markab al-'ilal*), the "Sciences of How? and Why?" (*'ulúm al-kayf wa'l-lima*), the "Elevated, All-Merciful Throne" (*'arsh al-istiwá ar-raḥmánî*), and the "Supreme Panorama" (*al-manẓar al-'alá*); second, the "Bosom of Knowledge" (*ṣadr al-'ilm*), the "Chair extended before the heavens and the earth" (*al-kúrsí al-wásí 'li's-samáwát wa'l-arḍ*), and the "Book Inscribed" (*al-kitáb al-mastúr*); third, the "Heaven of Security" (*samá' al-amán*), the "Peace of Faith" (*salm al-ímán*), the "Star of Saturn" (*burj al-kaywán*), the "Mountain of the manifestation of the Light and the Proclamation" (*jabal zuḥúr an-núr wa'l-isti'lán*), the "Compliance of the Merciful" (*muṭtí' ar-raḥmán*), the "Path of the Heart" (*ṭaríq al-janán*); fourth, the "Treasury of Knowledge" (*khizánat al-'ilm*), the "Repository of the Decree" (*wi'á' al-hukm*), the "Locus of knowledge" (*mazhar al-'ilm*), the "Veil of Chrysolite" (or Emerald) (*ḥijáb az-zabarjad*), and the "Firmament of the Assisting Star" (*falak al-kawkab al-is'ád*); fifth, the "Mountain of Power" (*jabal as-saṭwa*), the "Scene of the wrath of the Angel of Death" (*mazhar al-qahr al-'azrá'ilt*), and the "Crimson Veil" (*ḥijáb al-aḥmar*); sixth, the "Mountain of the Second Principle (or: Essence) (*jabal al-hayúlá ath-thániyya*), and the "Pulpit of Bountiful Existence" (*minba' al-wujúd al-fayyáḍ*); seventh, the "Mountain of Spiritual Existence" preserved in the Divine Treasuries" (*jabal al-akwán al-malakútiyya al-mahfúz fí'l-khazá'in al-iláhiyya*); eighth, the "Mountain of Ciphred Tabernacles sent down according to a known decree" (*jabal al-hayákil ar-raqamiyya al-manzila bi'l-qadr al-ma'lúm*); ninth, the "Mountain of Life (*jabal al-ḥayát*) in whose shade living beings (*al-ḥayawánát*) are enlivened"; and tenth, "Mount Sinai" (*jabal at-túr*) and "[Mount] Qaf" (*al-qáf*). The complexity of the Shaykh's interpretations of Mount Sinai and motifs associated with it may be gathered from the fact that he understood this "mountain" to have varied and diverse senses in terms of its multifarious terrestrial and celestial poles of being.⁵¹

In his *Sharḥ az-zīyāra al-jāmi'a al-kabīra* and in other treatises, *Shaykh* Aḥmad comments on Qur'an 7:143, in the light of the tradition that it was a proto-*Shī'ī* Cherub that was manifested before Moses and shattered the mountain. It was an infinitesimal portion of the "light of the [divine] Veil" (*nūr as-sitr*) or the "light of [God's] Grandeur" (*nūr al-'aẓīmat*) related to God's seventy thousand "veils of Light" and to the light of the Imāms that beamed forth before Moses from the mysterious cherubic "Speaker." It was in view of Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq's having stated that "God manifested himself (*tajallā*) unto his servants through his Speech [or Word] (*al-kalām*) but they did not see Him [God]" that the *Shaykh* also taught that God's epiphany before the "mountain" was the epiphany of "the Speaker" (*al-mutakallam*) through His "Speech" (*al-kalām*) and not God's personal manifestation. In the form of "light," the divine "Speech" was revealed upon the "mountain" which is, on one level, symbolic of the "heart" of Moses. While, furthermore, Moses' Sinaitic experience of God was a mystical experience of a mere glimmer of the Divine Light, Imām Ja'far had an experience of its fullness whilst wrapt in prayer. Both literalistic and mystical interpretations of Qur'an 7:143 are present in the vastly erudite writings of *Shaykh* Aḥmad.⁵²

At various points in his lengthy and frequently abstruse *Commentary on the Sermon of the Gulf* (*Sharḥ al-khuṭba aṭ-ṭutunjiyya*), Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī touches upon Moses/Sinai motifs. Commenting on Imām 'Alī's words, "He [God] created the oceans (*al-biḥār*) and the mountains (*al-jibāl*)," he has much to say about the "mountains." He not only adds further details about the "ten mountains" listed above but, for example, refers to: the "mountain of iron" (*jabal al-ḥadīd*); a "mountain under which the mine of mercury (or quicksilver, *ma'dan az-zaybaq*) flows"; the "mountain of yellow cornelian" (*jabal al-'aḳīq al-aṣfar*); the "mountain of red ruby" (*jabal al-yāqūt al-aḥmar*); the "mountain of the mine of gold" (*jabal ma'dan adh-dhahab*) which is the "seat of the beams of the

sun" (*maṭraḥ aṣḥi* "at *aṣḥ-shams*) related to the "Mount of Moses" (*ṭūr mūsá*), the "Locale of Jesus" (*manzil 'ísá*), the "Ark of Aaron" (*tábút harín*), the "Well of Daniel" (*bi'r danyál*) and the "Station of Assent" (*maqám al-iqbál*); the "mountain of lead" (*jabal al-usrub*) with an exterior of iron and an interior of gold; Mount Qáf; the "Mountain of Light" (*jabal an-núr*); the "Mountain of the One [God]" (*jabal al-aḥad*); the "Mountain of Najaf" (*jabal an-Najaf*, in Iraq); Mt. Sinai; Mt. Seir; and Mt. Paran.⁵³

What Sayyid Kázim has to say about "Mount Sinai" (*jabal ṭūr síná*) is expressive of the importance of Najaf as the place where the shrine of Imám 'Alí is located: "As regards Mount Sinai, outwardly and inwardly it is the 'hill of Najaf' (*rubwa an-Najaf*)." Though he acknowledged that this mountain was traditionally located in Syria or the "Holy Land" he explained this in terms of a part of the "mountain of Najaf" (*jabal an-Najaf*) having become detached and reconstituted piecemeal in the "land of Syria" (*arḍ aṣḥ-Shám*). The "mountain of Najaf" is a part of the "mountain" on which God held converse with Moses, sanctified Jesus, took Abraham for a "Friend" and reckoned Muḥammad one "Beloved." It is the "greatest of the mountains of the world" closely related to Mt. Sinai, Mt. Seir, and Mt. Paran.⁵⁴ Following Shaykh Aḥmad, the Sayyid considered "Mount Seir" (*jabal sá'ir*) to be the scene of Jesus's "sanctification" and intimate converse with God—he located it in the Hedjaz (Western Arabia)—and an "edifice" (or dome, *qubba*) which was "with Moses and like a throne." The mountain on which God took Abraham for a Friend was either a hill on the slope of Mt. Mina (near Mecca) where a mosque is built or another mountain in Jerusalem, (Ilya) the Holy City, in Palestine. Allegedly a mountain near Mecca, Mount Paran (*jabal al-fárán*) was the place where "sanctified myriads" (*ribwát al-muqaddasín*) of angels beyond the ken of the Cherubim appeared to Muḥammad.⁵⁵

In the course of expounding various lines of the *Sermon of*

the Gulf, Sayyid Kāzim also makes occasional reference to Qur'an 7:143 and to the tradition about the proto-Shī'ī Cherub. Commenting on God's having singled out the Prophet Muḥammad from the "Supreme Center" (*al-buḥbūḥa al-'ulyā*) in the light of Qur'an 3:33 and other traditions, he speaks of the "heart" (*al-qalb*) and the "self" (*an-nafs*) as pivotal realities. The core of the being of the Prophet Muḥammad is his transcendent "Self" (*an-nafs*) which is the locus of the divine Epiphany (*al-mutajallī bi'l-aḥadiyya*) as the "Self of God" (*nafs allāh*). When God created Imām 'Alī this elevated "Self" was manifested in him for both he and the Prophet are associated with the same created, though divine, "Self" (*nafs*) and "Essence" (*dhāt*). It was Imām 'Alī who conversed with Moses from the Sinaitic Tree (*ash-shajarat*) and uttered the words "I, verily am God." He was the one who appeared "before and to Moses through his Light" as one of the "men of the Cherubim." The epiphany (*tajallī*) of Imām 'Alī unto Moses from the "Tree" was "the essence of the epiphany of God" (*'ayn tajallī allāh*) within the Israelite Prophet.⁵⁶

In further explaining the significance of the epiphany unto Moses, Sayyid Kāzim states that the proto-Shī'ī Cherub mentioned by Imām Ja'far (see above) is symbolic of the "Self of Moses" (*nafs mūsā*). He has disclosed this "mystery" in view of the fact that an epiphany (*at-tajallī*) unto something is only possible through the "self" (*nafs*) of that thing.⁵⁷ On similar lines is the Sayyid's teaching that the number and names of the angelic host of the Cherubim are the same as those of the prophets (*al-anbiyā*): "That man [Cherub] who revealed himself unto Moses (*tajallī li-mūsā*) such that Moses fell down in a swoon [see Qur'an 7:143] was named Moses." On another level however, the Cherubic being who appeared to Moses was the reality of such Prophets as the "First and Last Adam" (*adam al-awwal wa'l-ākhir*).⁵⁸ The Cherubim are the archetypal realities of the prophets possessed of an essential oneness. Moses thus experienced the epiphany (*tajallī*) of his

celestial "Self" (*nafs*) as a Cherub who may be thought of as Imám 'Alí or one of the prophets who partake of the same plenitude of reality. The epiphany (*tajallí*) was the disclosure of an infinitesimal glimmer of the radiance that emanated from the angelic body of a Cherub numbered among the messengers "possessed of constancy" (*ulú al-'azm*).⁵⁹ Alternatively, the epiphanic radiance which shone forth before Moses on Sinai may be thought of as the "Light" (*núr*) of Muḥammad and his family.⁶⁰

In the light of the above, it will be evident that both Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kázim often gave symbolic or mystical interpretations to Moses/Sinai motifs—sometimes in line with those set forth by such Sufi mystagogues as Ibn al-'Arabí, and frequently informed by imamological speculations. On one level Mount Sinai all but becomes the interior reality of Moses or the inmost heart of the believer, and the epiphany on the Mount the shining forth of the Divine Light upon it.

The founding fathers of the Shaykhí movement were criticized by their more rigidly orthodox Shí'í contemporaries for their allegedly unwarranted allegorism. In, for example, the *Tiryáq-i fárúq* (Discriminating antidote [for poisons]) of 'Abd aṣ-Ṣamad b. 'Abdalláh al-Ḥusaynání al-Mazandarání written in 1301 A.H./1883 C.E., the mystically-oriented Shaykhí interpretation of Qur'an 7:143 is singled out for critical comment.⁶¹ The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, however, both drew on and creatively expounded early Shaykhí nonliteral interpretations of this and other texts and traditions relating to Moses' Sinaitic experiences.

WRITINGS OF THE BÁB

During the period of his prophetic ministry (1844–1850), the Báb wrote a great many books, treatises, and letters in the Arabic and Persian languages. As indicated below, only a few of these largely unpublished, unedited, unstudied, and often

abstruse writings will be referred to here, despite the fact that a good many of them contain materials of central interest.

The Báb's early and lengthy Arabic Commentary on the Sura of Joseph (*Tafsír súra Yúsuf*, also known as the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* [loosely, Stature of the names], written mid-1844) contains a large number of verses that are informed by Sinaitic imagery and motifs.⁶² In the very first chapter of this complex work, its author refers to his revelation as the truth which was concealed in the Mother Book (*umm al-kitáb*) on Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭúr*) and to himself as the Greatest Word (*al-kalima al-akbar*) commissioned about or raised up from the Sinaitic Fire (*an-nár*, loosely, the "Burning Bush").⁶³ In subsequent chapters, the Báb frequently invites terrestrial and celestial beings to hearken unto the proclamation of divinity ("I, verily, am God . . .") uttered from the mystic Sinai which is the heavenly sphere of revelation and the abode of the occulted (Most Great) Remembrance (of God) (*dhikr alláh*, the hidden and expected Imám) with whom he identified and with whose voice he often spoke:

O ye people of the [celestial] Throne! Hearken unto My Call [raised up] from about the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*), "Verily, I am God, no God is there except Me." . . . The Remembrance (*adh-dhikr*) standeth firm upon the unsullied Path through the upright line about the [Sinaitic] Fire.⁶⁴

Hearken unto the Call of thy Lord [raised up] upon Mount Sinai (*jabal as-síná'*), "Verily, there is no God except Him. And I, verily, am the Exalted One (*al-'alí*), veiled in the Mother Book according to the decree of God."⁶⁵

O people of the Throne! Hearken unto My Call from about the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*), in the leaves of these branches, for God hath inspired me [to utter the words], "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Me. I am the Remembrance (*adh-dhikr*), the [letter] "H" (*al-há'*) which hath been sent down in the "Night of Power" (*laylat al-qadr*) in the midst of the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*).⁶⁶

O people of Paradise! Harken unto the Call of God from the leaves of the Branch of Camphor about this Tree (*ash-shajara*) [situated on] the Mount (*aṭ-ṭūr*), "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Him."⁶⁷

O Concourse of Lights! Harken unto My Call from this Crimson Leaf upon this Snow-White Tree (*ash-shajara al-bayḏā*) in this Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr as-síná*), "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Me. . . ."

O people of the realm of Unknowing! Harken unto My Call from the tongue of the Báb, this Arabian Youth who crieth out in Sinai (*as-síná*) according to the melody of the Point of Praise (*nuḡṭat ath-ṭhaná*), "God, no God is there except Him."⁶⁸

O ye people of the Throne! Harken unto My Call from the Point of the Gate (*nuḡṭat al-báb*). God, verily, hath inspired me in Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr as-síná*) from the region of this Tree (*ash-shajarat*) [to say], "I verily, am God, no God is there except Me."⁶⁹

O ye peoples of the earth! Harken unto My Call, from the precincts of this Tree (*ash-shajara*) which blazeth through the pre-existent [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*): "There is no God but Him."⁷⁰

O people of the realm of the Unseen (*'amá*, lit., cloud of unknowing)! Harken unto the Call of God from the Tree (*ash-shajara*) upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭūr*), and upon whose leaves the birds are in motion, "I, verily am God, Lord of the worlds."⁷¹

God, verily, inspired Me in the Primordial Mount (*aṭ-ṭūr al-awwal*) through the tongue of His Beloved with the hidden mystery about the Gate (*al-báb*), "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Him."⁷²

Say! through the tongue of thy Lord—no God is there except Him—in this Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr as-síná*) about the Crimson Word (*kalimat al-ḥamrá*) uttered from the Exalted Tree (*ash-shajarat al-'ulyá*): "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Him."⁷³

These verses of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* form but a small proportion of the many passages in which either the Báb or the

Remembrance (*dhikr*) are pictured as having uttered various forms of God's declaration from the Sinaitic Fire, or Tree (Burning Bush). The relationship between the Báb, the Remembrance (*dhikr*), and God is so intimate that the former can invite humankind to "the Truth" by revealing the words, "I, verily, am God." It is not that the Báb made an early or direct claim to divinity, for at various points in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* he underlines his station of servitude and his position as the "Gate" (*báb*).⁷⁴ Indeed, as indicated below, the Sinaitic declaration of divinity is explicitly stated in early *Shaykhí* literature to have been the prerogative of such exalted Imáms as 'Alí, seen as the locus of the divine Self (*nafs*) or Essence (*dhát*) of God—though not the absolute, unknowable Godhead. The frequency and significance of the voicing of the words, "I, verily, am God," or the like, seems to be hinted at in the forty-fourth sura of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* where it is stated: "The likeness of some of the verses of this Book is as the likeness of the Word of the Mount (*kalimat at-túr*) in the Qur'an. In very truth, it hath not been revealed except by God, the Single, the One, the Incomparable."⁷⁵

Directly related to his claim to have uttered the declaration of divinity on Mt. Sinai in view of his intimate relationship with, or identity with, the Remembrance (*dhikr*) is the Báb's claim to have cried out unto or conversed with Moses:

O ye people of [the realm of] Extinction (*mahw*)! Hearken unto My Call from the Point of Brightness (*nuqṭat as-sahw*), from this Arabian Youth [the Báb] Who, by the leave of God, cried out unto Moses on Mount Sinai (*at-túr síná*).⁷⁶

Indeed, We conversed with Moses by the leave of God from the Tree (*ash-shajara*) on the Mount (*at-túr*).⁷⁷

I caused the Remembrance (*adh-dhikr*) to cry out in the two Mounts (*at-túrayn*) . . . God hath not decreed that anything stand between me [the Báb] and the Most Great Remembrance (*adh-dhikr al-akbar*).⁷⁸

Elsewhere in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, the Báb takes the place of Moses as the one called in the "Holy Vale"—for the Báb, a mystic or celestial realm—or the "servant" to whom God communicated through certain "Letters of the Divine Oneness" (the Imáms as qabbalistic loci of inspiration?):

So give ear when Thou [the Báb] receivest inspiration from Thy Lord in the "Holy Vale" (*bi'l-wád al-muqaddas*) through the Point of Fire (*nuqṭat an-nár*) in the zenith of Ice (*kabid ath-thalj*).⁷⁹

The Báb equated both himself and the Remembrance⁸⁰ with the Sinaitic Tree (*shajara*) which, for him, symbolized the sphere of the Divine Oneness (*al-aḥadiyya*) and the locus of inspiration centered in their inmost hearts (*fu'ád*):

O People of the earth! Fear God on account of this Leaf sprung up from the Tree of the Divine Oneness (*shajarat al-aḥadiyya*).⁸¹

I, verily, am the Tree (*ash-shajara*) in the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) and He Who speaketh (*al-manṭúq*) from the Manifestation (*aṣ-ṣuhúr*) of the Living One, the Self-Subsisting.⁸²

O people of the Throne! Harken unto My Call raised nigh unto the Shrine (*aḍ-ḍarīḥ*) and uttered by the tongue of this Tree (*ash-shajara*) planted in the Exalted Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) . . . "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Him."⁸³

This is assuredly the Tree of the Inmost Heart (*ash-shajara al-fu'ád*) upon Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭúr as-síná*).⁸⁴

The Most Great Remembrance (*adh-dhikr al-akbar*) is this Blessed Tree (*ash-shajara al-mubáraka*) dyed crimson with the oil of servitude.⁸⁵

The Remembrance of God (*dhikr alláh*) is in the Blessed Tree (*ash-shajara al-mubáraka*). So hearken unto the Call of God: "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Me."⁸⁶

O ye people of Paradise! Harken unto the Call of God from the wondrous tongue of this Remembrance (*adh-dhikr*) . . . "I, verily,

am God, no God is there except Me." . . . He, verily, is the Blessed Tree (*ash-shajara al-mubáraka*) on Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭúr as-síná*) sprung up from the Land of Glory (*arḍ al-bahá*).⁸⁷

The Remembrance of God (*dhikr alláh*) is in the Blessed Tree (*ash-shajara al-mubáraka*). So hearken unto the Call of God, "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Me."⁸⁸

At several points in the same work, the Sinaitic Fire (*an-nár*) seen by Moses is spoken about and equated with the Divine Light (*an-núr*) which, according to Shaykhí and other sources, accompanied the theophany (*tajallí*) on the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*). Once again, both the Báb and the Remembrance (*dhikr*) are in various ways associated with the Sinaitic Fire and/or Light:

Say: . . . I, verily, am the Fire (*an-nár*) of the Speaker (*al-kalím*) nigh unto the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*). The Tree (*ash-shajara*) hath proclaimed: "No God is there except Him" and God beareth witness unto Me.⁸⁹

Say: I, verily, am the Light (*an-núr*) which was, in very truth, made manifest upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) of the Inmost Heart (*al-fu'ád*).⁹⁰

Such, verily, as gaze upon the Light (*an-núr*) manifest before the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*), concealed, in very truth, above the sphere of Glory (*minṭaqat al-bahá*), are privy to the ancient Mystery of God, and shall, with Our permission, gaze upon the Light (*an-núr*) before the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) made visible in the Dawning Place of Manifestation on the part of the Báb.⁹¹

O ye people of the earth! . . . This is assuredly the Light (*an-núr*) which shone forth in the Dawning-Place of Manifestation upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) . . . This is the [Fire] (*an-nár*) which was, in very truth, revealed upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*).⁹²

I, verily, am the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*) emanating from the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) . . .

I, verily, am the Light (*an-núr*) above the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) . . .

I, verily, am the [Sinaitic] Speaker (*al-mutakallam*) in the two stations (*al-maqámayn*) [who uttered the words], "No God is there except God alone; no God is there except Him." . . .

I, am the Flame (or, Fire; *an-nár*) of that [supernal] Light (*an-núr*) that glowed upon Sinai (or, "the Mount"; *aṭ-ṭúr*) in the glad-some Spot (lit., land of exhilaration; *arḍ as-surúr*), and lay concealed in the midst of the Burning Bush (lit., Fire; *an-nár*).⁹³

O people of the Abyss of the Divine Unity! Hearken unto My Call from the Point of the Fire of the Divine Epiphany (*al-mutajallí*) shining upon your inmost hearts.⁹⁴

This is assuredly the Mystery of Mysteries (*sirr al-asrár*) which was concealed about the [Sinaitic] Fire.

This is assuredly the Light of Lights (*an-núr al-anwár*) in the midst of the Mountains (*al-jibál*) to the right-hand side of the Throne beyond Mount Qáf.⁹⁵

He [the Báḅ] is the Light (*an-núr*) in the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) and the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) in the Dawning-Place of Manifestation (*maṭla' az-zuhúr*) who [or which] was, by the leave of God, the Exalted; concealed in the Point of Rapture (*nuḡṭat as-surúr*) upon the Mountain of the Ice of Manifestation (*jabal ṭhalj az-zuhúr*).⁹⁶

This is the Remembrance of God (*dhikr alláh*) that crieth out from the Tree dyed crimson and sprung up through the Oil which blazeth forth on account of the Fire (*an-nár*). This is the Light of God (*núr alláh*) in the Fire (*an-nár*) encompassed by the [celestial] Water (*al-má*).⁹⁷

This Remembrance (*adh-dhikr*) is assuredly the Light (*an-núr*) in the Mount of Manifestation (*aṭ-ṭúr az-zuhúr*) . . . Say: "I, verily, am the Light (*an-núr*) in the Point of Manifestation (*nuḡṭat az-zuhúr*)."⁹⁸

The quranic account of Moses' request to see God and the epiphany before the mountain (Qur'an 7:143; see above) as exegetically "rewritten" and mystically interpreted in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* is fundamental to the Sinaitic theology of the Báḅ. Apart from claiming to be the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) where the

Divine Epiphany (*tajallí*) took place, the Báb identified both himself and the Remembrance (*dhikr*) as the agents of this epiphany.⁹⁹ Reflecting early *Shaykhí* speculations he, furthermore, associated the Light (*an-núr*) of the Sinaitic epiphany with the Veil(s) surrounding God and with the celestial "Muhammadan Light" which emanates from the heavenly body of Imám 'Alí and is the locus of the archetypal Fátíma:

I, verily, am the mystery of the Epiphany (*as-sirr al-mutajallá*) above the Line (*as-satr*) secreted under the Yellow, Flashing Veil [of Divinity] concealed about the [Divine] Throne . . . Thou, assuredly, cried out in the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) and wast the Point of the Gate (*nuṣṣat al-báb*) situated about the Tree (*ash-shajara*) planted in the Land of the Unseen (lit., Cloud of Unknowing; *'amá*).¹⁰⁰

This is assuredly the Light (*an-núr*) upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*), the [Sinaitic] Epiphany (*al-mutajallá*) of the [divine] Names (*al-asmá*) in the Concourse of Manifestation (*malá' az-ẓuhúr*). . . the mystery of the [Sinaitic] Epiphany (*al-mutajallá*) [which emanated] from the Body of the Exalted 'Alí (*jism al-'alawí*), the Light (*an-núr*) treasured up in the form of a Dove in the Fátimid Center (*kabd al-fátimí*).¹⁰¹

In the one hundred seventh sura of the *Qayyúm al-asmá*, the Báb is identified as the Cherub (see above) who was the agent of the divine Epiphany:

O people of the Throne! Harken unto My Call . . . from this Arabian Youth, the Cherub [who appeared] on the Mount of Glory (*ṭúr al-bahá*), "I, verily, am the True One, no God is there except Me, the Exalted."¹⁰²

His Sinaitic role is underlined in the following lines from sura fifty-three in which allusion is made to Qur'an 7:143:

Indeed We conversed with Moses by the leave of God from the Tree (*ash-shajara*) on the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*). And We revealed an in-

finitesimal glimmer of Thy Light (*an-núr*) upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) and [unto] such as were upon it, whereupon the mountain (*al-jabal*) was crushed and became floating dust particles, and Moses fell down swooning.¹⁰³

A particularly interesting exegetical "rewrite" of Qur'an 7:143 is contained in sura sixty-eight of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*:

When we raised up the sincere ones in the precincts of the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*), they asked Us about the Cause (*al-amr*). Say: God cannot be seen! But, O people! Gaze upon Me! And if your inmost hearts remain firm after you have, in very truth, gazed upon Me, then shall you see the servant (*al-'abd*, the Báb) in a state of unsullied and upright servitude. And when the Remembrance (*adh-dhikr*) appeared in glory (*tajallá*) upon the mountain (*al-jabal*) through that Word (*al-kalima*), they hearkened unto my Call from the precincts of the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*): "God, no God is there except Him." But is there any among you who withholdeth his acceptance, by setting himself apart from God? [Nay!] Indeed, the mountains (*al-jibál*) were crushed to dust and the inmost hearts fell down prostrate before God, the Ancient.¹⁰⁴

Here it is sincere souls who, having been elevated to the mystic Sinai, enquire after the "Cause"; possibly the whereabouts of the Hidden Imám. They are informed that they can only indirectly vision God or identify with the Báb if their hearts remain firm after experiencing the epiphany of the Remembrance (*dhikr*). When the Remembrance "appeared in glory" (*tajallá*) upon the mountain through the divine Word, they heard the declaration of divinity, but proved unable to sustain its impact. The "mountains" of their inmost hearts were crushed, and they swooned away. Moses is replaced by "sincere souls," the Remembrance (*dhikr*) becomes the agent of the Divine Epiphany (*tajallí*) through the "Word" (*kalima*), and the "mountain" (*jabal*) crushed to dust becomes the "mountains" (*al-jibál*) of the hearts of souls incapable of sus-

taining an encounter with the Remembrance (*dhikr*). It is indicated that identification with the Báb is no easy matter: it presupposes identification with the Remembrance, who represents the Godhead.

In two adjacent suras of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, the Báb explains that the Sinaitic episode (*al-ḥadīth*) of the "Call of Moses" detailed in the Qur'an (see above) had come to pass again. This is in view of his claim to be in communication with God and in receipt of divine revelation. As the Gate, the Báb pictured himself as having mystic access to the celestial sphere, or Holy Vale, where Moses encountered God. He heard anew the Sinaitic declaration of divinity and uttered again the "I, verily, am God . . ." (or the like) as one in intimate communion with the Remembrance or the Being who spoke from the Fire:

O Solace of Mine Eyes! Say: The episode surrounding the mystery of Moses, the Speaker (*al-kalīm*), hath, by the leave of God, the Exalted, again come to pass.

O people of Contentment! Harken unto the Call of God . . . "I, verily, am God, and He is the True One, no God is there except Him." . . . Say: I, verily, am the Crier (*al-munádī*) situated, by the leave of God, the Lord of the Throne and of the Realm of the Unseen (lit., Cloud of Unknowing; *'amā*) in the [Sinaitic] Fire. I, verily, am the servant of God (*'abd allāh*). So doff thy sandals, relinquish the two worlds (lit., the two limits; *al-ḥaddayn*). Thou, verily, art in the "Holy Vale" (*al-wād al-muqaddas*) concealed (*maṭwiyyan*) in this Báb.¹⁰⁵

O Solace of Mine Eyes! Say: The episode of Moses upon Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr as-sínā'*) hath again come to pass through the appearance of the Glorious Light (*al-nūr al-bahā'*), for Thy Lord hath called out unto Thee in the "Holy Vale" (*bi'l wād al-muqaddas*) . . . And He hath enabled Thee to see something of His mighty signs by virtue of the Light (*an-nūr*) [which emanateth] around the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nār*).¹⁰⁶

The Sinaitic theology of the *Qayyûm al-asmâ'* not only has typological and realized eschatological aspects to it, but it embraces a futurist eschatology as well. In the following paragraph, from sura twenty-eight, the Báb indicates that the Sinai epiphany (*tajallî*) described in Qur'an 7:143 will have a future realization:

O Solace of Mine Eyes [*qurrat al-'ayn*]! Stretch not Thy hands wide open in the Cause, inasmuch as the people would find themselves in a state of stupor by reason of the Mystery; and I swear by the true, Almighty God that there is yet for Thee another turn after this Dispensation (*ad-dawra*).

And when the appointed hour hath struck, do Thou, by the leave of God, the All-Wise, reveal from the heights of the Most Lofty and Mystic Mount (*aṭ-ṭûr al-akbar*) a faint, an infinitesimal glimmer of Thy impenetrable Mystery, that they who have recognised the radiance of the Sinaitic Splendor (*aṭ-ṭûriyyûn fî's-sínâ'*) may faint away and die as they catch a lightning glimpse of the fierce and crimson Light (*an-nûr*) that envelops Thy Revelation. And God is, in very truth, Thine unfailing Protector.¹⁰⁷

God is here pictured as exhorting the Báb not to divulge the fullness of His Mystery in view of the ultimate realization of another cycle (*ad-dawra*) of disclosure. It is implied that, at the eschatological consummation, God will reveal a mere glimmer of His ethereal and crimson Light (*an-nûr*) from the supreme Sinai, causing the mysterious denizens of this sphere—lit., “the Mountites in Sinai” (*aṭ-ṭûriyyûn fî's-sínâ'*)—to swoon away before its sublimity. Bahá'u'lláh, as will be seen below, has interpreted these and other lines of the *Qayyûm al-asmâ'* in terms of His own manifestation and claim to be the Bábí messiah figure “Him whom God shall make manifest” (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*), whose advent is so frequently dwelt upon in the Báb's later writings.

In the light of the foregoing, it will be clear that in his earliest major work, the *Qayyûm al-asmâ'*, the Báb pictured himself as hearing or voicing anew the Sinaitic declaration of

divinity. This in view of his conviction that he was in communion with and spoke with the voice of the Remembrance (*dhikr*) who, in the Sinaitic sphere of revelation, represented the Godhead. Like Moses, the Báb spoke of himself as having been called in the Holy Vale (*al-wád al-muqaddas*). On one level he and/or the Remembrance (*dhikr*) are, mystically speaking, the manifestations of the Sinaitic "Tree" (*shajara*), "Mount" (*ṭūr*), "Fire" or "Flame" (*nár*), or "Light" (*núr*), "Speaker" (*kalím*), "Cherub" (*karúb*), and "Epiphany" (*tajallí*). For the Báb, Sinaitic events associated with the call of Moses and his request to see God had been mystically repeated in the light of his being commissioned to occupy the role of Gate (*báb*). In line with early Shaykhí sources (see above), the Báb exhibited a tendency to allegorize Moses/Sinai motifs in illustration of spiritual events connected with his person and mission. In the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* and other writings of the Báb, it is often the case that Sinaitic events and motifs symbolize revelatory experiences outwardly comparable to those of Moses, but inwardly located in heavenly spheres and associated with the person of the Báb. The Mount (*ṭūr*), for example, is not simply a peak in the Sinai peninsula but symbolizes the interior realm of the heart (*fu'ád*) where God's epiphany (*tajallí*) might be experienced. The Sinaitic Tree from which the voice of God was heard is symbolic of such as are inspired with His word, and of the celestial pole from which divine revelation originates. In the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* (cited above), the Báb, like Moses, is exhorted to doff his (two) sandals which symbolize the "[two] limits" (*al-haddayn*, of this world and the other?) in view of his occupying the position of Gate (*báb*) or being one concealed (*maṭwiyyan*, cf. *tuwá*) in the Holy Vale (*al-wád al-muqaddas*) which symbolizes that role.

The Báb's Epistle Between the Two Shrines (*Ṣaḥífa bayn al-ḥaramayn*) (early 1845) is basically an Arabic treatise written in reply to questions posed by the leading Shaykhí, Mírzá Muḥammad Ḥusayn, Muḥit-i Kirmání.¹⁰⁸ Toward the beginning of this epistle its verses are referred to as having been sent

down from "the Sinaitic Tree" (*shajarat as-síná*).¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, the Báb describes himself as a Leaf "sprung up from the Sinaitic Tree."¹¹⁰ In the following lines it is indicated that one who desires to identify with the Báb should be prepared for an inner experience of the Divine Epiphany mentioned in Qur'an 7:143:

And if thou desirest in the inmost reality of thine essence to enter the Way of this [divine] Decree then journey upon this Crimson Path and hearken unto the call of the Dove [the Báb] in the breezes of this snow-white Dawn which is as the call from the Tree (*ash-shajara*) situated on Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr as-síná*) [namely]: "God, no God is there except Him." And thou shalt, furthermore, direct thyself unto the Glory of the [divine] Splendor (*jalál al-bahá*) in the Snow-White Land in a humble and submissive state like unto the crushing of the particle (*dharra*) on Mount Sinai [within thyself] through the Epiphany (*tajallí*) of the Light of the Inmost Heart (*núr al-fu'ád*).¹¹¹

Written for Sayyid Yaḥyá Darábí, the son of the well-known Shí'í writer *Shaykh* Ja'far Kashfí (d. 1850), the Báb's Commentary on the Sura of the Abundance (*Tafsír súrat al-kawthar* [Sura 108 of the Qur'an], written 1845-6) contains several paragraphs of considerable interest. In its second introduction, the Báb refers to his revealed verses as a proof from the Remnant of God (*baqiyyat Alláh*, the expected Imám) and, among other things, pronounces a woe against such as are oblivious of the fact that the "Sinaitic Tree" (*shajarat aṭ-ṭūr*) had been planted or sprung up in his bosom.¹¹² Commenting on the first letter "K" (*káf*) to occur in this sura, the youthful sayyid relates it to the "Word" (*kalima*) and to a variety of Sinaitic motifs:

Now the letter *káf* signifieth the Primordial Word (*kalimat al-awwalí*) before which the Greatest Depth (*'amq al-akbar*) was held in check. It cried out in praise of its Creator in the seventh Citadel

of the Snow-White Thicket in the Divine Realm (*al-lahút*). It signifieth the Word (*kalima*) which shone forth on Mount Sinai (*tajallat 'alá at-túr as-síná'*) and cried out from the Crimson Tree (*shajarat al-ḥamrá'*), from the right-side of the Mount (*yamín at-túr*) in the blessed Spot (*al-buq'a al-mubáraka*) in the Land of Divine Power (*arḍ al-jabarút*). It is the Word (*kalima*) which shone forth (*tajallat*) above the Ark of the Testimony (*tábút ash-shaháda*) in the Pillar of Fire (*'amúd an-nár*) upon Mount Horeb (*jabal húrīb*) in the Land of the Kingdom (*arḍ al-malakút*). It signifieth the Word (*kalima*) which shone forth (*tajallat*) upon Mount Paran (*jabal fārán*) through the myriads of holy ones (*ribwát al-muqaddasín*) beyond the ken of the Cherubim in the Clouds of Light (*ghamá'im an-núr*) shed upon 'Alí standing in the human realm (*an-násút*).¹¹³

Here the divine Word (*kalima*) is associated with the Divine Epiphany (*tajallí*) and declaration of divinity uttered in the traditional hierarchy of metaphysical spheres each of which has its "Sinaitic dimension." A similar theology informs the following lines of the Báb's qabbalistic explanation of the letter "h" (*há'*) of the "he is" (*huwa*) of Qur'an 108:3:

Then [the letter *há'*] signifieth the Everlasting Ipseity (*huwiyya aṣ-ṣamadániyya*) which beamed forth from the Primordial Ipseity (*huwiyya al-úlá*) and gave utterance, unto and through its own Self, to the Primordial Word in the Self of the Tree (*nafs ash-shajara*) upon Mount Horeb (*jabal húrīb*) in the Holy Vale (*al-wad al-muqaddas*), through a [Sinaitic] Tree (*shajara*) planted in the center of the Land of Divine Power (*arḍ al-jabarút*).¹¹⁴

Also, along similar lines, is the following paragraph in which the letter "a" (*alif*) of the definite article of "the cut off" (*al-abtar*) is expounded in terms of the Sinaitic epiphany (*tajallí*) of the "Greatest Name" of God:

Now the letter *alif* signifieth the Supreme Name (*ism al-a'lá*) unto and through which God shone forth (*tajallá*). He made it the sta-

tion of His own Self (*nafs*) in [the realm of] the [divine] Accomplishment (*al-adá'*), and the Decree (*al-qadá'*) and the Genesis (*al-badá'*) . . . It signifieth a Name unto and through which God shone forth (*tajallá*) by means of His right hand. He made it the station of His own Self (*nafs*) on the level of the [divine] Purpose (*al-iráda*) in [the realm of] the Decree (*al-qadá'*), the Glory (*al-bahá'*), the Splendor (*as-saná'*), and the Praise (*ath-thaná'*), to the end that it might cry out from and through His Self (*nafs*), from the Blessed Tree (*ash-shajara al-mubáraka*) in the Holy Vale (*al-wád al-muqaddas*) at the right side of the Mount: "God, no God is there except Him. . . ."

Then [also the letter *alif* signifieth] the hidden, treasured, greatest, pure, purifying, and blessed Name of God unto and through which God shone forth (*tajallá*) by means of the lights of the Triune Names (*asmá' ath-thulth*). And He made its first station in the [sphere of] the [divine] Glory (*al-bahá'*), its second station in the [sphere of] Praise (*ath-thaná'*), its third station in Mount Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr as-síná'*), and the station of His own Self (*nafs*) in the [realm of] the [divine] Decree (*al-qadá'*) and that of Genesis (*al-badá'*). By virtue of it was His Light (*núr*) made manifest on Mount Paran (*jabal fárán*) through the myriads of holy ones (*ribwát al-muqaddasín*) and upon Mount Horeb (*jabal húrīb*) through the hosts of the angels of the [divine] Throne and of the heavens and the earth, as well as upon the Cuppola of Time (*qubbat az-zamán*) through the former and latter systems, and upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭūr*) through the Blessed Tree (*ash-shajara al-mubáraka*) [as the words], "O Moses! God is my Lord and your Lord. No God is there except Him, the Lord of all the worlds."¹¹⁵

Without going into details, the purport of these difficult lines appears to be that God made His supreme or greatest name (here *Alláh*, beginning with the letter *alif*?) the locus or equivalent of His own "Self" and the intermediary through which His epiphany (*tajallí*) was realized in a descending hierarchy of spheres. These are partly informed by that section of the *Shí'í* Prayer of the Signs quoted below and by Qur'an 7:143.

The Commentary on the Sura of Abundance, furthermore, contains several paragraphs in which the Báb underlines the absolute transcendence and incomprehensibility of God and rules out any notion of a direct epiphany (*tajallí*) of His exalted Essence. Qur'an 7:143 is quoted and explained in terms of the manifestation of the proto-Shiite Cherub spoken about by Imám Ja'far Šádiq (see above). Only seventy select Israelites were capable of sustaining the epiphany of this Cherub who represented the "Self" (*nafs*) of God. (Cf. Exodus 24:9 ff.) Direct vision of God is not possible.¹¹⁶

While the tradition about the Cherub being the agent of the Divine Epiphany is occasionally quoted and commented upon literally in early (pre-1848) Bábí scripture,¹¹⁷ the Báb ultimately came to identify himself (as the expected Imám or Qá'im, or as one claiming independent prophethood and subordinate divinity) with the "Lord" (*rabb*) who addressed Moses from the Burning Bush. In one of his epistles to Muḥammad Sháh (d. 1848) we read:

When Moses . . . asked God that which he asked [to see Him], God revealed His glory (*tajallá*) upon the Mountain (*al-jabal*) through the Light of one belonging to the party of 'Alí [the Cherub] just as hath been made clear in that famous tradition [of Imám Ja'far] . . . By God! This was my Light (*núr*) for the numerical value of my name ['Alí Muḥammad; i.e., 202] corresponds to that of the name of the "Lord" (*rabb*, also 202). Thus God, praised be He, said, "And when He revealed His glory (*tajallá*) before the Mountain . . ." (Qur'an 7:143b)¹¹⁸

According to Qur'an 7:143, Moses asked to see "his Lord" (*rabbahu*). It was "his Lord" who "revealed His glory" (*tajallá*). Since the *abjad* numerical value of *rabb* (Lord) and the name 'Alí-Muḥammad are both 202, the Báb identified himself as the source of the epiphany (*tajallí*) before the Sinaitic mountain. The epiphanic Light (*núr*) of the proto-Shiite Cherub was ultimately the Light of the Báb.

Finally, but by no means exhaustively, in connection with the rich legacy of Sinaitic materials in the writings of the Báb, it may be noted that in the Persian Seven Proofs (*Dalá'il-i sab'ih*, c. 1849–50) allusion is made to the Báb's having fulfilled that line of the Sermon of the Gulf (*Khuṭbay-i ṭutunjiyya*) in which the eschatological manifestation of the Sinaitic Speaker (*mukallam*) is predicted:

And among the utterances which conduce to tranquillity of heart [as a proof of the Báb's mission] is the pronouncement of the Commander of the Faithful [Imám 'Alí] recorded in the Sermon of the Gulf at the point where he saith: "Anticipate ye the revelation of He Who conversed with Moses from the Tree upon the Mount, for He shall assuredly be outwardly unveiled and publicly celebrated." It is evident [from the pronouncement in the "Sermon of the Gulf"] that naught hath nor shall be manifested in Him but the mention of "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Me."¹¹⁹

In view of his adaptation of the Sinaitic declaration of divinity such that it included the words "... no God is there except Me," the Báb reckoned that the prophecy attributed to Imám 'Alí had found fulfillment. In his *Qayyúm al-asmá'* and innumerable other writings of his last years, the Báb frequently and in various contexts uttered the words, "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Me" (or the like).¹²⁰ It was his conviction that the eschatological "Day of God" had come to realization and that he was a manifestation of Divinity.

As, furthermore, "Divinity" and "Lordship" were conferred by the Báb on certain of his major disciples, they too made exalted claims.¹²¹ The Bábí cycle came to be seen as the cycle of the manifestation of Divinity in the person of the Báb and the leading Bábís. The eschatological "encounter with God" (*liqá' Alláh*) mentioned in the Qur'an found fulfillment through the Báb and the "pleroma of Divinity" manifested by his exalted disciples on the "Day of God." It is in this context, and in

view of the Báb's assertion that the Bábí messiah, "Him whom God shall make manifest" (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*), shall utter the words "I, verily, am God, no God is there except Me . . ." ¹²² that certain of Bahá'u'lláh's exalted claims are to be understood. Both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh claimed divinity by uttering adapted versions of the Sinaitic declaration of divinity, though they did not thereby claim identity with the absolute Godhead. They saw themselves as pure mirrors reflecting the divinity of the transcendent and unknowable Lord and as manifestations of the eschatological advent of Divinity. ¹²³

WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

During the forty year period 1852–1892, Bahá'u'lláh wrote or dictated in excess of fifteen thousand Persian and Arabic "Tablets" (*alwáh*), some of them titled "revelations" of considerable length. Selected passages within this massive corpus of as yet little studied and largely unpublished Bahá'í scripture will be discussed in loose chronological order.

Of the major writings of Bahá'u'lláh, only one nineteen line Persian poem, The Sprinkling of the Divine Cloud (*Rashh-i 'amá*), dates from prior to its author's exile to Iraq. This exquisite piece, composed in a dungeon in Tehran in late 1852, contains Sinaitic imagery in its sixteenth couplet. Bahá'u'lláh bids his fellow Bábís observe his exalted status and power of revelation in the following terms:

Observe the Fire of Moses (*átish-i mūsá*)!

Behold the Snow-White Brightness (*bayda[t]-i baydá*)! See thou that the Sinaitic Bosom (*sínay-i síná*) streameth forth from the Radiant Palm (*kaff-i saná*). ¹²⁴

It is indicated that within his mystic being Bahá'u'lláh manifested the Sinaitic Fire and Moses' white hand. (See Exodus 4:6–7 and Qur'an 7:105, etc.) The radiance that shone forth from the "Sinai" of Moses' "bosom" (or interior self) shines

forth from the "Palm" or "Hand" of the person of Bahá'u'lláh. Such claims are made in many of the poetical and other writings of Bahá'u'lláh, some of which will be quoted below.¹²⁵

The 'Iraq Period (1853-1863). The Tablet of All Food (*Lawh-i kull at-ta'ám*) is basically a mystical commentary on Qur'an 3:93, written just prior to Bahá'u'lláh's withdrawal to Iraqi Kurdistan (late 1853 or early 1854) and primarily addressed to Hájí Mírzá Kamál ad-Dín Naráqí (d. c. 1881), a Bábí.¹²⁶ Though Sinaitic motifs are present at several points in this Arabic epistle the following paragraph is of particular interest:¹²⁷

Since, at this moment, the fire of love surgeth in the heart of *al-bahá'* (Bahá'u'lláh), the Dove of Servitude singeth in the Heaven of the Divine Cloud, the Bird (lit., Hoopoe; *hudhud*) of Light warbleth in the midst of the firmaments, the Sinaitic Tree (*shajarat at-túr*) burneth of itself through the Fire (*nár*) of its own self above the Ark of the Testimony (*tábút ash-shaháda*) beyond (Mount) Qáf (in) the Land of Realization (*arḍ al-imdá'*), and the Ant of Servitude (*nimlat al-'ubúdiyya*) hideth in the Vale of the Divine Oneness (*wádí al-ahadiyya*) in this "Night" with mystic fidelity, I desire to [further] expound that verse [Qur'an 3:93] . . .¹²⁸

Here Bahá'u'lláh relates his God-given power to expound the Qur'an to his ability to transcend earthly limitations and identify with the Sinaitic sphere of his celestial Self. The "Sinaitic Tree" of his spiritual Self is located beyond the mythic Mount Qáf and, like the Burning Bush which was not consumed, generates its own spiritual "Fire" in the "Land of Realization." As the "Ant of Servitude" faithful to the primordial covenant, Bahá'u'lláh takes mystic refuge during the dark "night" of the period following the Báb's martyrdom in the Sinaitic "Vale of the Divine Oneness" where divine guidance is available just as it was for Moses. Such, without going into details, appears to be the sense of these somewhat abstruse lines.

During the period of his residence in Sulaymaniyyih in the mid-1850s, Bahá'u'lláh was invited by resident Sufis to compose an ode in the meter and rhyme of Ibn al-Faríd's "Ode Rhyming in the Letter Tá'" (*Qaṣída at-tá'iyya*) or Poem of the Way (*Nazm as-sulúk*). This led him to compose around 2,000 Arabic verses and to select 127 of them for circulation. These verses came to be known as the "Ode of the Dove" (*al-Qaṣída al-warqá'iyya*). Well characterized as a "fusion of Sufi mysticism with Bábí theological and eschatological teachings,"¹²⁹ the Ode of the Dove lauds a divine feminine Being who is the locus of prophetological perfections and the beloved celestial "Self" of Bahá'u'lláh (so it seems). Composed in about 1855, the first part of the Ode of the Dove associates the divine Beloved with Moses/Sinai motifs and events. In line 5, her radiance (*lum'a*) is said to have been responsible for the manifestation of the Sinai of Eternity (*tūr al-baqá'*), and her brilliance (*ghurra*) the cause of the epiphany (*tajallí*) of the Sinaitic Light of Splendor (*nūr al-bahá'*).¹³⁰ Line 8 contains allusions to the quranic accounts of the call of Moses mystically understood:

The very Countenance of Guidance was guided by the Light of her Countenance;

It was through the Fire of her effulgent face that the Self of the Speaker (Moses, *nafs al-kalím*) was purified.¹³¹

In his Persian commentary on select parts of the Ode of the Dove, Bahá'u'lláh himself expounds this line by setting forth an interesting allegorical account of Moses' call. His comment begins:¹³²

When Moses purified and sanctified the "foot" (*rijl*) of His Heavenly Self (lit., Merciful Self; *nafs-i rahmáníyya*) which had been deposited in the human temple (*haykal-i bashariyya*) from the [two] "sandals" (*na'layn*) of incidental imaginings and drew out the "Hand" of Divine Power from the "Fold" (or "Bosom"; *jayb*) of Grandeur within the "Cloak" (*ridá'*) of Nobility, he arrived at the

holy, goodly, and blessed "Vale" (*wádí*) of the heart (*qalb*) which is the seat (lit., locale; *buq'a*) of the throne (*'arsh*) of the All-Enduring Epiphany (*tajallíy-i samadáníyya*) and the scene of the Mighty and Lordly Proclamation (*tahallí*). And when he reached that region of the Mount (*arḍ-i túr*) which formed an expanse to the right side of the Luminous Spot (*buq'a[ft]-i núr*), he inhaled and caught the fragrance of the Spirit from the Eternal Dawning-Place and perceived the Lights of the Eternal Presence from all directions, though directionless.¹³³

It is here presupposed that Moses' doffing of his "sandals" was his detaching himself from the "incidental imaginings" of his lower self, such that the "foot" of his Divine Self was purified. His snow-white "hand" symbolizes the Divine Power which he manifested from the interior "fold" or "bosom" of the "cloak" of his nobility. The Sinaitic "Vale" entered by Moses was the mystical sphere of his "heart" where he experienced the Divine Epiphany (*tajallí*). From the region of the "Mount" within himself, he caught the fragrance of the Holy Spirit and perceived the "Lights" of divinity. Qu-r'an 7:143 is interpreted as an allegory of Moses' interior identification with his Divine Self.

Bahá'u'lláh's mystical midrash continues:

From the warmth of the fragrance of divine love and the "flames" (or firebrands; *qabasát*) of the faggots (*jadhawát*) of the [Sinaitic] Fire of the Divine Oneness the "Light" of the Divine Identity ("He[God]-ness"; *huwiyya*) was ignited and blazed forth in the "Lamp" (*miṣbáh*) of His [Moses'] heart, after the veils of the "glass" of [limited] selfhood ("I-ness"; *aniyya*) had been removed. And after the effacement of the[se] opposing [internal] stations [within Moses] had been realized, he arrived at the "Vale" of Everlasting Awareness (*wádí saḥw-i abadiyya*) through [drinking deep of] the Wine of Reunion with the Peerless Countenance and the Pure Beverage of [attainment to] the Eternal Presence.¹³⁴

These lines are rooted in Qur'an 20:9ff., 27:7ff., and 28:29ff. (cited above) and in the "Light Verse" (Qur'an 24:35). Moses, perceiving a "Fire" (*nár*), desired to approach what he thought was a "burning brand" (*[shiháb] qabas*) or a "faggot" (*jadhwa*) in the hope of gaining warmth or guidance. For Bahá'u'lláh this episode symbolizes Moses' being warmed and set ablaze within himself by the divine love such that his divine identity (*huwiyya*) subsumed his personal identity (*aniyya*). With the effacement of this limited selfhood, Moses attained the Sinaitic "Vale" (*wádí*) which symbolizes a state of perpetual sobriety or mindfulness, inasmuch as he had drunk of the mystic "wine" of union with the divine.

Further developing the same allegory, Bahá'u'lláh continues:

On account of [His] enraptured yearning for the Attainment of God's Presence (*liqá*), He [Moses] became aware of the City of Eternal Delight (*madínay-i dhawq-i baqá*); "He entered the City at a time when its inhabitants were heedless," [Qur'an 28:15a], observed the "Fire" of the Pre-Existent God (*nár alláh al-qadím*), and beamed forth through the "Light" of Almighty God (*núr alláh al-'azím*; cf. Qur'an 24:35; 21:48) just as He [Moses] said to His household, "Tarry ye here; I observe a fire." [Qur'an 20:10a, 27:7a, 28:29a]. And when He [Moses] discovered and beheld the Countenance of Guidance leading unto primordial subtleties in the "Tree" (*shajara*) which is neither of the East nor of the West [see Qur'an 24:35a], the perishable, ephemeral Visage [within Moses] (*wajh-i fáníy-i ghayriyya*) was ennobled and glorified through attainment unto the permanent All-Enduring Visage (*wajh-i báqíy-i samadiyya*). For He could perceive the transcendent, wondrous Visage of Guidance in the blazing "Fire" that was hidden in the inmost hearts [of celestial souls like Moses] (*af'iday-i ghaybiyya*). It is thus that He [Moses] said: "... or I shall find at the fire guidance." [Qur'an 20:10b]¹³⁵

Spiritually desirous of attaining the divine Presence, Moses, we are informed, became aware of a celestial "City"

symbolic of the state of "permanent abiding" (in God) (*baqá'*). On entering this "City," or attaining the highest mystical goal, he perceived the Sinaitic "Fire" and radiated its "Light" (cf. Exodus 34:29ff.) as implied in Qur'an 20:10a, spiritually interpreted. Having identified with the "Tree" mentioned in Qur'an 24:35 (seen as the Sinaitic "Tree"), he discovered the "Visage of Guidance" as a result of which he transcended the mystical state of *faná'* ("nullification" of human limitations) and assimilated that of *baqá'* ("permanent abiding" in God). The mysterious "Visage of Guidance" was mirrored in the Sinaitic Fire hidden in the "inmost hearts" of great souls like Moses, as alluded to in Qur'an 20:10—reflected in line 8 of the Ode of the Dove—in terms of Moses' vision of the "Visage of Guidance" in the "Fire" of the Sinaitic "Tree" within the Israelite Prophet and his transition from the state of *faná'* to that of *baqá'* which is the highest goal of classical Islamic mysticism.¹³⁶

In the latter part of his commentary on line 8 of the Ode of the Dove Bahá'u'lláh quotes Qur'an 36:80—"[the God] Who produced fire (*náran*) for you out of the Green Tree (*ash-shajarat al-akhḍar*)"—and underlines the depths of mystic wisdom hidden in this verse. Then, commenting on and developing his spiritual interpretation of Moses' Sinaitic experiences, he adds:

By all that hath been mentioned of the level of guidance and the [mystical] stations of the purification of the self [within] (*nafs*) on the level of Moses . . . naught is intended save the manifestation of these glorious epiphanies (*tajalliyát*) in the exterior world (*'álam-i ṣáhir*). In reality that Holy One [Moses] hath ever been and will ever continue to be guided by the Guidance of God. Nay rather! It was from Him that the very Sun of Guidance beamed forth and the Moon of the Divine Bounty was made manifest. From the depths of His being the [Sinaitic] "Fire" (*nár*) of Divinity (*huwiyya*) was ignited and from the "Light" (*núr*) of His brow the all-enduring radiance (*diyáy-i šamadiyya*) was illumined. The very utterance of

that Holy One when questioned by Pharoah about the one killed serveth to resolve any doubts [in this respect] for He [Moses] replied: "Indeed, I performed [that deed; i.e., murder or manslaughter] and was reckoned among such as erred. And I fled from you because I feared you [Pharoah]. But my Lord gave me wisdom and numbered me among the Messengers." [Qur'an 26:20-21]¹³⁷

Bahá'u'lláh here makes it clear that Sufi-type interpretations of Moses' Sinaitic experiences, in which Moses becomes archetypal of transformations within his "self" or of the advanced mystic, do not really apply to Moses the great Prophet of God. The esoteric interpretations he has given to quranic texts are to be understood in terms of the manner in which epiphanic disclosures (*tajallíyyát*) are appropriated on a worldly level. As a Messenger of God, Moses was himself the locus of the Sinaitic Fire or Light. Outwardly he was a self-confessed murderer, but inwardly a Messenger of God favored with wisdom.¹³⁸

Moses/Sinai motifs occur in several further lines of the Ode of the Dove. At line 42, allusion is made to Qur'an 20:10 when the Sinaitic Fire of the Divine Beloved is depicted as being of far greater moment than the mere "firebrand" (*qabasa*) seen by Moses:

Compared to the Light of my mystery, the mystery of existence is
but an ant;
Beside the Fire of my love, the blazing Fire is but a firebrand.¹³⁹

In line 46, the female Beloved is pictured as the Divine Being whose epiphany before the mountain is described in Qur'an 7:143:

At my glance the Moses of Eternity (*músá al-baqá'*) swooned
away;
And at my radiance the Mount (*túr*) among mountains (*al-jibál*)
crumbled to dust.¹⁴⁰

Her epiphany was so stunning that even the archetypal Moses in the most elevated mystic state of "permanent abiding" in God fell into a swoon and the very Sinaitic Mount was levelled. According to line 100, the supernal brilliance of the Sinai Epiphany was as naught compared to the glory of the Heavenly Maiden. Bahá'u'lláh has his Divine Beloved declare:

The most-glorious splendor of the Mount (*abhá bahá' at-túr*) seemeth to Me mere dross;

The most-brilliant radiance of the Light (*asná diyá' an-núr*) appeareth to Me but a shadow.¹⁴¹

Moses/Sinai motifs are associated with the Divine Beloved in a good many other poetical and mystical writings of Bahá'u'lláh dating from the period of his withdrawal in Kurdistan (1854–1856) or the following few years. In the fifteenth couplet of his Persian Ode "The Cupbearer of the Invisible Eternity" (c. 1855), Bahá'u'lláh's celestial Beloved is pictured as one about whom the "Mount of Moses" (*túr-i mūsá*) circumambulates.¹⁴² In another poem Moses is said to have hastened to meet her on Sinai: "Out of love for her cheek, Moses hasteneth in the Mystic Mount (*túr-i ma'ant*)."¹⁴³ She is said to have appeared from the Sinaitic sphere—"The Beloved came with the flame of [Mt.] Paran (*shu'lay-i fārán*) from the most elevated Lote-Tree (*sidray-i a'lá*)"—and to have been manifested through the Sinaitic "Fire", the archetypal "Moses," and the "Trumpet of 'I am Divine'" (the words of the Sinaitic declaration of divinity).¹⁴⁴ In a forty-one-couplet Persian poem, Bahá'u'lláh underlines the loftiness of her discourse in the following terms: "From her 'Tree,' I heard that subtlety which Moses did not hear from the Lote-Tree on Sinai (*sidray-i síná*)."¹⁴⁵ So powerful is the fiery "water" of the stunning Divine Cupbearer (*sáqí*) that but a "firebrand" (*jadhwa*) ignited from its flame in the Sinaitic Lote-Tree would suffice to throw one hundred Imranite Moseses into a state of bewildered astonishment.¹⁴⁶ Celebrating the spiritually intoxicating and eschato-

logical consequences of the Divine Beloved's rhythmic chant "O He!" (*yá hú*), Bahá'u'lláh in yet another Persian poem associates the burning of the "firebrand" (*jadhwa*) of this invocation on Sinai with the "Moses of the soul" (*músáy-i ján*) falling into a swoon on the "Mystic Mount" (*túr-i ma'âní*).¹⁴⁷

In explaining the mysteries of the "Light Verse" (Qur'an 24:35) in his Commentary on the Detached Letters (of the Qur'an) *Tafsír ḥurúfát al-muqatta'a* (c. 1857-8?), Bahá'u'lláh sets forth an interesting mystically oriented account of the call of Moses which begins:¹⁴⁸

When Moses had completed the appointed term in the Midian of Origination (*madyan al-inshá'*), He returned to His people and entered the environs of Sināi in the Holy Vale (*wādí al-quḍs*) at the right side of the spot of Paradise (*buq'at al-firdaws*) nigh unto the Shore of Eternity (*shátí al-baqá'*), whereupon He heard the [divine] call from the Supreme Realm, from the retreat of the Divine Ipseity (*shaṭr al-huwiyya*):

"O Moses! Behold! What dost thou see? I, verily, am God your Lord and the Lord of Thy fathers Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob."

Moses then veiled his face out of fear of God, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Self-Subsisting.¹⁴⁹

This paragraph is rooted in the quranic accounts of the call of Moses, and in Qur'an 7:143. Moses' appointed term in Midian symbolizes a period of mystic initiation or "origination." The Holy Vale is located to the "right side" of Paradise and the form of the declaration of divinity is indebted to Qur'an 7:143 and 2:133 (where mention is made of "God of thy fathers Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac . . .").

After mentioning Moses' veiling his face, Bahá'u'lláh's account continues as follows:

Again was He [Moses] summoned before the Shore of the Ocean of [the Divine] Grandeur in the Crimson Dome (*qubbat al-ḥamrá*):
"Lift up, O Moses, your head!"

And when He lifted it up, He saw a Light (*núr*) blazing and radiant from the Furthestmost Tree (*shajarat al-quṣwá*) in the Green Vale (*wádí al-khudrá*). Thus was He guided unto the Most Great Guidance through the Fire (*nár*) kindled from the Lote-Tree of Eternity (*sidrat al-baqá*). He then doffed the [two] sandals of base passion (*na'layn al-hawá*) and detached Himself from the latter stage (the hereafter) and [from] this first stage (this world).

All this is that which God had decreed for Him [Moses], even as thou hast been informed in the [scriptural] Tablets. Thus was His Cause raised up and His remembrance exalted. He [Moses] was among those who, through the Lights of the [Sinaitic] Fire, turned their faces towards the paths of justice. Such is that which was ordained for Moses, son of 'Imrán [Amram], in the Dome of Time (*qubbat az-zamán*), if thou are of such as are informed. Unto this beareth witness the Paran of Love (*fárán al-hubb*) upon the Paran of Fire (*fárán an-nár*) in the Horeb of Holiness (*húrib al-quds*) and the Sinai of Nearness (*síná' al-qurb*), if thou shouldst scan the Scrolls of Justice with the eye of God.¹⁵⁰

Going beyond the quranic accounts, Bahá'u'lláh here has God summon Moses from the celestial sphere and command him to lift up his veiled face. On so doing, Moses visions the Light emanating from the Sinaitic Tree depicted as the "Furthestmost Tree" in a green or verdant "Vale." He was thus guided to the Sinaitic Fire kindled in the "Lote-Tree of Eternity" and doffed both his sandals on approaching it (an act symbolic of his detachment from all limitations). Such events were foreordained and are described in Scripture. The very Sinaitic realities witness their veracity.

Having outlined in esoteric tone the episode of the call of Moses, Bahá'u'lláh goes on to relate these Sinaitic events to the person and call of the Prophet Muḥammad and to the Light Verse (Qur'an 24:35). He states that the countenance of the Arabian Prophet beamed with the "Light of the Divine Oneness" (*núr al-aḥadiyya*). The "Fire of the Divine Ipseity" (*nár al-huwiyya*) was kindled in his "Self" (*nafs*) and the "Fire

of the Lote-Tree" (*nár al-sidra*) blazed forth in his breast. In a state of spiritual rapture he, like Moses, heard the call of God from the "Tree of humanity" (*shajarat al-insán*) in his inmost being in the form: "He, verily, is Thou Who art God, the King, the Protector, the Mighty, the Holy." As the mouth-piece of God, Muḥammad experienced and proclaimed his divinity within the Sinai of his celestial "Self."

This, Bahá'u'lláh says, Muḥammad wanted to communicate to the Jews. He desired that his contemporaries understand that Sinaitic events had again come to pass within his "Self" and that he occupied an exalted station. If the Jews could realize that the "mysteries of the Divine Oneness" (*as-rár al-aḥadiyya*) now shone forth in the "Tree of his Self" (*shajarat nafsihī*), they would be able to detach themselves from "the Fire (*annár*) which was revealed in glory (*tajallat*) in the Sinai of the Decree (*síná' al-ḥukm*) unto the Moses of the Cause (*músá al-amr*)" and convert from Judaism to Islam. It was to this end that God inspired Muḥammad with the Light Verse, which was "a proof unto those who were given the Torah and a guidance unto those who were guided by the Lights of Guidance in the Muhammadan Lote-Tree" (*sidrat al-muḥammadiyya*, the Prophet Muḥammad).¹⁵¹

In the Commentary on the Detached Letters, Bahá'u'lláh further teaches that God commanded Moses to inform his followers about the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad, to announce unto the Jews "this [Islamic] Sinai in this Aḥmadian [Sinaitic] locale (*al-buq'a al-aḥmadiyya*, the Prophet Muḥammad)." This is indicated in the following quranic verse: "We, verily, sent Moses with our signs [and the command to]: 'Bring the people from the darkness unto the light (*an-núr*) and announce unto them the Days of God.'" (Qur'an 14:5) Bahá'u'lláh also explains that while Moses was guided by the "Fire of the [Sinaitic] Tree in the region of the right side of the Vale" and was among those who entered the "blessed locale" (*al-buq'a al-mubáraka*), the Prophet Muḥammad was

capable of transforming fire (*nár*) into light (*núr*) and guiding whomsoever he desired unto this light. Key terms in the Light Verse are symbolic of the being of the Arabian Prophet:

Then know that the position (or station; *maqám*) of the "Niche" in this verse is His Self (*nafs*), the "Lamp" His resplendent heart and the "Glass" His sanctified [human] temple (*haykal*) in which the luminary of the Divine Oneness beams forth. The "light" (*an-núr*) shines forth and radiates from Him [Muḥammad] and from Him derives the splendor of all who are in the heavens and upon earth.¹⁵²

For Bahá'u'lláh, Moses' Sinaitic experience of God took place again in the being of the Prophet Muḥammad whose exalted status is indicated in the Light Verse. The Sinaitic "Tree" and "Fire" correspond to the "Blessed Tree" or Olive and to the "Light"—viewed as the Muḥammadan Light (*núr al-muḥammadiyya*)—of Qur'an 24:35.¹⁵³

Originally entitled the "Scroll of Fatima" (*ṣaḥīfay-i fāṭimiyya*) and consisting of a collection of Persian and Arabic utterances couched in the form of the "Divine Saying" (*ḥadīth qudsī*), a few of Bahá'u'lláh's subsequently titled "Hidden Words" (*Kalimát-i maknūnih*, c. 1857–8) utilize Moses/Sinai imagery.¹⁵⁴ In the sixtieth Arabic Hidden Word, Bahá'u'lláh exhorts the "Son of Man" (*ibn al-insán*, human beings collectively) to mystically repeat the miracle of Moses' snow-white hand. By putting his "hand" into the divine "bosom" (*jayb*), man may experience the radiant epiphany of God from his own bosom:

O Son of Man!

Put thy hand into My bosom, that I may arise above thee, radiant and resplendent.¹⁵⁵

The sixty-third Arabic Hidden Word reads as follows:

O Son of Man!

The light (*an-núr*) hath shone on thee from the horizon of the sacred Mount (*aṭ-túr*) and the spirit of enlightenment (*ruh as-saná'*) hath breathed in the Sinai of thy heart. Wherefore free thyself from the veils of idle fancies and enter into My court, that thou mayest be fit for everlasting life (*al-baqá'*) and worthy to meet Me (*al-liqá'*). Thus may death not come upon thee, neither weariness nor trouble.¹⁵⁶

The implication is that human beings should, having experienced the light of the Divine Epiphany in the Sinaitic sphere of their hearts (presumably in mystic preeternity), purify themselves so as to be fit for immortal life and the eschatological encounter with God.

Islamic theologians and mystics have, on the basis of certain Qur'anic texts (for example, Qur'an 7:172ff. and 20:115), written about God's taking of a covenant with human souls in primordial times or in mystic preeternity, a covenant which mankind came to forget or ignore. In his seventy-first Persian Hidden Word, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to this ancient covenant and refers to the region where it was made as "Mount Paran" (*jabal fārán*, mystically, Mt. Sinai) in the "hallowed precincts of Zaman" or the "blessed [Sinaitic] locale of Time" (*buq'ay-i mubárrakay-i zamán*):

O My Friends!

Call ye to mind that covenant (*'ahd*) ye have entered into with Me upon Mount Paran, situate within the hallowed precincts of Zaman. I have taken to witness the concourse on high and the dwellers of the city of eternity yet now none do I find faithful unto the covenant. Of a certainty pride and rebellion have effaced it from the hearts, in such wise that no trace thereof remaineth. Yet, knowing this I waited and disclosed it not.¹⁵⁷

Though this Hidden Word cannot be discussed in detail, it should be noted that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has commented on it in

several of his epistles. In one Arabic letter, he identifies the covenant made on Mt. Paran with that made with all human souls outside of time (cf. *zamán*). The great Messengers of God make a covenant about the Prophet who will succeed them: "Consider Moses, He who conversed with God. Verily, upon Mount Sinai, Moses entered into a Covenant regarding the Messiah [Jesus] with all those souls who would live in the day of the Messiah. And those souls, although they appeared many centuries after Moses, were nevertheless—so far as the Covenant, which is outside time, was concerned—present there with Moses. The Jews, however, were heedless of this and remembered it not, and thus they suffered a great and clear loss."¹⁵⁸ In a Persian letter, this same covenant is identified as that made by the "Supreme Pen" (Bahá'u'lláh) in the primordial Sinaitic realm; "the Blessed Spot (*buq'at-i mubá-raka*), the Paran of the love of God (*fárán-i muḥabbat alláh*), the Dome of Time (*qubbat-i zamán*)."¹⁵⁹ What 'Abdu'l-Bahá apparently had in mind was his father's covenant appointing him as the head of the Bahá'í community, for in another Persian letter he writes: "This Covenant and Testament is that which the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] made with the Supreme Pen in the Holy Land in the shade of the Tree of Life and which became known after his ascension [in 1892]."¹⁶⁰ Mount Paran in the Sinaitic sphere of the "Dome of Time" is interpreted as the "Holy Land"; the Mount Carmel/Akká-Haifa area (mystically, the "New Sinai"), where Bahá'u'lláh wrote his Book of My Covenant (*Kitáb al-ahdí*) appointing 'Abdu'l-Bahá his successor.¹⁶¹

Bahá'u'lláh's well-known Book of Certitude (*Kitáb-i íqán*, c. 1861–2) contains an interesting paragraph about the mission and rejection of Moses. It begins:

And when His [Abraham's] day was ended, there came the turn of Moses. Armed with the rod of celestial dominion (*'aṣay-i amr*), adorned with the white-hand of divine knowledge (*bayḍay-i ma'*

rifat) and proceeding from the Paran of the love of God (*fárán-i muḥabbat-i iláhiyya*), and wielding the serpent of power and everlasting majesty (*thu'bán-i qudrat wa shawkat-i šamadániyya*), He shone forth from the Sinai of light (*síná'y-i núr*) upon the world.¹⁶²

Here motifs associated with Moses' Sinaitic encounter with God and miraculous powers are, in Sufi fashion and by means of genitive expressions, made vehicles for the expression of the mystic greatness of the Israelite Prophet.

In illustration of God's manner of testing his creatures, Bahá'u'lláh also narrates the story of Moses' murder of an Egyptian and of his flight to Midian where he entered the service of Shu'ayb, (the biblical Jethro in many Islamic sources):

While returning [from Egypt to Midian], Moses entered the holy vale (*wádfy-i mubáraka*), situate in the wilderness of Sinai, and there beheld the vision of the King of Glory (*sultán-i aḥadiyya*) from the "Tree that belongeth neither to the East nor to the West." [Qur'an 24:35] There he heard the soul-stirring and spiritual call from the lordly and enkindled Fire, bidding him to shed upon Pharaohic souls the light of divine guidance.¹⁶³

The Burning Bush is here the "Tree" neither of the East nor the West of the Light Verse, from which Moses beheld the "Sovereign of the Divine Oneness" or (loosely) "King of Glory." Read in context, it will be evident that Bahá'u'lláh's account spills over into allegory and goes beyond the quranic texts.¹⁶⁴

Like the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic epistle to the Bábí Sayyid Ja'far Yazdí, the Sura of the Counsel (*Súrat an-nuṣḥ*, c. 1861-2) opens with an account of the rejection of various past messengers of God. The account of Moses' call reads as follows:¹⁶⁵

Then . . . We sent Moses . . . We caused Him to attain unto the Precinct of Holiness (*sháṭi al-quds*) in the seat of Paradise (*buq'at*

al-firdaws) and enabled Him to enter the Sinai of the Cause (*síná' al-amr*) and the Horeb of the Spirit (*húrib ar-rúh*). Then We cried out unto Him from beyond the 70,000 veils; from the Lote-Tree of Eternity (*sidrat al-baqá'*) by the majestic ocean of the fathomless deep: "O Moses! I, verily, am God, Thy Lord and the Lord of Thy fathers, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob." This is My Beauty (*jamálí*) which We have unveiled before Thee. So behold! What dost Thou see?" Thus have We bestowed Our Bounty upon Thee and completed Our favor unto Thee. Thou shouldst become inflamed with this [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*) that perchance, in the Days of God, the people might be set ablaze with the fire of love (*nár al-hubb*).¹⁶⁶

Here, as in the Commentary on the Detached Letters (see above), Moses' call is transcendentalized. It is understood to have been Moses' visionary experience of the God of the patriarchs. Moses heard God's call from beyond the seventy thousand veils which, according to a well-known Islamic tradition, surround Him. He had a vision of the unveiled Beauty (*jamál*) of God (cf. Qur'an 7:143) and was commissioned to communicate to his contemporaries something of the radiance of the Sinaitic Fire (*al-nár*) and to infuse into their hearts the fire of love, to the end that they might be receptive to truth in eschatological times when God, the Sinaitic Speaker, will be manifested. As in other writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Sinaitic Fire is reckoned to have been the fire of the love of God experienced by Moses. Moses' mission is to communicate this "fire" of love for the Sinaitic Divinity to his contemporaries. His vision was an esoteric experience of the eschatological Savior or the person of the Báb.¹⁶⁷

In the Sura of the Counsel and other writings, Bahá'u'lláh pictures the call to prophethood of various messengers of God in Sinaitic terms. Noah for example, is said to have come from the "Paran of Light" (*fārán an-núr*) only to have been rejected by his contemporaries.¹⁶⁸ In the Sura of Patience (*Súrat as-ṣabr*, 1863) the call of the prophet Job is expressed in the following terms:

. . . We gave him [Job] refuge in the shade of the Tree of Holiness (*shajarat al-quds*) in his inmost heart (*fu'ád*). We caused him to witness the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*) which was ignited and beamed forth in his inmost reality and We manifested the epiphanic glory (*tajallayná*) before him, through and unto his own Self (*nafs*) and made him to cry out in the blessed region of the Throne (*buq'a*; lit., spot or locale) of God (*fí buq'at Alláh burika hawlihá*) [cf. Qur'an 27:7ff.], "He, verily, is God, thy Lord and the Lord of all things. Wherefore is He One, Powerful, Self-Subsisting."

And when his [Job's] face was illumined by the Fire (*an-nár*) which blazed forth within him, We clothed him in the garment of prophethood and commanded him that he direct the people unto the Shore of Bounty and Grace.¹⁶⁹

Like that of Moses, Job's call was his interior experience of God. The suffering prophet experienced the Divine Epiphany (cf. Qur'an 7:143) and went forth with beaming countenance having been illumined by the Sinaitic Fire within himself.

Towards the end of his days in Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh composed a considerable number of poetic, devotional, and rhythmic writings that all but spell out his claim to independent prophethood and leadership of the Bábí community. Certain of these writings are rich in Moses/Sinai motifs. In "Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! O Glad Tidings" (*Halih Halih Halih, Yá bi-shárat*, late 1862 or early 1863?) for example, we read:

The Maid of Eternity came from the Exalted Paradise; . . .
 With Snow-White Hand, with Raven Locks, like the Dragon [rod
 in the form of a serpent] of Moses she came; . . .
 With Guiding Light from the Morn of Meeting [with God], with
 Mount Sinai she came; . . .
 This Eternal Countenance came with Snow-White Hand from the
 Divine Command . . .¹⁷⁰

Possibly composed around the same time are the following select lines from an unpublished poetic composition which may have been written by Bahá'u'lláh for his disciple Darvish Šidq-'Alí Qazvíní (d. 'Akká c. 1880 ?):

The Sinaitic Lote-Tree crieth out with the tongue of "I, verily, am God";

So, Blessed be thou who hast hearkened unto its melodies.

The Divine Fire blazeth forth from the Sinaitic Lote-Tree
And saith to the Moses of spirit, "I, verily, am God, thy God and
the God of all the worlds";

So, Blessed be thou who hast, through the ear of Reality, hearkened unto its intimate discourse and hast, through the eye of the Fire, visioned such flames as are within it.

This is the Tree of Holiness which hath been planted in the Sinai of the Spirit and crieth out, "He, verily, is God, no God is there except Him";

So, Blessed be the one who hath hearkened unto its sweet songs, sought shelter beneath its shade, and derived sustenance from its fruits.¹⁷¹

Like the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh came to express his claim to Prophethood by representing himself as the Sinaitic "Tree," "Fire," and "Speaker." A good many writings of the late Baghdad and early Adrianople (Edirne) period are written in a rhyming Arabic prose and express a Sinaitic theology which echoes that of the *Qayyûm al-asmá'*. Of interest in this respect are the following extracts from an untitled epistle:

Say: O People! Harken unto the Call of God from this Elevated and Blessed Tree (*shajara*, Bahá'u'lláh) which hath sprung up from the Land of Holiness. . . . "He, verily, is God, no God is there except Him." Thus was the [divine] Command made manifest from the Tree of Fire (Burning Bush, or *shajarat an-nár*) in the Luminous [Sinaitic] Seat (lit., Locale of Light; *buq'at an-nur*) . . .

Say: He hath revealed His glory (*tajallá*) upon this Tablet (*lawh*) through the Beloved Lights of Holiness (*anwár al-quds*).

Say: When God revealed His glory upon the Mountain it was crushed to dust . . . but God made this Tablet the scene of His Epiphany (*tajallí*) at this moment. He revealed His glory (*tajallá*) upon it through the Ancient Beauty (*jamál al-qadím*, Bahá'u'lláh) in accordance with that which was manifested from this Pen.¹⁷²

Among other points of interest it should be noted that Bahá'u'lláh here contrasts the inability of the Sinaitic mountain to withstand the Divine Epiphany with his power of revelation as the vehicle of the Divine Epiphany.

The Constantinople-Adrianople Period (1863-1868). Several important writings of Bahá'u'lláh date from the four-month period that he spent in Constantinople (Istanbul) during the latter part of 1863. The well-known *Mathnawí* of over three hundred couplets was composed during these months at the Ottoman capital.¹⁷³ Like several of the poetic writings of the late Baghdad period, it is rich in Moses/Sinai imagery. In line 15, the Divine Beloved is pictured as the source of the Sinaitic light: from her "cheek" the "lights of the Mount" (*anwár-i tûr*) may be witnessed.¹⁷⁴ The Divine Beloved alludes to the tremendous spiritual power of Bahá'u'lláh's not-yet-fully-disclosed revelation in the following terms at line 184ff.:

O Bahá'u'lláh! As Thy Fire was kindled, the harvest of the existence of the lovers was burned up. A single spark from such a Fire Thou didst cast upon the hearts. And lo! one-hundred-thousand Lote-Trees Thou didst cause to spring up upon Sinai. Thus within every heart there appeared many a Lote-Tree.

O Moses! Thou shouldst hasten to this spot, rushing headlong so that Thou mayest behold with all Thy being the mystic fire of God and thus escape from the Copts.¹⁷⁵

If Bahá'u'lláh disclosed the full measure of the Sinaitic "fire" of his revelation human hearts would be devastated. A mere spark of this "fire" is powerful enough to kindle one-hundred-thousand Sinaitic Lote-Trees. It could result in Lote-Trees springing up in all human hearts such that seekers after truth—symbolized by Moses—could envision the Beloved One, and thus escape from the forces of the lower self or ungodliness—symbolized by the Copts (that is, Egyptians, enemies of Moses).

Symbolizing the spiritual wayfarer, Moses is addressed by the Divine Beloved at line 197 ff. of the *Mathnawí*. He is exhorted to come up to the "Mount of the Beloved" (*ṭúr-i ján*) bereft of "shoe" (*na'l*) and "cloak" (*rída*), or "naked" (*'uryán*) of the trappings of this world. This, so that he might be initiated into the "secrets of the [Sinaitic] Fire" (*asrár-i nár*), "the Fire which emergeth from the ringlet of the Friend" (*zulf-i yár*) and which consumes all (limited) aspects of the lover's being. It was the "Fire" of the "ringlet" of the Divine Beloved that was manifested on Mount Paran (*fárán*, symbolically, Sinai).¹⁷⁶

As in the Ode of the Dove, several lines of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnawí* picture the Divine Beloved as manifesting the perfections of Moses and the glory of Sinai to a superlative degree. The "staff" or "rod" (*'ašá'*) of Moses, it is indicated, was derived from the tree of an orchard or fashioned from water and clay. That of the Heavenly Maiden, on the other hand, was a "sword" in the "Hand of the Absolute" which originated with the "Command of the Absolute." It is associated with the Sinaitic Fire kindled from her Flame and capable of burning away the veils of perfidy and falsehood. The Fire of Moses was manifest from the Lote-Tree of the Divine Beloved. It was her bosom which was the mystic Sinai and her Fire that was the Sinaitic "Light of the Friend" (*núr-i dúst*). She manifested the Snow-White Palm or Hand and enshrined the Mount in her heart.¹⁷⁷

It has been noted that Bahá'u'lláh associates the "ringlets" (*zulf*) of the Divine Beloved with the flames of the Sinaitic Fire. Though most likely written considerably later than the *Mathnawí*, there are a number of his writings in which his own "ringlets," "locks," and "tresses" of hair are linked with Sinaitic imagery. In one epistle he speaks of his hair as "My Messenger," "My Phoenix," "My Cord," and "My Veil" while introducing paragraphs expressive of his position as intermediary between God and man. While Sufi poets celebrated

the tresses of the Divine Beloved, Bahá'u'lláh came to express his claims in terms of the symbolic senses of his flowing locks of hair:

My hair is My Phoenix. Therefore hath it set itself upon the blazing fire of My Face and receiveth sustenance from the garden of My Countenance. This is the station wherein the Son of 'Imrán [Moses] removed from the feet of selfish desire the coverings of attachment to all else but Him and was illumined by the splendors of the Light of Holiness in the undying Fire kindled by God, the Potent, the Gracious, the Ever-Forgiving.

O denizens of the everlasting Realm! Let your ears be attentive to the stirrings of this restless and agitated hair, as it moveth upon the Sinai of Fire, within the precincts of Light, this celestial Seat of divine Revelation. Indeed, there is no God besides Me . . . ¹⁷⁸

Every single hair of Mine head calleth out that which the Burning Bush uttered on Sinai. ¹⁷⁹

As the Being who spoke from the Burning Bush or Sinaitic Fire Bahá'u'lláh pictures his hair as having uttered the declaration of divinity heard by Moses.

During the almost five years that Bahá'u'lláh resided at Adrianople (between 1863 and 1868), he wrote or dictated a large number of revelations and gradually disclosed the full measure of his claims. Many of the epistles written during these years contain paragraphs expressive of a Sinaitic theology and expound such eschatologically oriented verses of the *Qayyûm al-asmá'* and other writings of the Báb as have already been discussed. Qur'an 7:143 and that paragraph of the twenty-eighth Sura of the *Qayyûm al-asmá'* related to this verse are interpreted in terms of Bahá'u'lláh's manifestation as the following select annotated translations must suffice to illustrate:

a) *From the Sura of the Servants (Súrat al-'ibád, c. 1864):*

. . . And when the set time of concealment was fulfilled, We manifested from behind the myriad veils of light an infinitesimal glimmer of a light of the lights of the Face of the Youth, and lo, the dwellers of the Realms above fell into a swoon . . . ¹⁸⁰

Bahá'u'lláh here alludes to his advent in terms of the epiphany of the light of his "Face" which caused celestial souls to swoon away. It is implied that the eschatologically oriented paragraph of *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, Sura 28, found fulfillment during the Baghdad period of his ministry, when only a few Bábís were privy to his divine status.

b) *From the Sura of the Robe (Súrat al-qamís, c. 1865):*

O Delight of the Spirit! The polytheists have been in doubt about Thy Cause, despite the fact that We enabled Thee [Bahá'u'lláh] to cry out in the accents of the Remembrance (*adh-dhikr*) before the Dawning-Place of Light in this Theophany (*az-zuhúr*) which hath beamed forth in this Mount (*aṭ-túr*) . . .

O denizens of Existence! Harken unto the melodies of God in the midst of the Garden of Paradise from the Lote-Tree of Holiness (*sidrat al-quds*; Bahá'u'lláh) planted in the Land of Za'farán (Saffron) by the Hand of the All-Merciful.

Say: By God! A single melody therefrom caused the Epiphany (*tajallá*) of the Light (*an-núr*) to appear upon the Elevated Mount, on the Sinai of Holiness (*siná al-quds*) beyond the Abyss of Intimacy (*lujjat al-uns*) before Moses, the Speaker, situate in the Heights of Eternity nigh unto the Lote-Tree of the Extremity through this Blazing, Yellow [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*). "I, verily, am God, thy Lord and the Lord of thy forefathers. Verily, He hath encompassed all the worlds."¹⁸¹

It is here presupposed that Bahá'u'lláh speaks with the voice of the Remembrance whose advent is anticipated by the Báb at various points in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*. Like the Remembrance, he reveals verses from the "Mount" of his being in the new Bahá'í theophany or dispensation (*zuhúr*). From

the "Land of Saffron (*za'farán*)"—by which the saffron-colored Sinaitic Light or the town of Adrianople might be indicated¹⁸²—he, as the "Lote Tree of Holiness," voices divine melodies. Through him the epiphany of the Sinaitic Light was realized before Moses (cf. Qur'an 7:143), for he proclaimed his divinity from the all-encompassing blazing, yellow light of the Sinaitic Fire.

In the lines following those translated above, Bahá'u'lláh dwells on the stunning results of his epiphany before Moses. He speaks of his manifestation as that of the "Beauty of God" (*jamál alláh*) before which all souls in the dominion of God were thunderstruck or fell into a swoon. Alluding to the yellow color of the Sinaitic Light, he also pictures himself as the "Yellow Thread" (*al-khayt aṣ-ṣafrá*) which he explains: "... hath beamed forth in this Heaven; divulged glory (*tajallá*) upon this Divine Cloud (*al-'amá*), and been made manifest in crimson hue (*bi-lawn al-ḥamrá*) in the midst of this Eternity (*al-baqá*)."¹⁸³ The implication is that the glory of Bahá'u'lláh's epiphany was the radiating of the yellow Sinaitic light and the crimson Sinaitic fire mentioned in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* and other writings of the Báb.

Clear reference to Qur'an 7:143 and to *Qayyúm al-asmá'* 28, is made in the following excerpt from the Sura of the Robe:

Say: By God! The Primal Beauty (*jamál al-úlá*) hath once again been made manifest and hath shed the glory (*tajallá*) of but an infinitesimal glimmer of a light (*núr*) of the lights (*anwár*) of His Face upon such as inhabit the heavens and the earth. And, lo, before this effulgent and transcendent Beauty (*al-jamál*; Bahá'u'lláh), the inhabitants of the Mount (*aṭ-ṭuriyyún*) swooned away upon the Elevated Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) after We had announced this Cause unto them in mighty, preserved Tablets. So recite thou all that which hath been revealed by Our Primal Beauty [the Báb] in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* [Sura 28] that thou mayest comprehend the secret of the Cause regarding this Mystery which was veiled behind many mysteries.¹⁸⁴

As the return of the "Primal Beauty" manifest in the Báḅ, Bahá'u'lláh claims to have divulged the glory (*tajallá*) of a mere glimmer of the Sinaitic lights of his Face. This stunning epiphany, anticipated in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, caused the mysterious Sinaites or "inhabitants of the Mount" (*aṭ-ṭúriyyún*) to swoon away.

At yet another point in the Sura of the Robe, we read:

... then purify the mirrors of thine hearts that the epiphany of the lights of this Beauty (*al-jamál*) may be realized . . .

Say: By God! The inhabitants of the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúriyyún*) have fallen into a swoon on the Sinai of the Cause (*síná al-amr*). The denizens of the heavenly Kingdom (lit. realm of Unknowing; *al-'amá'íyyún*) have taken flight before this Divine Lion [cf. Qur'an 74:51]. Spiritual souls (*ar-rúhiyyun*) expire on account of this Terror which hath unsettled all things; save those who have been seized by the Hand of the Divine Bounty on the part of One Mighty and Powerful.¹⁸⁵

The inhabitants of Sinai or the Mount, among other exalted beings, have been powerfully influenced by the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh.

c) From the Sura of the Divine Bounty (Súrat al-faḍl, c. 1865?):

The manifestations of existence (*mazáhir al-wujúd*) hath assuredly been humbled before My Sovereignty. All traces hath been obliterated before My Sign. All skins have been made to creep on account of My overpowering Majesty. Before the manifestation of the Lights of My beaming, sanctified, mighty and luminous Face, the inhabitants of the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúriyyún*) were annihilated upon the Elevated Sinai.¹⁸⁶

Alluding to various eschatological prophecies contained in the Qur'an and to *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, Sura 28, Bahá'u'lláh here underlines the exaltedness of his epiphany.

d) *From the Sura of the Wrathful One (Súrat al-qahír, c. 1867?):*

Hearken unto that which We sent down through the tongue of 'Alí before Nabíl [the Báb] . . .

We, verily announced [in *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, Sura 28] unto the servants [the Bábís] Our latter manifestation [Bahá'u'lláh]. And we manifested the Mystery (*as-sirr*) to an infinitesimal degree such that the dwellers on the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúriyyún*) were made to expire. When We manifested Our Self once again with the name of Abhá (the Most Glorious), We decreed that the Mystery be fully disclosed. Before We manifested it, however, the dwellers on the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúriyyún*) swooned away, just as thou hast heard, for thou art one possessed of a hearing ear. But in spite of this [epiphany], these souls [Bábís] did not restrain themselves. They opposed Us . . . ¹⁸⁷

Part of *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, Sura 28, is quoted here—after the first sentence translated above—and commented upon in this interesting Tablet. The “dwellers on the Mount” (*aṭ-ṭúriyyún*), who swooned away and then expired before the Sinaitic disclosure of the “Mystery” of Bahá'u'lláh's divinity, are identified as followers of the Báb, a number of whom came to oppose the emergent Bahá'í revelation. Bahá'u'lláh pictures himself as the return of the Báb, with the name *abhá'* (the all-glorious; the superlative of *bahá'*, glory), who gradually disclosed the secret of his epiphany.

Reference to the “dwellers on the Mount” and other exalted beings is also made in the following paragraph from the Sura of the Wrathful One:

Say: O Concurrence of heedlessness! By God! This Bird is capable of warbling innumerable melodies; accent upon accent and song upon song. Should but one of them be disclosed, even to an infinitesimal degree, the spiritual souls (*ar-rúḥiyyún*), the dwellers on the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúriyyún*), the illumined ones (*an-núriyyún*), and also

the denizens of the heavenly Kingdom (*al-'amā'īyyūn*) would assuredly swoon away upon the dust of heedlessness and annihilation; save him whom God, by the Hand of Divine Favor, safeguarded through this Youth [Bahá'u'lláh], made manifest with the name "Abhá" in the Kingdom of Names.¹⁸⁸

e) From the Sura of the Exposition (Súrat al-bayán, c. 1867?)

Say: The Revelation sent down by God (lit., the latter turn; *karrat al-ukhrá*) hath most surely been repeated, and the outstretched Hand of Our Power hath overshadowed all that are in the heavens and all that are on the earth. We have, through the power of truth, the very truth, manifested an infinitesimal glimmer of Our impenetrable Mystery, and lo, they that have recognized the radiance of the Sinaitic Splendor (lit., the denizens of the Mount; *aṭ-ṭúriyyūn*) expired, as they caught a lightning glimpse of this Crimson Light (*an-núr al-ḥamrá'*) enveloping the Sinai of Our Revelation (lit., the Sinaitic locale; *buq'at as-síná*). Thus hath He Who is the Beauty of the All-Merciful (*jamál ar-raḥmán*) come down in the clouds of His testimony, and the decree [been] accomplished by virtue of the Will of God, the All-Glorious, the All-Wise.¹⁸⁹

In this paragraph Bahá'u'lláh clearly links his advent with the "latter turn" or eschatological cycle anticipated in *Qayyūm al-asmá'* 28. With the disclosure of a mere glimmer of his "Mystery," the "denizens of the Mount" (*aṭ-ṭúriyyūn*, Bábís) expired. This in view of the epiphany of the "Crimson Light" emanating from the Sinaitic "Fire" of Bahá'u'lláh's celestial Being.

f) From Untitled Writings of the Adrianople Period:

The Mount dwellers (*aṭ-ṭúriyyūn*) have assuredly swooned away on the Elevated Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*). The denizens of the heavenly Kingdom (*al-'amā'īyyūn*) upon the Transcendent Sinai have as-

surely expired. Indeed, all things have been disrupted within themselves save a number of the Letters of the love of My Name, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting.¹⁹⁰

Say: By God! The Sovereign of Words hath assuredly come upon the clouds of the verses, and lo, the words of every contentious polytheist were thunderstruck . . . The dwellers on the Mount (*at-tūriyyūn*) have assuredly expired upon the Elevated Sinai before the manifestation of the Lights (*anwār*) of My resplendent, sanctified, mighty and luminous Face.¹⁹¹

These quotations from major and untitled epistles of Bahá'u'lláh expressive of the fulfillment of the prophetic paragraph of *Qayyūm al-asmá'* 28 could easily be multiplied. Within many of his revelations of the Adrianople period, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims his mission in terms of the stunning effects of the Sinaitic epiphany of his "Light" or of the divine "Beauty" of his "Face." The swooning away, or expiration, of such lofty souls as inhabit the "Mount" sometimes expresses the bewilderment of the Bábís upon coming to a knowledge of the nascent Bahá'í revelation. Just as Moses fell into a swoon at the time of the epiphany before the mountain, so were Bábís stupefied before the glory of Bahá'u'lláh's claim to prophethood. Some, it is indicated, died the spiritual "death" of apostasy by rejecting the revelation of the one who claimed to be the "return" of the Báb with the name of *abhá'* (Bahá'u'lláh).¹⁹²

Only a few further notes can be set down at this point about passages within writings of the Adrianople period that are illustrative of the general Sinaitic theology of Bahá'u'lláh's claims. There exist, for example, a large number of texts in which Bahá'u'lláh represents himself as a celestial Bird that warbles on the branches of the Sinaitic Tree, or the Lote-Tree. At one point in the Sura of the Servants (*Súrat al-aṣḥáb*, c. 1864) we read:

Say: The Lote-Tree of the Spirit (*sidrat ar-rúh*) hath been lifted up upon the Sinai of eternity (*síná al-baqá'*) and upon its branches the Nightingale of Pre-Existence warbleth in the most melodious notes.¹⁹³

In the Sura of Blood (*Súrat ad-damm*, c. 1865 ?) and other writings, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of Sinaitic events as being repeated within his own Being:

O People! By God! I have not cried out among you out of base passion. Nay, rather! according to that which the Speaker on the Mount uttereth in My sanctified most pure heart.¹⁹⁴

Not only did Bahá'u'lláh claim that the Sinaitic voice of inspiration spoke from within his inner Self but, in such revelations as the Sura of the Pen (*Súrat al-qalam*, c. 1865 ?), he taught that created things would themselves utter "that which the Tree of the Mount (*shajarat at-túr*) uttered in the Land of Manifestation (*arq az-zuhúr*) unto Moses, the Interlocutor, in the Blessed Holy Vale," if they were influenced by "but a letter" of what was revealed through him.¹⁹⁵

In his lengthy Tablet of the Spirit (*Lawh ar-rúh*, c. 1866), Bahá'u'lláh refers to himself as "this Tree (*ash-shajara*) which hath sprung up from the Sinai of the All-Merciful" (*síná' ar-rahmán*) and characterizes his revelation as "... this Musk which hath been sprinkled upon this Camphor Tablet during this theophany (*az-zuhúr*) around which both the Seat of the Mount (lit., locale of the Mount; *buq'at at-túr*) and the Sinai of Light (*síná' an-núr*) circumambulate."¹⁹⁶ In his Tablet of the Execration (*Lawh-i mubáhala*, c. 1866), he refers to himself as the "Palm [of the hand of Moses] which God made snow-white unto all the worlds" and the "Rod" (of Moses) capable of swallowing all creatures.¹⁹⁷ He identifies himself in his Tablet of Ashraf (*Lawh-i Ashraf*, c. 1867 ?) as the one who enabled the followers of the Báb to "... draw nigh unto the sacred strand at the right-side (*sháṭi' al-ayman*) of the Seat

(*buq'a*; lit., spot or locale) of Paradise [cf. Qur'an 28:30], the region in which the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*) crieth in manifold accents, 'There is none other God besides Me, the All-Powerful, the Most High.'"¹⁹⁸ In this latter passage, it is indicated that identification with Bahá'u'lláh amounts to identification with the Sinaitic Fire which utters the declaration of divinity. It calls to mind one of the lines of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Youth of Paradise (*Lawḥ-i ghulám al-khuld*, c. 1863): "O beloved ones! The Fire of the Sinai of Love (*nár-i síná'y-i 'ishq*) shineth resplendent."¹⁹⁹

Bahá'u'lláh's Sura of the Kings (*Súrat al-muluk*, 1867) is without doubt one of the most important writings of the Adrianople period. Its author expresses his claims in Sinaitic terms in an address to the "kings of the earth" at the beginning of this forthright Arabic revelation:

O kings of the earth! Give ear unto the Voice of God, calling from this sublime, this fruit-laden Tree (*ash-shajara*) that hath sprung out of the Crimson Hill (*arḍ kathíb al-ḥamrá'*) upon the Holy [Sinaitic] Plain, intoning the words: "There is none other God but He, the Mighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise." This is the [Sinaitic] Seat (lit., locale; *buq'a*) which God hath blessed . . . Within it the Call of God can be heard from the Elevated Lote-Tree of Holiness [Bahá'u'lláh]. "Fear God, O concourse of kings, and suffer not yourselves to be deprived of this most sublime grace."²⁰⁰

In this address, Bahá'u'lláh clearly refers to himself as the Sinaitic "Tree" or "Lote-Tree" which is the vehicle of divine revelation. He speaks of this "Tree" of his Being as having grown up from the "Crimson Hill," literally, "Land of the Red Sand Ridge" (*arḍ kathíb al-ḥamra'*), and of himself as the Sinaitic "Locale" or "Spot" (*buq'a*). References to the Crimson Hill (*kathíb al-ḥamrá'*; *al-aḥmar*) are found in a good many of the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, more often than not in Sinaitic contexts. The expression appears to be rooted

in the idea that the heights of the "Mount" radiate the crimson light of the Sinaitic Fire. In the mystical geography of the Sinaitic realm, where revelation originates and the Divine Epiphany may be experienced, stands the "Crimson Hill."

While the Báb associates the eschatological epiphany with the radiating of "the fierce and crimson Light" in the twenty-eighth sura of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, Bahá'u'lláh quite frequently characterizes the Sinaitic sphere of his revelation as being in one way or another "crimson" (*ḥamrá'*, *aḥmar*). Apart from such passages from his writings as will be quoted below and which illustrate this point, it must suffice here to note that his epistle to *Shaykh* Kázim-i Samandar in which the Ottoman statesman Fu'ád Pasha (d. 1869) is addressed begins as follows: "We summon thee from beyond the Sea of the Divine Grandeur, upon the Crimson Land (*al-arḍ al-aḥmar*) at the Horizon of the Affliction: 'There is no God except Him, the Mighty, the Munificent.'"²⁰¹

The 'Akká Period (1868-1892). Most of the major, and very many minor, writings of Bahá'u'lláh of the 'Akká period contain passages informed by Sinaitic imagery or motifs. During the twenty-four years that the Bahá'í Prophet spent in western Galilee, he drew on and expounded, sometimes in great detail, both biblical, quranic, and Bábí texts that recount or relate to the call of Moses and his Sinaitic experiences.

In what must amount to several hundred of his epistles of the 'Akká period, Bahá'u'lláh identified himself with "Him Who conversed with Moses" (*mukallam mūsá*) from the Sinaitic Tree (*ash-shajara*); that is, with the Divine Being whose advent was predicted by Imám 'Alí in the Sermon of the Gulf (*al-khuṭba at-tutunjiyya*, see below). In one of his epistles to Mírzá 'Alí Ashraf 'Andalíb, Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

O 'Alí! He who wast named 'Alí [Imám 'Alí] gave thee the glad-tidings and announced unto thee this Promised Day. He said—and his saying is the truth: "Anticipate ye the theophany of Him

Who conversed on the Mount (*mukallam at-túr*).” By God! This is assuredly He, and He crieth aloud. God, verily, hath come in the shadows of the clouds [see Qur’an 2:210], but the people have failed to comprehend.²⁰²

On similar lines are the following select excerpts from various other Persian and Arabic writings of the ‘Akká period:

By the life of Our Lord! Today He Who conversed on the Mount (*mukallam at-túr*) is made manifest and hath proclaimed His Word. The Hidden Mystery (*sirr-i maknún*), the Treasured Secret (*ghayb-i makhzún*) [i.e., Bahá’u’lláh] hath been revealed.²⁰³

Say, this is the Day when the Speaker on Sinai (*mukallam at-túr*) hath mounted the throne of Revelation (*‘arsh az-zuhúr*) and the people have stood before the Lord of the worlds.²⁰⁴

O Concourse of the earth! The Day of victory hath arrived, and He Who conversed on the Mount (*mukallam at-túr*) hath been made manifest.²⁰⁵

The second *taráz* (Ornament) is to consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship, to proclaim that which the Speaker on Sinai (*mukallam at-túr*) [Bahá’u’lláh] hath set forth and to observe fairness in all matters.²⁰⁶

“The first *tajallí* (epiphanic radiance) which hath dawned from the Day-Star of Truth is the knowledge of God . . . And the knowledge of the King of everlasting days can in no wise be attained save by recognizing Him Who is the Bearer of the Most Great Name [Bahá’u’lláh]. He is, in truth, the Speaker on Sinai (*mukallam-i túr*) Who is now seated upon the throne of Revelation (*‘arsh-i zuhúr*). He is the Hidden Mystery (*ghayb-i maknún*) and the Treasured Symbol (*sirr-i makhzún*).²⁰⁷

At one point in his “Medium [Daily] Obligatory Prayer,” Bahá’u’lláh bids his devotees bear witness to the fact that God has “. . . manifested Him [Bahá’u’lláh] Who is the Day-Spring of Revelation, Who conversed on Sinai (*mukallam at-túr*), through whom the Supreme Horizon hath been made to

shine, and the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing (*sidrat al-qayyûm*; lit., Lote Tree of the Self-Subsisting) hath spoken . . . ”²⁰⁸

In another prayer, in which details are given of the travels of Mírzá Yaḥyá Šarráf, Bahá'u'lláh refers to this pilgrim's arrival at 'Akká when he was present before his "Face" (*al-wajh*) and heard from the "Person of the Manifestation (*nafs az-zuhúr*) and He Who Conversed on the Mount (*mukallam at-túr*)" that which the Son of 'Imrán [Moses] heard on the "Mount" (*at-túr*) of God's "mystic knowledge" (*'irfán*).²⁰⁹ Attainment to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh is identified as attainment to the presence of the Divine Being who spoke with Moses. Bahá'u'lláh divulged that which Moses heard from the "Mount." He disclosed his divinity to all peoples:

Every discerning eye can, in this Day, perceive the dawning light of God's Revelation, and every attentive ear can recognize the Voice that was heard from the Burning Bush (*nidáy-i mukallam-i túr*).²¹⁰

This is the Day whereon human ears have been privileged to hear what He Who conversed with God [Moses] heard upon Sinai . . . ²¹¹

Call thou [Muḥammad Jawád Qazvíní] to mind when thou were in My [Bahá'u'lláh's] company, within the Tabernacle of Glory, and didst hear from Me that which He Who conversed with God [Moses] heard upon the Sinai of divine knowledge (*túr al-'irfán*) . . . ²¹²

The people of the world are now hearing that which Moses did hear, but they understand not.²¹³

It was through his claim to be the "Speaker on the Mount" (*mukallam at-túr*) that Bahá'u'lláh—like the Báb—taught that Sinaitic events had been repeated through his manifestation:

Say: Through this theophany (*az-zuhúr*) the episode of the Mount (*ḥadith at-túr*) hath again come to pass. The Trumpet (*aş-şúr*) hath

been sounded and the servants have risen up before God, the Mighty, the Loving.²¹⁴

The episode of Sinai (*ḥadīth at-ṭūr*) hath been reenacted in this Revelation (*aẓ-ẓuhūr*) and He Who conversed [on the Mount] (*al-mukallam*) is calling aloud: "Verily, the Desired One is come, seated upon the throne of certitude, could ye but perceive it." He hath admonished all men to observe that which is conducive to the exaltation of the Cause of God and will guide mankind unto His Straight Path.²¹⁵

Mystically speaking, Moses has again attained the presence of the Lord through the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh:

Today the Voice of the All-Merciful hath been raised up from the Kingdom of Utterance (*bayán*). He who conversed with God (*kalím*; Moses) hath attained unto the Lord [Bahá'u'lláh].²¹⁶

This is the Day in which He Who held converse with God [Moses] hath attained the [Sinaitic] light of the Ancient of Days [Bahá'u'lláh] . . .²¹⁷

While, according to Qur'an 7:143, Moses was informed by his Lord of the impossibility of direct vision of him—"Said He, 'Thou shalt not see Me (*lan taranī*)' "—in such epistles as the following Bahá'u'lláh affirms, in the light of his advent, the possibility of visioning the "Speaker on the Mount":

In this Day . . . the faculty of sight calleth aloud, "Verily this is my Day, for I behold the Dayspring of glory shining resplendent at the bidding of Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Powerful." Blessed the ear that hath heard the call, "Behold, and thou shalt see Me (*inẓar taranī*)" and happy the eye that hath gazed upon the most wondrous Sign dawning from this luminous horizon.²¹⁸

Certain of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets to the Kings, written shortly after the exile to the Holy Land (1868), contain paragraphs of considerable interest in terms of the Sinaitic claims

of the Bahá'í Prophet. In, for example, the Tablet to Napoleon III (c. 1869) we read:

Give ear, O King [Napoleon], unto the Voice that calleth from the [Sinaitic] Fire (*an-nár*) which burneth in this verdant Tree (*ash-shajara al-khudrá*), on this Sinai (*al-buq'at al-muqaddasat al-baydá*), beyond the Everlasting City (*qulzum al-baqá*): "Verily there is none other God but Me, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful!" . . . Set your faces towards Him [Bahá'u'lláh] on this Day which God hath exalted above all other days, and whereon the All-Merciful hath shed the splendor of His effulgent glory (*tajallá*) upon all who are in heaven and all who are on earth . . . The voice of the Burning Bush (*shajarat at-túr*) is raised in the midmost heart of the world, and the Holy Spirit calleth aloud among the nations: "Lo, the Desired One is come with manifest dominion!"²¹⁹

As the Divine Being who uttered the declaration of divinity from the "Tree" on the "Mount," Bahá'u'lláh communicates his message from a "new Sinai" located above "the hallowed and snow-white [Sinaitic] Spot" beyond the "Everlasting City," or (literally) the "Abyss of Eternity" (*qulzum al-baqá*). Through him God has disclosed his glory (*tajallá*) as he did before the "mountain" in the presence of Moses. (See Qur'an 7:143.)

With Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the Holy Land, the 'Akka-Haifa-Mt. Carmel region where he resided came to be pictured in his writings in terms of the mystic geography of the Sinaitic sphere. References to this region as the "snow-white Spot" or the "Crimson Spot" appear to express the idea that it was irradiated with that brilliant whiteness which shone from Moses' hand (mystically the Divine light) and by the crimson light of the Sinaitic "Fire." This, in view of Bahá'u'lláh being the locus of Sinaitic realities and the "Speaker on the Mount." In several of his writings, Bahá'u'lláh clearly associates the Holy Land or the 'Akka-Haifa-Mt. Carmel area with the Sinaitic Vale (*wádi*) or "snow-white Spot":

This Holy Land (*arāḍīy-i muqaddasa*) hath been mentioned and extolled in all the sacred Scriptures (*kutub-i illāhī*) . . . This is the promised Land in which He Who is the Revelation of God was destined to be made manifest. This is the [Sinaitic] Vale of God's unsearchable decree (*wāḍīy-i qaḍā*), the snow-white Spot (*ard-i bayḍā*), the Land of unfading splendor (*buq'ay-i nūrā*; lit. luminous Spot).²²⁰

. . . "Holy Vale" (*al-wād al-muqaddas*), "the Land of the Assembling" [for judgement] (*ard al-maḥshar*), "Snow-White Spot" (*buq'at al-bayḍā*): these three terms refer to the 'Akkā region (*ard-i 'Akkā*).²²¹

In an epistle to Ḥājī Mīrzā Ḥaydar-'Alī (d. 1920), Bahá'u'lláh expressed the nature and scene of his Sinaitic claims as follows:

. . . from the right bank of the Holy Vale (*min shāṭī al-wād al-ayman*) [Qur'an 28:30] in the Luminous Spot (*al-buq'a an-nūrā*) beyond the Ocean of Grandeur (*qulzum al-kubriyā*) from the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing, We call aloud unto thee saying: In truth there is no God but Me, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.²²²

The epistle (c. 1869) to the Czar of Russia, Alexander II, contains a passage in which Jesus is pictured as acknowledging Bahá'u'lláh's advent as the Father in the Holy Vale (the 'Akká-Haifa area?). Personified Sinai, it is stated, circumambulates his residence while the Burning Bush asserts the parousia of divinity:

He Who is the Father (*al-ab*) is come, and the Son [Jesus] in the holy vale (*al-wād al-muqaddas*) crieth out: "Here am I, here am I, O Lord, my God," whilst Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr*) circleth round the House (*al-bayt*), and the Burning Bush (*ash-shajara*) calleth aloud: "The All-Bounteous (*al-wahháb*) is come mounted upon the clouds!"²²³

At the very beginning of his epistle to Queen Victoria (c. 1869), Bahá'u'lláh boldly invites the queen to hearken unto his declaration of divinity from the Sinaitic Lote-Tree:

O Queen in London! Incline thine ear unto the voice of thy Lord, the Lord of all mankind, calling from the Divine Lote-Tree (*as-sidra*): "Verily, no God is there but Me, the Almighty, the All-Wise!"²²⁴

Though essentially a volume of laws and ordinances, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book (*al-Kitáb al-aqdas*, c. 1873) contains several passages in which its author expresses his claims in Sinaitic terms. Within it Moses is, mystically speaking, said to have attained his presence. Mount Sinai is pictured as "circling round the Dayspring of [Bahá'u'lláh's] Revelation."²²⁵ At one point, humankind is exhorted to advance "... with snow-white faces (*wujúh baydá'*) and radiant hearts (*qulúb núrá'*) unto the blessed and crimson Spot (*al-buq'a al-mubárraka al-ḥamrá'*, 'Akká?') wherein the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing (*sidrat al-muntahá*, Bahá'u'lláh) is calling, 'Verily, there is none other God beside Me, the Omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting!'"²²⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, furthermore, refers to himself as the one who caused the Sinaitic Lote-Tree to "lift up its voice upon the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) rising above the Holy Land (*al-arḍ al-mubárraka*) and proclaim: 'The Kingdom is God's, the sovereign Lord of all, the All-Powerful, the Loving.'"²²⁷

It has been noted above in connection with Sinaitic terminology occurring in the Sura of the Robe that the expression "Land of Saffron" might (in certain contexts) be indicative of the saffron-colored Sinaitic light or the town of Adrianople (see above). As this phrase occurs in epistles of Bahá'u'lláh of the 'Akká period, it doubtless also has more mystical import. In Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom (*Lawḥ-i ḥikmat*, c. 1876 ?), Áqá Muḥammad Qá'iní (Nabíl-i Akbar) is addressed as follows:

O Muḥammad! Hearken unto the Voice proceeding out of the Realm of Glory (*shaṭr al-kubriyá*), calling aloud from the celestial Tree (*as-sidra*) which hath risen up above the Land of Za'farán (land of saffron; *arḍ az-za'farán*): "Verily, no God is there but Me, the Omniscient, the Wise."²²⁸

Doubtless responding to an enquiry about the significance of the "Lote Tree" (*sidra*) and "Land of Saffron" mentioned in this or another of his epistles, Bahá'u'lláh has explained that: "... The Holy Tree (*sidra*) is, in a sense, the Manifestation of the One True God, exalted be He. The Blessed Tree in the land of *za'farán* referreth to the land which is flourishing, blessed, holy and all-perfumed, where that Tree hath been planted."²²⁹ The quranic term "Lote-Tree" is, then, symbolic of the great Prophets or Manifestations of God, including Bahá'u'lláh. The place of their residence or where the "Lote-Tree" is planted is the sacred "Land of Saffron."²³⁰ As already indicated, both the "Lote-Tree" and "Land of Saffron" are often used in Sinaitic contexts. Throughout his ministry Bahá'u'lláh, in one way or another, referred to himself as the "Lote-Tree" which is equated with the Sinaitic "Tree" (*ash-shajara*) or "Burning Bush." While for example, Bahá'u'lláh refers to himself as the "Lote-Tree of God" (*sidrat Alláh*) in his Sura of the Arabs (*Súrat al-a'rab*, early 'Akka period ?), God addresses him in the following terms in his Sura of the Temple (*Súrat al-haykal*, c. 1873-4 ?): "O Thou Temple! . . . We have made Thee [Bahá'u'lláh] the Lote-Tree of Munificence to whomsoever is in the heavens and on the earth."²³¹ Hundreds of such passages occur in writings of the 'Akká period.

In a number of his epistles of the 'Akká period Bahá'u'lláh refers to and comments upon a line from one of the poems of the poet and philosopher Hájí Mullá Hádí, Ḥakím Sabziwári (d. 1873). As quoted in the Bahá'í Prophet's Words of Paradise (*Kalimát-i firdawsíyya*, late 'Akká period) it reads as follows: "Alas! Attentive ears are lacking, otherwise the

whisperings of the Sinaitic Bush (*sidray-i ʿūr*) could be heard from every tree (*shajara*)."²³² For Bahá'u'lláh, these words indicate the widespread incapacity of his contemporaries to acknowledge or mystically perceive his being the One Who spoke from Mount Sinai. In the Tablet of the Ground of Being (or Elemental Reality) (*Lawḥ-i basīʿ al-ḥaqīqa*, early or middle 'Akká period), it is stated that Sabziwári's poem indicates the non-existence of a "Moses" capable of hearing the murmur of the Sinaitic declaration of divinity ("I, verily am God"), but implies that mystic knowers might attain a rank in which their "eye" is illumined by beholding the "lights of the effulgence of the Agent of the [Sinaitic] Epiphany (*anwár-i tajalliy-i mujallá*)" and their "ears" made capable of hearing the Sinaitic Call.²³³ Like other Shí'í mystics, Sabziwári did not become a Bahá'í. Bahá'u'lláh considered that he had failed to "hearken unto the call which the Tree of Man (*sidray-i insán*; Bahá'u'lláh) raised from the loftiest heights of the world" and that his words exceeded his deeds.²³⁴

In the later Arabic section of the Tablet of the Ground of Being, Bahá'u'lláh exhorts a certain Ḥusayn to inform one who had posed a question that he is capable of enabling him to attain a station in which he would see naught in the world save "the epiphany of the presence of the Ancient One" (*tajallí ḥadrat al-qadím*, Bahá'u'lláh) and hear the declaration of divinity from the Lote-Tree. He also refers to himself as the One Who cried out from the Sinaitic "Fire" (*an-nár*). From the "luminous Lote-Tree raised up above the Crimson Spot (*al-buq'a al-ḥamrá*, 'Akká?)" he uttered the words, "O People! Hasten in heartfelt manner unto the precinct of the Beloved One [Bahá'u'lláh]."²³⁵

In certain epistles then, Bahá'u'lláh quotes, comments upon and expresses his claims in the light of a line from one of the poems of Ḥakim Sabziwári. Apart from the two Tablets (*alwáḥ*) referred to above, there exists another in which Bahá'u'lláh equates the "Speaker" (*al-kalím*, Moses) with such

souls as are given to celebrating his position as the "Remembrance" (*adh-dhikr*) and claims that through his "Reality" (*al-ḥaqíqa*)—which permeates all "realities" (*al-ḥaqá'iq*)—all things assert his divinity by crying out, "No God is there except Him." Sabziwari's poem and failure to come to faith are commented upon in the following terms:

And among them stands he who claimed that he had heard from every tree (*shajara*) that which was heard by the One Who conversed with God (*al-kalím*; Moses). But when the times were fulfilled and the Lote-Tree [Bahá'u'lláh] cried aloud between earth and heaven, We found him [Sabziwari] thunderstruck upon the dust.²³⁶

In order to highlight the greatness of his person and revelation, Bahá'u'lláh not infrequently personified Mt. Sinai and the Sinaitic Lote-Tree during the 'Akká period of his ministry. He pictured them as, for example, circumambulating his residence and testifying to the sublimity of his Cause. In the Most Holy Tablet (*Lawḥ-i aqdas*, middle 'Akká period ?), we read: "... Sinai (*aṭ-ṭúr*) circleth round the House (*al-bayt*) and the Burning Bush (*ash-shajara*) calleth aloud: 'He Who is the Desired One is come in His transcendent majesty. [i.e., Christ has returned]'"²³⁷ These words are closely paralleled in the earlier and already quoted Tablet to the Czar of Russia (see above) and anticipate Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation:

... O peoples of the earth ... Purge ye your ears and set your hearts towards Him that ye may hearken to the most wondrous Call which hath been raised from Sinai (*as-síná*), the habitation of your Lord, the Most Glorious (*al-abhá*) [Bahá'u'lláh]. It will, in truth, draw you nigh unto the [Sinaitic] Spot (*maqám*) wherein ye will perceive the splendor of the light of His Countenance (*anwár al-wajh*, lit., the lights of the Face [of Bahá'u'lláh]) which shineth above this luminous Horizon."²³⁸

While in an epistle to a certain Jawád, Bahá'u'lláh pictures personified Mount Sinai as exclaiming, "Verily, the Lord of Revelation is come,"²³⁹ he elsewhere represents this mountain as weeping over his plight.²⁴⁰ In his highly allegorical Tablet of the Vision (*Lawḥ-i ru'yá*, March 1, 1873), Mount Sinai personified is said to have cried out—in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's manifestation—"The Kingdom is God's, . . . the All-Wise."²⁴¹ On similar lines is the following extract from an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to the aforementioned Bahá'í poet 'Andalíb:

This is the Day in which all things have been ennobled through the lights of the Theophany (*anwár az-ẓuhúr*) [of Bahá'u'lláh]; though most of the people are to be numbered among the heedless. The [Sinaitic] Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) crieth out before the Theophany (*az-ẓuhúr*) [Bahá'u'lláh] and summoneth all unto the One round whom the Messengers [of God] circumambulate (*maṭáḥ al-mursalín*) [Bahá'u'lláh]."²⁴²

At one point in his Tablet of the Proof (*Lawḥ-i burhán*, early 1880s), Bahá'u'lláh exhorts the anti-Bahá'í Shí'í cleric Shaykh Muḥammad Báqir (d. 1883) to present himself before Him, that he might hear "... the mysteries which were heard by the Son of 'Imrán [Moses] upon the Sinai of Wisdom (*ṭúr al-'irfán*)."²⁴³ After quoting these words in his epistle to Muḥammad Báqir's equally antagonistic son, Shaykh Muḥammad Taqí Najafí (d. 1914), the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (*Lawḥ-i ibn-i dhi'b*, c. 1891), Bahá'u'lláh sets forth certain words of the "true Faith" in which both "Sinai" and "the Bush" are personified and pictured as addressing words of considerable interest to the followers of the Báb or the "people of the Bayán":

Thereupon hath the cry and the lamentation of the true Faith been raised once again, saying: "Verily Sinai (*aṭ-ṭúr*) calleth aloud and saith: 'O people of the Bayán! Fear ye the Merciful. Indeed

have I attained unto Him Who conversed upon me (*mukallamī*) [Bahá'u'lláh], and the ecstasies of my joy have seized the pebbles of the earth and the dust thereof.' And the Bush (*as-sidra*) exclaimeth: 'O people of the Bayán! Judge ye fairly that which hath in truth been manifested. Verily the Fire (*an-nár*) which God revealed unto the One Who conversed with Him (*al-kalīm*) [Moses] is now manifested. Unto this beareth witness every man of insight and understanding.' "244

At another point in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, the "voice and lamentation of the true Faith" is pictured as uttering the words: "This is the Day whereon Sinai (*aṭ-ṭūr*) hath smiled at Him Who conversed upon it [Bahá'u'lláh], and [Mount] Carmel at its Revealer and the Sadrah [Lote-Tree] at Him Who taught it . . ."245 Bahá'u'lláh's epiphany as the "Speaker on the Mount" had, figuratively speaking, caused the Mount to smile with joy. In the same work, personified Sinai is also said to have exclaimed: "He that discoursed upon Me (*mukallamī*) is come with evident signs and resplendent tokens . . ."246

The Claim to Divinity. During the latter years of the 'Akká period, Bahá'u'lláh dictated a number of sometimes lengthy epistles in which key aspects of his Sinaitic theology are discussed in the light of allegations that he had uttered blasphemy by claiming to be an incarnation of the Absolute Godhead. Anti-Bábí mullas, unaware of the subtleties of Bahá'í theophanology, took Bahá'u'lláh's oft-voiced claim to represent the eschatological advent of Divinity, and to have uttered the words "I, verily am God . . ." or the like, as the "Speaker on the Mount," as sure signs of the perfidy of the Bahá'í Prophet and of the heretical nature of the Bahá'í religion. The uninitiated came to view and refer to Bahá'u'lláh as the "God of the Persians." They were unaware that he had explained in his "revelations" that one of the significances of the doctrine of the Divine Unity (*at-tawḥíd*) is that the great Manifestations

of God mirror forth the names and attributes of God such that all scriptural statements about God revolve around their transcendent Being. It was not commonly understood that Bahá'u'lláh's claim to "Divinity" and "Lordship" was not a claim to identity with the transcendent and unknowable Godhead, as he himself made perfectly clear in innumerable Tablets.

The following notes on select writings of the late 'Akká period must suffice to illustrate some of the detailed aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's own clarification of his Sinaitic theology and claim to divinity.

a) The Tablet of Effulgences (Tajallíyát):

The important work which bears this title was written for a staunch Iranian Bahá'í named Ustád 'Alí Akbar Banná (d. Yazd 1903). It consists of a prolegomenon and four sections on diverse themes, each of which constitutes an "Effulgence" or "Epiphany" (*tajallí*) from the pen or person of Bahá'u'lláh. In the prolegomenon, Bahá'u'lláh refers to "that which the people of tyranny ascribe unto Me in My days" and mentions that some among them say, "He hath laid claim to divinity (*ar-rubúbiyya*, lit., "Lordship")."²⁴⁷ While the first *tajallí* includes reference to his claim to be the "Speaker on Sinai," the fourth *tajallí* takes up the issue of the claim to "Divinity" (*ulúhiyya*), "Lordship" (*rubúbiyya*), and the like. After alluding to the importance of his person and revelation as the "Lote-Tree and its fruits" and again referring to himself as the "Speaker on Sinai" (*mukallam aṭ-ṭūr*) Bahá'u'lláh states:

Say O people, if ye judge fairly and equitably, ye will testify to the truth of whatsoever hath streamed forth from the Most Exalted Pen [i.e., Bahá'u'lláh's writings]. If ye be of the people of the Bayán [the Bábís], the Persian Bayán will guide you aright and will prove a sufficient testimony unto you; and if ye be of the people of the Qur'an [Muslims], ponder ye upon the Revelation on

Sinai (*tajallí*) and the Voice from the Bush (*sidra*) which came unto the Son of 'Imrán [Moses].²⁴⁸

It is indicated that the truth of the revelation and claims of Bahá'u'lláh would be clear to Bábís who derive guidance from the Báb's Persian Bayán and to Muslims who are mindful of the quranic accounts of the Sinai epiphany (of Qur'an 7:143) and of the call of Moses. God "revealed his glory" (*tajallá*) before the "Mount" and declared His divinity from the "Bush." As the manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh has accomplished the same and should, it is implied, be accepted by Muslims who are aware of the quranic precedent.

God, Bahá'u'lláh continues to argue, intended that human beings be mature enough to accept and understand his elevated claims. Heedless souls, however, have failed to come to faith: "That which they accepted from the [Sinaitic] Bush (*shajara*) they now refuse to accept from Him who is the [Lote-] Tree of the world of existence (*sidray-i wujud*) [Bahá'u'lláh]."²⁴⁹ People, in other words, can accept that God proclaimed His divinity through a "Bush," but cannot accept Bahá'u'lláh's "I, verily am God," or the like. Followers of the Báb, furthermore, should bear in mind that: "Most of the peoples of the earth attest the truth of the blessed Word (*kalimat-i mubáraka*) that hath come forth from the Bush (*shajara*)."²⁵⁰ They acknowledge the truth of the scriptural accounts of the Sinaitic declaration of divinity. Unbelieving Bábís should thus feel humbled that they have failed to acknowledge Bahá'u'lláh's position as the "Speaker on Sinai." They should bear in mind that he would not have "breathed a word" of his claim to divinity had not the Báb praised him so highly and, for example, written of him in his Persian Bayán (8:1): "He is the One Who shall proclaim under all conditions, 'Verily, verily, I am God, no God is there but Me, the Lord of all created things . . .'"²⁵¹ Such, in summary, if I understand it correctly, is the substance of Bahá'u'lláh's fourth *tajallí*.

b) *The Tablet of the Essence of Praise (Lawḥ-i jawhar-i ḥamd).*²⁵²

This unpublished Persian Epistle which is largely addressed to the people of the world collectively opens with a paragraph in which God's supreme transcendence and essential incomprehensibility are clearly and categorically set forth. The next few paragraphs contain many points of interest and serve to underline the elevated status of the Manifestations or Messengers of God. The "Blessed and Primordial Word (*kalimat*) which shone forth from the Dawning-Place of the Will (*mashīyya*) of the King of the Divine Oneness [God]" as the agent of creation is equated with the "Self" (*nafs*) of the Manifestation of God. As the exclusive intermediaries between God and creation, the great Prophets represent the Godhead and express His divinity. Prophecies about the eschatological advent of God refer to them and to Bahá'u'lláh in particular for, as the "Most Great Theophany" (*zuhúr i-a'ẓam*), he has been manifested in every age and cycle with a particular Name, and appeared on the "Day of God." Despite the fact that "He Who Conversed with the Speaker (*mukallam-i kalím*) [Moses]" disclosed the "Greatest Name" (*ism-i a'ẓam*) or identity of Bahá'u'lláh, souls have remained veiled from him.

About half way through his Tablet of the Essence of Praise, Bahá'u'lláh mentions how different religious factions have been held back from faith on account of his various claims to "Prophethood" (*nubuwwa*), "Guardianship" (*wiláya*), and "Divinity" (*ulúhiyya*). He expresses astonishment that Jews, Christians, and other communities in possession of a Holy Book object to his claim to divinity and writes: "Say: O thou who art dumb! Hast thou not heard the Call of God from the [Sinaitic] Tree (*ash-shajara*) raised up from the Luminous Spot (*al-buq'a an-núrá*), "No God is there except Him." Then consider this and be not such as hearken but fail to comprehend." It is implied that Bahá'u'lláh's claim to divinity was foreshadowed on Sinai.

In defending the legitimacy of his claim to divinity, Bahá'u'lláh also quotes and comments on that line of the "blessed Sermon of the Gulf which shone forth from the horizon of the heaven of guardianship [Imam 'Alí]" in which the advent of "He Who conversed with Moses" (*mukallam mūsá*) on Sinai is mentioned. He stresses the importance of this prophecy and declares that through it "all the peoples of the world were given the glad-tidings of the [eschatological] manifestation of God (*ṣuhúr Alláh*).” Referring to himself, he explains: "To-day He Who conversed with Moses (*mukallam mūsá*) hath appeared and hath cried out, 'I, verily am God.'" That a Prophet of God would be made manifest and make such claims is, Bahá'u'lláh also argues, anticipated in various Islamic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and quranic texts. The "Day of Resurrection" is the time of the rising up of the "Manifestation of the Self of God" (*mazhar-i nafs Alláh*).

c) *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (Lawḥ-i ibn-i dhi'b)*:

This epistle to Shaykh Muḥammad Taqí Najafí has already been mentioned and quoted from. It is fairly rich in Sinaitic and related theological materials²⁵³ and contains an important section on the question of Bahá'u'lláh's claim to divinity. About a quarter of the way through his treatise, Bahá'u'lláh records that either Shaykh Muḥammad or some other opponent of the Bahá'í Cause had suggested that the quranic Sura of the Divine Unity (*Súrat at-tawḥíd*, Qur'an 112) be translated [into Persian], to the end that it may be clear to all that "the one true God begetteth not, nor is He begotton." This was with a view to countering the assertions of such "Bábís" (i.e., Bahá'ís) as "believe in his [Bahá'u'lláh's] Divinity (*rubúbiyya*, lit., Lordship) and Godhood (or Divinity, *ulúhiyya*)."²⁵⁴

Immediately after recording such views, Bahá'u'lláh defends his claim to divinity in the following terms: "This station [Divinity] is the station in which one dieth to himself (*faná' az nafs*) and liveth in God (*baqá' bi'lláh*)."²⁵⁵ His exalted

claims are indicative of his utter self-effacement before God and not of his own identity with the Absolute Godhead. Outside of an acceptance of the legitimacy of his claim to divinity, the prophetically and mystically understood accounts of the epiphany (*tajallí*) before the Mount, and of the declaration of divinity from the "Bush," lose their meaning—given that the absolute Godhead was not personally involved: "O Shaykh," Bahá'u'lláh asks Shaykh Muḥammad Taqí, "How do the [Muslim] divines of this age account for the effulgent glory (*tajallíyát*, lit., epiphanic splendors) which the Sadrah [Lote-Tree] of Utterance hath shed upon the Son of 'Imrán [Moses] on the Sinai of Divine knowledge (*túr-i 'irfán*)? He [Moses] hearkened unto the Word (*kalimat*) which the Burning Bush (*sidra*, lit., Lote-Tree) had uttered, and accepted it; and yet most men are bereft of the power of comprehending this, inasmuch as they have busied themselves with their own concerns, and are unaware of the things which belong to God."²⁵⁶ Moses, in other words, accepted the claim to divinity made from a "Bush," while souls find it difficult to accept the claim to divinity made by Bahá'u'lláh. This, despite that Islamic tradition which has it that in the latter days souls shall behold "their Lord" as clearly as they behold the "full moon on its fourteenth night" and the prophecy contained in the Sermon on the Gulf (which is again quoted by Bahá'u'lláh).²⁵⁷

Having made these points, and others besides, Bahá'u'lláh states that the people have failed to perceive his purpose in making reference to his "Divinity" (*ulúhiyya*) and "Godhood" (*rubūbiyya*). His having made such claims is perfectly legitimate in the light of claims to "Divinity" made by Muḥammad and the Imáms (recorded in Shí'í literatures). Opponents have stirred up controversy, furthermore, by referring to his most elevated claims, without taking into account the fact that other less exalted claims had been disclosed by the "Abhá Pen" (Bahá'u'lláh). In order to illustrate his lowliness before God, Bahá'u'lláh writes: "In truth I say, and for the sake of God I declare: This servant, this Wronged One, is abashed to

claim for Himself any existence whatever, how much more those exalted grades of being!"²⁵⁸ His claims to "Servitude" (*'ubúdiyya*) do not, however, overrule his claims to "Divinity" (*ulúhiyya*). Both sets of claims are made by the Manifestations of God who, though they may say, "I, verily, am God," as representatives of the unknowable Godhead, yet remain servants of that Absolute Being. In explaining such theological subtleties, Bahá'u'lláh quotes the sixth Imám, Ja'far aṣ-Ṣádiq, as having said: "Servitude (*al-'ubúdiyya*) is a substance the essence of which is Divinity (*ar-rubúbiyya*)."²⁵⁹ It is in view of such arguments that Bahá'u'lláh can confidently declare in his Epistle to the Son of the Wolf: "The Sun of Utterance beameth forth in this day, above the horizon of bounty, and the radiance of the Revelation of Him Who spoke on Sinai (*núr-i ṣuhúr-i mukallam-i túr*) [Bahá'u'lláh] flasheth and glisteneth before all religions."²⁶⁰

Bahá'u'lláh as YHWH "Jehovah" and Exodus 3: The majority of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh discussed in the previous pages have contained Sinaitic materials closely related to Islamic and Bábí sources. Other epistles do, however, contain paragraphs in which Bahá'u'lláh interprets and expresses his claims in the light of the biblical account of the call of Moses and epiphany of YHWH "Jehovah." With the conversion of a considerable body of Iranian Jewry to the Bahá'í Faith from the early 1870s, and the publication of Cornelius Van Dyck and Eli Smith's Arabic translation of the Bible (Beirut, 1865) (later editions were available to Bahá'u'lláh), Bahá'u'lláh came to dictate Tablets for Jews directly informed by biblical materials.

A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh written as if by his amanuensis Mírzá Aqá Ján Khadímu'lláh and addressed to a Bahá'í referred to as *Khalíl* is of particular interest. Its opening Arabic section was revealed in honor of a certain Ḥakím—most probably a Jewish convert to the Bahá'í Faith—and may be characterised as a mystical exegesis of Exodus 3 and 6:3 (Arabic

version).²⁶¹ Within it, key texts drawn from the biblical account of the call of Moses and relating to God's disclosure of his identity to the patriarchs and to Moses are associated with the disclosure of the Greatest Name (*bahá'*) or identity of Bahá'u'lláh in primordial times (mystic pre-eternity). It opens with a paragraph in which mention is made of the archetypal beauty of the pre-Mosaic Prophets whose creation is linked with God's theophany as "Almighty God," the *El Shaddai* of Exodus 6:3.²⁶² The scene is set for mention of God's appearance to Moses and His declaration, "Moses, Moses, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:4b + 6a Arabic version). Bahá'u'lláh says that Moses was greatly moved by this declaration and "veiled his face, being unable to look at Him [God]." (See Exodus 3:6b + quranic parallels.) On account of it, he swooned away, thunderstruck for a period of 81,000 years ($9 \times 9 \times 1,000$; a symbolic figure) until "his Lord" revived him, and he glorified Him for 9,000,000 years (another symbolic figure; cf. Qur'an 20:14, 7:143b).²⁶³

Then, called again from the "Supreme Horizon," Moses was commissioned by God to make Him known to His "hidden people" in the celestial realms or "timeless" preeternal sphere. A difficult paragraph follows which forms a kind of counterpart to and transcendentalization of Moses' being called to liberate the Israelites in bondage in Egypt (cf. Exodus 3:7-11 Arabic text) and Exodus 3:13-15 is exegetically paraphrased:

Then the One Who conversed with God [Moses] presented His plight unto the Lord, the Ancient: "If I come unto them [the people] and say to them, "Your Beloved hath sent me unto you," and they ask me "What is His name?", what reply shall I give to them?"

Then did the mighty Divine Realm (*láhút*) quake, the Heavenly Dominion (*jabarút*) of Power shake, and the kingdom (*malakút*) of loftiness and exaltedness swoon away. The most exalted heaven

of heavens trembled by reason of the [divine] call which was raised from the hidden Retreat of [God's] Grandeur. The Voice of the Lord caused every ancient mountain to tremble. [Cf. Qur'an 7:143]

Say [O Moses, to the people]: "I am He Who is I AM WHO I AM ('EHYEH 'ASHER 'EHYEH). I AM hath sent me [Moses] unto you." [See Exodus 3:14 Hebrew + Arabic.] O Moses! This Thou shalt say to the thirsty ones who desire the Kawthar (Fount) of union with Me: "YHWH (Jehovah), your Beloved, hath sent Me [Moses] unto you in order that I might give you the glad tidings of His [future] advent, His [spiritual] nearness, and of the [eschatological] attainment of His Presence."²⁶⁴

It seems to be presupposed in this paragraph that God's making himself known to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM" and YHWH "Jehovah" was with a view to the Israelite Prophet making his presence and future advent as Bahá'u'lláh known to the denizens of the mystic realm. The Divine Being who appeared to Moses and made Himself known as the God of the Patriarchs and YHWH will, Bahá'u'lláh subsequently states, not be known by His name *Bahá'* (the Greatest Name) until "the end of all ages" (eschatological times). Exodus 3: 13-15 and 6:3 are paraphrased by Bahá'u'lláh so as to express a progressive disclosure of the names of the Divine Being Who spoke from the Burning Bush culminating in the announcement of the expected advent of *El Shaddai/YHWH* as one bearing the "Hidden Name," *Bahá'*, namely, Bahá'u'lláh.

In a number of his epistles of the late 'Akká period, Bahá'u'lláh clearly claimed to be YHWH, the Divinity Who conversed with Moses from the burning bush and whose eschatological advent as "YHWH of hosts" ("the Lord of hosts") was predicted by the Israelite prophets. In, for example, the following lines addressed to a Jewish convert to the Bahá'í Faith named Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

The Face of the Ancient One [Bahá'u'lláh] hath turned towards the sages (*ḥukamá'*) in the Land of *al-há'* and *al-mím* [Hamádán, in

Iran] and announceth unto them the glad-tidings of the Ridván (Paradise) of God, the Lord of all the worlds: "By God! He Who hath been named *YHWH* "Jehovah" in the Torah hath come."²⁶⁵

On similar lines is the following extract from an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to the Bahá'í poet 'Andalíb (and others):

He [Bahá'u'lláh] it is Who, in the Old Testament (Torah) hath been named *YHWH* "Jehovah" . . .²⁶⁶

A good many passages are to be found in the Tablets of the late 'Akká period in which Bahá'u'lláh refers to himself as "the Lord (*YHWH*) of hosts" (Arabic: *rabb al-junúd*). One such passage reads as follows:

This is the Day in which He Who cried out on the Mount (*munadí at-túr*) hath held converse and the Lord of Hosts (*rabb al-junúd*) proclaimed before all the world: "No God is there except Me, the Mighty, the Knowing."²⁶⁷

'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically identified the Biblical "Lord of Hosts" with his father and spoke of the "hosts" as the stalwart members of the Bahá'í community.²⁶⁸

CONCLUDING NOTE

In the light of the foregoing it should be clear that Moses/Sinai motifs rooted in the Bible and the Qur'an were given a wide range of interpretations by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. They reinterpreted, in terms of their respective missions, those quranic texts that narrate the episode of the call of Moses, often presupposing that it has deep allegorical and mystical levels of meaning. While they underlined the incomprehensibility and transcendence of the Absolute Godhead, they yet understood the epiphany before the Mount recorded in Qur'an 7:143, and rooted in Exodus 33:18-23, in the light

of their own manifestations in eschatological times. Each claimed divinity in the light of God's declaration from the "Tree" or "Burning Bush," and in this respect they made reference to the prophecy attributed to Imám 'Alí about the theophany of "He Who Conversed with Moses" on Sinai.

The Báb's claim to be the "Gate" and Bahá'u'lláh's oft-voiced claim to be the "Speaker on Sinai" were made in the light of the typological repetition of the call of Moses in the "Holy Vale." Such are but a few of the key points which emerge from the study of the Sinaitic materials within the massive corpus of Bábí and Bahá'í scripture. Of course, not all the points made in this paper can be discussed here.

Finally, it is important to note that, in addition to the many passages within the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh that are expressive of a "Sinaitic theology," there exist certain writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (d. 1921) and Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957) that contain important exegetical statements. The former, for example, showed himself fully aware of his father's claims when he wrote: "... the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] is the One promised by the sacred Books of the past, the revelation of the Source of light that shone upon Mount Sinai, Whose fire glowed in the midst of the Burning Bush."²⁶⁹

Shoghi Effendi, to quote but one extract from a letter expressive of his interpretation of the Sinaitic dimensions of Bahá'u'lláh's claims, has stated:

Bahá'u'lláh is not the intermediary between the other Manifestations [of God] and God. Each has His own relation to the Primal Source [God]. But in the sense that Bahá'u'lláh is the greatest Manifestation to yet appear, the One who consummates the Revelation to Moses, He was the One Moses conversed with in the Burning Bush. In other words, Bahá'u'lláh identifies the glory of the God-Head on that occasion with Himself. No distinction can be made amongst the Prophets in the sense that They all proceed

from one Source [God], and are of one essence. But their stations and functions in this world are different.²⁷⁰

It is clear from this letter that the present Bahá'í viewpoint is that Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be "He Who conversed with Moses," with its implications of divinity, does not signify that the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith acted as an intermediary between other great Messengers of God and the absolute God-head; neither, as we have seen, does it assert his own identity with the unknowable God. Rather, as has also been pointed out, it implies that Bahá'u'lláh fulfills the Mosaic faith and appeared on the eschatological "Day of God" as the manifestation, but not incarnation, of divinity.

NOTES

Editor's Note: There is some considerable variation in the first two consonants and first two vowels of *Ṭutunjiyya*, the name given to an oration (*khutba*) ascribed to the Imám 'Alí and referred to in both this paper and the previous one by Todd Lawson. The first two consonants are variously given as *tá'* and *tá'* (in the text of the *khutba* in al-Bursí, *Masháriq anwár al-yaqín* [Beirut, 1978] p. 166; and as a preferred variant by Corbin, *Annuaire de l'École des hautes études: Section des sciences religieuses, 1969-1970* [Paris] p. 236) or as *tá'* and *tá'* (in Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, *Sharḥ-i khutba ṭutunjiyya*, lithograph [Tabriz, 1270]; Abu'l-Qásim Ibrahímí, *Fihrist kutub masháyyikh 'izám*, 3rd ed., [Kirmán, n.d.] p. 292, and given as a variant in Corbin, *op cit*, p. 236) or as *tá'* and *tá'* (as a variant in Corbin, *op cit*, p. 236). The first two vowels are given by Corbin as *a* and *a* in all three of his variant forms, the first vowel as *u* in Rashtí, *Sharḥ*, and the first two vowels as *u* and *u* in A. L. M. Nicolas, *Essai sur le Cheikhisme*, vol. 2, p. 32. I have somewhat arbitrarily standardised this enormous variability to *Ṭutunjiyya* in order to avoid confusing the reader.

1. All Biblical quotations are taken from the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV)

2. The name Moses in Hebrew corresponds to an Egyptian

form of the verb *mši*, "to bear, give birth to." Midian indicates the region of northwest Arabia along the east coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. "Jethro, priest of Midian" is the name of Moses' father-in-law in Exod. 3:1, 4:18, and Chapter 18. Cf. Exodus 2:18, where he is named Reuel (his clan name?), Numbers 10:29, and Judges 4:11.

3. Most modern commentators on the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) give some weight to the so-called "Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis": loosely, the theory that the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) 'is made up of various written documents combined and revised over several centuries: that is, a "J" (Yahwist) source (9th cent. B.C.), an "E" (Elohist) source (8th cent. B.C.), a Deuteronomic Code or "D" source (7th cent. B.C.) and a Priestly Code or "P" source (5th cent. B.C.). It is in the light of such an hypothesis that Exodus 3:1-6 has been thought to combine materials from the "J" (Exodus 3:1 [the final clause]+ 2-4a and 5) and "E" sources (Exodus 3:4b+6).

4. Much has been written about the possible location of Mt. Horeb/Mt. Sinai. See, for example, G. I. Davies, *The Way of the Wilderness*, esp. pp. 63-9 (and see bibliography).

5. See Philo, *De Vita Mosis* I.6b; *De Confusione Linguarum* 95 7; *Quaest. Exod.* 45.

6. See below and refer, for example, to Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* I.8.; *Paedagogus* II.8.; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.6; IV.10,20; Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.*, XI.9ff; Ambrose, *De Fide* I.13.

7. For details see D. C. Trakatellis, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in Justyn Martyr*, pp. 73-80.

8. See Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* pp. 59-63. Cf., p. 159 notes 26-28.

9. I draw on and quote here from B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, pp. 84-5 referring to Augustine, *On the Trinity* V.2f.

10. For further details see W. G. Williams, *Bush, Burning* in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 476-7; J. Rogerson, *The Supernatural in the Old Testament*, pp. 36-38; J. Feliks, *Burning Bush* in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 4, cols. 1528-30.

11. Cf. pp. 79-80 and fn. 32 (below).

12. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 84.

13. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* (II.21) p. 59.

14. See S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, p. 111.

15. See for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II.22 ("... Sandaled feet cannot ascend that height where the light of truth is seen, but the dead and earthly covering of skins [cf. Gen. 3:21], which was placed around our nature at the beginning when we were found naked because of disobedience, must be removed from the feet of the soul." [p. 59]); Al-Ghazzalí, *Mishkat al-anwár*, p. 133.

16. See below pp. 111–112, 118.

17. Cf. Gen. 26:24; 31:5, 42, 53; 43:23; 46:1, 3; 49:25; 50:17; and Exod. 15:2; 18:4.

18. For details, see M. Reisel, *The Mysterious Name of Y.H.W.H.*; B. W. Anderson, *JEHOVAH in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2., p. 817.

19. While the "J" strand of pentateuchal tradition has it that the worship of YHWH predated Moses (13th cent. B.C.?; see, for example, Gen. 4:26), "later" streams of pentateuchal tradition ("P", cf. "E") consistently maintain that YHWH first made himself known by this name to Moses (Exod. 6:2–3). The name YHWH was doubtless given new currency in Mosaic circles. There would seem to be some truth in the so-called "Kenite hypothesis": the theory that YHWH was, in pre-Mosaic times, the God of the Kenites or Midianites from whom Moses learned this name (through Jethro?). The name of God *'Elohim* (occurs some 2,550 times in the Hebrew Bible) is derived from the generic Semitic name for "God" or "deity," namely, *El* (cf. Alláh). In the Hebrew Bible *El*, *'Elohim*, YHWH, and other ways of referring to God all describe the same God of the Israelites. *El Shaddai* (*El*, "God"; *Shaddai*, meaning uncertain) or simply *shaddai* (loosely, "Almighty God"; NB: Heb. *shadad*, "to overpower," "devastate") indicates God at certain points in the "P" pentateuchal tradition and in the Book of Job as an heritage of the patriarchal religion. The many complex issues surrounding the significance and use of these various names of God in the Hebrew Bible cannot be discussed in detail here.

20. See below, pp. 155–57.

21. R. E. Clements, *Exodus*, p. 110.

22. Exodus 33:18–23, is loosely paralleled at Qur'an 7:143. See below p. 81ff.

23. Certain references in the Bible to the eschatological manifestation of God's "glory" (Hebrew, *kabôd*; Greek, *doxa*) are inter-

preted in Bahá'í literature in terms of the advent of Bahá'u'lláh (the "glory of God").

24. See Galatians 4:24f. Paul understood the story of the free woman Sarah's driving out of the slave woman Hagar (see Gen. 21:10, 12) as an allegory of the superior position of freedom in Christ over against the burden of Jewish legalism.

25. Unless otherwise indicated all translations from the Qur'an are taken from A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*.

26. For details see, J. Obermann, "Koran and Agada," p. 30f; A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Koran*, pp. 184-5; 206-7. As Jeffery points out (p. 185) the form *sínín* at Qur'an 95:2 is a modification of *síná'* "for the sake of rhyme." The word *ṭūr* occurs ten times in the Qur'an (2:60, 87; 4:153; 19:53; 20:82; 23:20; 28:29, 46; 52:1, and 95:2).

27. See H. Gätje, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis*, p. 283, note 11.

28. Refer, Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkat al-anwār*, p. 133.

29. Al-Káshání [Ibn al-'Arabí], *Tafsír . . .* cited Gätje, *The Qur'an*, pp. 234-5. See Ibn al-'Arabí, *Tafsír al-Qur'ān al-Karím*, vol. 2, p. 35. *Soul* and *body* in the first line of Gätje's translation render *nafs* (having also the sense of "personality," "consciousness," etc.) and *badan*, respectively.

30. George Sale, *The Koran*, p. 283, note 1.

31. See further Qur'an 17:62; 57:71; 16:10, 70; 55:5; 36:80; 27:61; 31:26; 14:29, 31; 48:10.

32. On the Shí'í interpretation of the "Light Verse," see Gätje, *The Qur'ān*, pp. 243-245. Cf. Al-Ghazzālī's *Mishkat al-anwār*. The English word lotus/lote-tree loosely describes a number of dissimilar plants and shrubs or trees: including the water lily of Egypt and Asia (*Nymphaea lotus*, *Nelumbium speciosum*), the Jujube Tree (*Zizyphus lotus*), and the Wild Jujube (*Zizyphus spina Christi*) which allegedly supplied the material for Christ's crown of thorns. The Arabic *sidra*, often translated "Lote-Tree" perhaps indicates the Wild Jujube, or some other wild thornless shrub. The fact that the *sidra* figures in the mystical visions of the Prophet Muḥammad (see Qur'an 53:1ff.) may well be related to the references in Rabbinic literature to God's having manifested himself in the Burning Bush, understood to have been a lowly thorn-bush. In a plethora of Islamic sources the mundane "Lote-Tree" of the Qur'an is pictured as a

celestial tree of wondrous qualities and proportions. For further details, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica* articles, *Burning Bush* (Vol. 4) and *Jujube* (Vol. 11); Ibn al-'Arabí, *Shajarat al-kawn*, esp. p. 32ff.

33. The verbal form *tajallá* indicates the brightness of oncoming day at Qur'an 92:2. Cf. also, Qur'an 7:186, 59:3, and 91:3. Generally speaking *tajallá* signifies God's revealing himself or manifesting his glory.

34. Translated from Majlisí, *Bihár al-anwár*, Vol. 13, pp. 223-4. See also, Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i Iqán*, p. 61; trans., pp. 50-51.

35. al-Kisá'í, *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, p. 237.

36. See as-Suhrawardí, *'Awárif al-ma'árif*, pp. 79, 80. Sufi speculations about the modes of the divine theophany (*tajallí*) are commented upon or reflected at many points in Bábí and Bahá'í scripture. See for example Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i salmán* in *Majmú'ay-i alwáh-i mubáraka*, p. 124ff. (esp. p. 140).

37. Not recorded in the *Nahj al-Balágha*, this sermon is found in a variety of *Shí'í* sources including Rajab al-Bursí, *Masháriq anwár al-yaqín fí asrár amír al-mu'mínín*, pp. 166-170. Certain *Shí'í* and modern Western scholars have doubted its authenticity, though it was very highly regarded and esoterically interpreted by *Shí'í* mystagogues.

38. Text, al-Bursí, *Masháriq*, p. 168. I use here Shoghi Effendi's translation as cited in Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 42.

39. See *Shaykh* Aḥmad, Epistle to Maḥmúd Mírzá, in *Majmú'at ar-rasá'il*, Vol. 30, pp. 260-270.

40. Sayyid Kázim's *Sharḥ al-khuṭba at-tutunjiyya* (Commentary on the Sermon of the Gulf) is a lengthy and detailed commentary on 'Alí's sermon. A lithographed edition was produced in Iran in 1270/1853-4. However, the text and commentary in the published version ceases at a point prior to the line about the manifestation of the One Who conversed with Moses. It is not clear whether the text of the published work is incomplete or whether the commentary itself was incomplete.

41. The Báb did not comment on the whole of the Sermon of the Gulf but quoted from it a number of times in his writings. His commentary on a statement of Sayyid Kázim in his "Commentary on the Sermon of the Gulf" (See fn. 40, above. Cf. Fáḍil-i Mazandarání, *Tárikh-i zuhúr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, p. 288.) is not available to me.

42. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to a certain Šádiq, cited in Fáḍil-i Mazandaránī, *Asrār al-athār*, Vol. 5, pp. 153–4. The “Faithful Spirit” (*ruh al-amin*) mentioned here signifies Gabriel or the “Holy Spirit” (cf. Qur'an 26:193).

43. Cf., S. Lambden, “The Islámo-Bahá'í Interpretation of Deuteronomy 33:2,” p. 24ff.

44. Translated from the text cited in Mírzá Na'ím Iṣfahání, *Is-tidláliyya*, p. 65.

45. For some details see my article referred to in fn. 43 above and cf., H. Corbin, “The Configuration of the Temple of the Ka'bah,” p. 223. Mt. Paran is quite frequently mentioned in the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh (especially in the poetry of the latter).

46. This epistle is contained in al-Aḥsá'í, *Jawámi' al-kalim*, Vol. I, part two, pp. 1–68.

47. Refer, epistle to Mullá 'Alí in *Jawámi' al-kalim* (henceforth JK), Vol. 1, p. 24ff.

48. Epistle to Mullá 'Alí in JK, Vol. 1, p. 25.

49. See *ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

51. Refer *ibid.*, pp. 26–7.

52. See Shaykh Aḥmad, *Sharḥ az-ziyára*, Vol. IV, p. 195ff; *idem.*, *Risála* in JK, Vol. 1, pp. 139–41, and in *Majmu'at al-rasá'il*, Vol. 30, pp. 60–66. Cf. *Sharḥ aa-ziyára*, Vol. III, pp. 361–2.

53. Refer Rashtí, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba at-tutunjiyya*, p. 66ff.

55. See *ibid.*

56. See *ibid.*, p. 92.

57. See *ibid.*, p. 94.

58. Refer *ibid.*, p. 94. The Sayyid follows what Shaykh Aḥmad has to say in *Sharḥ az-ziyára*, Vol. III, p. 361, namely that God created His Prophets in the image of a specific Cherub and gave them corresponding names. The Shaykh wrote: “Thus Noah . . . bore the image and name of one of them [the Cherubim], that is to say, Noah was named with his name; and Abraham bore the image and name of one of them. Moses also bore the image and name of one of them, and that was the one which “revealed its glory before the mountain” (*tajallá li'l-jabal*) [Qur'an 7:143] at the time when Moses asked his Lord that which he asked [to see Him] and reduced it to dust. Jesus likewise bore the image and name of one of them

[the Cherubim]. It was by virtue of that Cherub that Jesus was able to cure the blind and the leprous and revive the dead."

59. See *ibid.*, p. 264.

60. Refer *ibid.*, p. 316. For further details see Rashtí, *Sharḥ al-khutba at-tutunjiyya* pp. 102, 105, 116, 143, 161, 168, 186-7, 252, 263, 273, 285, 293, 299, 324, 337-8, 348.

61. Cf., V. Rafati, "The Relationship of Shaykhí Doctrines to the Religious Thought of the Báb," unpublished paper, p. 6.

In the preceeding pages only a fraction of Sunni and Shí'í sources covering issues of central interest have been referred to. For some important further details and observations see, for example, Ibn Al-'Arabí, *Tafsír al-Qur'án al-karím*, Vol. 1, pp. 447-9 (on Qur'an 7:143, etc.) Vol. 2, pp. 33-36 (on Qur'an 20:12, etc.) Nwyia, P., *Le tafsir mystique attribué à Ga'fár Sádiq* (esp., pp. 196-7); Sirat, C., *Un midras juif . . .* and Vajda, G., *Le Probleme . . .*

62. In the pages to follow, I shall refer to the pagination of a well-written (though occasionally textually unsound) unpublished ms. of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* (henceforth QA) dated 1323 A.H./1905-6 C.E. I have also consulted the copy transcribed by Mírzá Áqá Khán Kirmání contained in the Browne collection [ms. F11] of Cambridge University Library. Unless otherwise indicated all translations from Persian and Arabic sources are my own.

63. See QA. 1, p. 1.

64. QA. 18, p. 56. Cf., The Báb, *Selections* [Henceforth SWB], p. 69.

65. QA. 19, p. 62 trans., SWB, p. 70 (adapted). The Sura 19 of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* is entitled "The Sura of Sinai."

66. QA. 24, p. 79. The reference to the letter *al-há'* being sent down in the "Night of Power" refers to the *há'* of the expression "We sent it down" (*anzalnahu*) in Qur'an 97:1. Cf. The Báb, *Tafsír laylat al-qadr*, ms.

67. QA. 24, p. 91.

68. QA. 28, p. 98.

69. QA. 50, p. 195.

70. QA. 51, p. 199 trans. SWB. p. 56 (adapted).

71. QA. 57, p. 226. Cf., also, *ibid.*, pp. 227, 228-9.

72. QA. 85, p. 354.

73. QA. 105, p. 421.

74. Cf. D. MacEoin, "Early Shaykhí Reactions to the Báb and His Claims" in Momen, *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, Vol. 1, p. 16ff.

75. QA. 94, p. 376. It is intimated at QA. 41, p. 154 that the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* was not wholly expressive of the Báb's "station of servitude."

76. QA. 41, p. 153.

77. QA. 53, p. 308, trans. SWB, p. 72 (adapted). Cf., also QA. 61, p. 244.

78. QA. 25, p. 85. At several points in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* the Báb uses the dual Arabic form of "Mount" (*túrayn*, "two Mounts"). See, for example, QA., p. 74; p. 105; p. 438. His frequent use of the Arabic dual form is related to his claim to stand between the "two worlds" as the "Gate" (*báb*) and to rather complex Shaykhí speculations rooted in the *Sermon of the Gulf* attributed to Imám 'Alí.

79. QA. 20, p. 64. In this sura of the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, the Báb also refers to the Remembrance (*dhikr*) being protected in view of him being cast "beyond the Crimson Abyss in the World of Unknowing" (*qulzum al-ḥamra' fí 'álam al-amá'*) and concealed in the "Pole of Splendor" (*quṭb al-bahá'*) on Mount Sinai (*aṭ-túr as-síná'*). Cf. QA. 21, p. 72. In a good many of the Báb's writings the term *bahá'* (splendor) describes the glorious radiance of the celestial Sinaitic sphere which emanates from the "fire" of the "Burning Bush" or Tree.

80. On the identity of the terms *dhikr* (Remembrance) and *báb* (Gate), see article by Todd Lawson in this volume.

81. QA. 27, pp. 95-6. Cf. QA. p. 53, "God created Joseph and his brothers from the Blessed Tree of the Divine Unicity (*ash-shajara al-aḥadiyya al-mubáraka*) . . .

82. QA. 92, p. 367.

83. QA. 93, p. 372; using a variant reading from ms. BB15 and Nicolas 107-I (the latter being a ms. originally in the possession of A.L.M. Nicolas), both mss. now held at the Bahá'í World Center, Haifa.

84. QA. 108, p. 432.

85. QA. 28, p. 99.

86. QA. 73, p. 298.

87. QA. 75, p. 306. Cf. QA. 76, p. 309 and fn. 79 above.

88. QA. 110, p. 440.
89. QA. 85, p. 342.
90. QA. 23, p. 76.
91. QA. 28, p. 101.
92. QA. 78, p. 318; using a variant reading from ms. BB15, p. 171, and Nicolas 107-I. See note 83 (above).
93. QA. 93, pp. 374, 375 partial trans. by Shoghi Effendi in SWB, p. 74.
94. QA. 105, p. 420.
95. QA. 108, p. 432.
96. QA. 109, p. 438.
97. QA. 60, p. 238.
98. QA. 67, p. 274.
99. We read at QA. 24, pp. 81-2, "... I, verily, am the Mount (*at-túr*) in the Mount (*aṭ-ṭúr*) where its epiphany took place ... "
100. QA. 91, p. 364.
101. QA. 108, pp. 431-2.
102. QA. 107, p. 429.
103. QA. 53, p. 208 trans., SWB, p. 72 (adapted).
104. QA. 68, p. 278.
105. QA. 76, p. 310.
106. QA. 77, p. 314.
107. QA. 28, pp. 101-2., last paragraph trans. by Shoghi Effendi in SWB, p. 53.
108. I have consulted and translated from the ms. of the *Ṣaḥífa bayn al-ḥaramayn* contained in the Browne collection (ms. F 7 [9]) of Cambridge University Library, and referred also to another unpublished ms. (photocopy in my possession). Page references indicate the Browne collection ms.
109. Refer, *Ṣaḥífa bayn al-ḥaramayn*, p. 5.
110. See *ibid.*, p. 49. Cf. also pp. 53, 82.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 68. See further pp. 103, 106f., 115, 121.
112. Refer, *Tafsír súrat al-kawthar* (Browne collection MS Or. F 10 [7], Cambridge University Library), f. 7b-8. Cf. also f.13, 14b.
113. *Tafsír súrat al-kawthar*, f.16(a). Text emended (one line is omitted in the Browne collection MS; see fn. 112 above) in the light of the text in Iran National Bahá'í Archives (henceforth INBA), Xe-

rox collection, Vol. 53, p. 207. Also using a variant reading in a ms. in the hand of Nabíl ibn Nabíl, p. 21, held at the Baha'í World Center.

114. Ibid., f. 29(a).

115. Ibid., f.30 (a b). The expression "Triune Names" (*asmá' ath-thulth*) here may be an allusion to the three letters which form the word *alláh* (God) or which are to be found in the formula "There is no God but God" (*lá iláha illa alláh*), namely, *alif*, *lam*, and *há'*. In at least one of the Báb's writings, the Greatest Name is identified with the glorious Epiphany on Mount Sinai (INBA, mss 6003c, pp. 173-188).

116. See *ibid.*, f.9(b)ff.

117. See for example, *Tafsír súrat al-baqara* on Qur'an 2:55 and 2:108; *Tafsir al-há'* [I] in INBA, Xerox collection Vol. 14, p. 245.; "Letter to a student" in *ibid.*, xerox coll., Vol. 14 (item 13), pp. 395ff.

118. Text translated from *ibid.*, Xerox coll., Vol. 64 (pp. 103/5-126), p. 109-110. Cf. Taherzadeh, SWB. pp. 11, 17 for a partial translation of this "Epistle of the Báb to Muḥammad Sháh." Cf. Qur'an 29:69 and Arabic Bayán 2, 1., where the Báb is addressed by God (so it seems) as "O letter of *al-rá'* and *al-bá'* (*rabb*, Lord?).

119. *Dalá'il-i sab'a* (Persian) (n.p. [Tehran], n.d. [Azalí edition]), p. 46.

120. Certain of the Báb's writings contain lengthy invocations in which their author frequently lays claim to divinity.

121. For some details reference should be made to Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawh-i sarráj* (printed in *Ishrāq Khávarí, Má'iday-i asmání*, Vol. 7., pp. 4-118) and to MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology," pp. 109-113.

122. *Persian Bayán* 8, 1. See SWB, pp. 97-8, and below p. 151.

123. See further below, pp. 149-50.

124. *Rashh-i 'amá'*, line 16. Text in *Ishrāq-Khávarí Má'iday-i ásmánt* (Henceforth MA), Vol. 4. (pp. 184-186), p. 186.

125. For further details and a full provisional translation of the *Rashh-i 'amá'*, see S. Lambden, "An Early Poem of Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí Bahá'u'lláh."

126. For further details and a full provisional translation of the "Tablet of All Food," see S. Lambden, "The Tablet of All Food."

127. See my provisional translation of the "Tablet of All Food" in the article mentioned in fn 126, pp. 30, 32, 33.

128. Text in MA, Vol. 4, p. 274.

129. So J. R. Cole in his excellent essay "Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandí Sufis." Bahá'u'lláh's "Ode of the Dove" is published in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 197-209 and in *Athár-i qalam-i a'lá*, Vol. 3, pp. 196-215 (+ Commentary).

130. *Qaṣída* . . . , line 5. Text in Bahá'u'lláh, *Athár-i qalam-i a'lá* (henceforth AQA), Vol. 3, p. 198.

131. Ibid., line 8. Text in AQA, Vol. 3, p. 197.

132. As indicated the full text of Bahá'u'lláh's commentary on select words and lines of the Ode of the Dove is printed in AQA, Vol. 3.

133. Text in AQA, Vol. 3, p. 197.

134. Text in *ibid.*, p. 197-98.

135. Ibid., p. 198.

136. Cf. A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 142ff. (+ Index). Worth consulting in terms of the connection between the theology of the "Face" or "Visage" (*wajh*) and the Sinaitic "Fire" (*nár*) is the Báb's unpublished Commentary on the Tradition, "We are the Face of God" (*Tafsír nahnu wajh Alláh*) contained in INBA MS 6006C., pp. 69-70 (Photocopy in my possession).

137. Text in AQA, Vol. 3, p. 198.

138. It should be noted that Moses' murder of the Egyptian overseer is given a variety of—sometimes esoteric—interpretations in Bahá'í scripture.

139. *Qaṣída*, line 42. Text in AQA, Vol. 3, p. 203. Cf. the interlinear comment of Bahá'u'lláh.

140. *Qaṣída*, line 46. Text in *ibid.*, p. 204. Cf. the interlinear comment of Bahá'u'lláh.

141. *Qaṣída*, line 100. Text in *ibid.*, p. 210. See further *Qaṣída*, line 43(b), (Text AQA, Vol. 3, p. 204) and line 111 (Text in *ibid.*, p. 211) and the lengthy comment of Bahá'u'lláh on line 117 (Text in *ibid.*, p. 212).

142. Refer, *Sáqí az ghayb-i baqá'*, line 10. Text in MA, Vol. 4, p. 210.

143. Text in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 176-78 (line 7[a] of the poem beginning, *Bí jánán ján hamí daryáft* . . .).

144. Text in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 179–80. See lines 1 and 4. Cf., also line 17.

145. Text in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 188, 192. See line 27.

146. See the poem beginning *Sáqí bidih ábí* . . . in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 192–4, line 4. Cf. also line 11.

147. See the poem beginning, *Mastand bulbulán zi naghmay-i yá húy-i ú* in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 194–6, lines 5–6.

148. The text of Bahá'u'lláh's Commentary on the Detached Letters is printed in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 49–80. Cf., the more reliable text in INBA. Xerox coll., Vol. 36 (also consulted).

149. Text in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 53–4.

150. Text in *ibid.*, p. 54.

151. See *ibid.*, pp. 54–5.

152. Text in *ibid.*, p. 55.

153. See further Commentary on the Detached Letters, text in *ibid.*, p. 55ff.

154. For the text of The Hidden Words, see *Majmú'ay-i alwáh-i mubáraka* (Henceforth, MAM), p.17ff. (Arabic), 373ff. (Persian). Shoghi Effendi's English translation of the text has been published many times. In the notes to follow, I refer to Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932[1975]).

155. Text in MAM, p. 29; trans., Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p. 18. In the quranic account (20:18–25; 28:33–36) of the episode of the epiphany on Mount Sinai, there is mention of two signs that were given to Moses so that he could demonstrate his power to Pharoah: his rod that turned into a serpent, and his hand which turned white when he drew it out of his *jayb* (bosom, sleeve, cloak).

156. Text in *ibid.*, p. 30, trans., Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p. 19.

157. Text in *ibid.*, p. 394; trans., Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, pp. 46–7.

158. Translation cited from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 207.

159. Persian text cited in *Payám-i bahá'í*, No. 25, p. 4.

160. Text in MA, Vol. 2, p. 56.

161. For some further details about the interpretation of this Hidden Word, see *Payám-i bahá'í*, No. 25, p. 4. Cf. MA, Vol. 9, p. 133.

162. Text in *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 8–9; trans., Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 8.

163. Text in *ibid.*, p. 42; trans., *ibid.*, p. 35 (adapted).

164. For full details, see text pp. 41–3; trans., pp. 35–6.

165. A good but not very legible text of Bahá'u'lláh's Sura of the Counsel is contained in INBA. Xerox coll., Vol. 36, pp. 242–68 and an incomplete and unreliable text in the same series Vol. 87, pp. 1–27. I have consulted both texts, but shall refer to the former only in the notes to follow.

166. Text in INBA., Xerox coll., Vol. 36, pp. 247–8.

167. Cf. text in *ibid.*, p. 248, where Bahá'u'lláh states: "Then We commanded him [Moses] that he should mention unto them [his contemporaries] My [God's] Days; the moment to come (*min ba'da al-hín*) [cf. Qur'an 38:88] when veils shall be burned away through Our power and the Countenance of the Spirit (*ṭal'at al-rúḥ*) shall come in clouds of light [cf. Qur'an 2:210] with the name of 'Alí ['Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb]; as [thou knowest] if thou art of those that are informed." Here Moses' mission is to announce unto the peoples the eschatological advent of the Báb.

168. See text in *ibid.*, p. 244.

169. Text in *Ishráq Khávarí*, *Risála ayyám-i tis'ih*, p. 282.

170. For the text and full provisional translation, see Lambden, "A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh of the Late Baghdad Period."

171. Text (beginning *Shams-i jamál-i illáhi.*) in INBA, Xerox coll., Vol. 32, pp. 31–4 (lines 4, 12 and 25).

172. Text in INBA, Xerox coll., Vol. 36, p. 24. Cf. also the epistles of Bahá'u'lláh in *ibid.*, pp. 87–8 (to the sister of Ḥají Sayyid Muḥammad) and p. 93 (to Sayyid Muḥammad Kázim in aṣ-Ṣád [Isfahán]).

173. The text of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnawí* is printed in AQA, Vol. 3, pp. 160–192.

174. See *Mathnawí*, line 15, in AQA, Vol. 3, p. 161. Cf., line 41 in *ibid.*, p. 164.

175. *Mathnawí*, lines 184–187, in AQA, Vol. 3, p. 178.

176. See *Mathnawí*, lines 197–201, in AQA, Vol. 3, pp. 179–80.

177. For full details, see *Mathnawí*, lines 202–219, in AQA, Vol. 3, pp. 180–182. See also lines 109 (p. 171); 119 (p. 172); 232 (p. 183); 266 (p. 186); and 319 (p. 192).

178. Translation from an inclusion accompanying a letter written

on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Mr. James Norquay, dated February 4, 1981. Extracts from this "Tablet" of Bahá'u'lláh were read at a Bahá'í Convention held in the United States when some locks of Bahá'u'lláh's hair were presented as a gift from Shoghi Effendi (see [American] *Bahá'í News*, No. 121 (Dec. 1938) p. 11 [including an older translation]).

179. From Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Napoleon III (early 'Akká period), partly trans. by Shoghi Effendi, as cited in Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 53.

180. Text in AQA, Vol. 4, p. 25; trans. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 74-5 (No. XXXI; adapted).

181. Text in AQA, Vol. 4, pp. 34, 36.

182. See further, below, p. 130ff.

183. See for details, Bahá'u'lláh, Sura of the Robe, text in AQA, Vol. 4, pp. 36-37.

184. Text in AQA, Vol. 4, p. 50.

185. Text in *ibid.*, p. 56. Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 46, 49, 52, 54.

186. Translated from an unpublished manuscript (photocopy in my possession).

187. Translated from an unpublished manuscript (photocopy in my possession).

188. As fn. 187 above.

189. Text in AQA, Vol. 4, p. 110; trans., Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 281 (No. CXXIX; adapted).

190. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to Fath al-A'zam, text in INBA. Xerox coll., Vol. 83 (pp. 242-3) p. 242.

191. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to Dhabīḥ, in *ibid.* (pp. 247-54) p. 249.

192. In his *Lawḥ-i sarrāj* (c. 1867) Bahá'u'lláh, it is worth noting responds to various questions relating to the position of his half brother Mírzá Yaḥyá Núrí (d. 1912). At one point within this lengthy Persian treatise he quotes *Qayyūm al-Asmá'* 28, and he argues that the "latter turn" (*karrat al-ukhrá*) has come about through his revelation, and underlines the fulfillment of that line in which the Báb anticipates the "death" or "annihilation" of the "dwellers on the Mount" (*tūriyyūn*). This in order to illustrate the fall of Mírzá Yaḥyá, the one time "Blessed Fruit" [of the Bayán] (*thamara tūbá*)

who, he states, had been transformed into a mere "wild gourd" or "colocynth" (*hanzal*). Elevated Bábís became satanic souls and exalted Sinaites lost their lofty status as a result of failing to sustain the impact of the Bahá'í theophany (see MA, Vol. 7, pp. 14–15. Cf., also Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i naṣír* in MAM [pp. 166–202] p. 192).

At a number of points in his English writings, Shoghi Effendi has referred to Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of *Qayyúm al-asmá'* 28. In, for example, his letter to the Bahá'ís of the West dated Feb. 8, 1934, and known as *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, he quotes the prophetic lines from this sura as words of the Báb addressed to Bahá'u'lláh (see p. 10). In another letter dated June 30, 1952, he refers to the birth of the Bahá'í revelation in terms of Bahá'u'lláh's mystical experiences in the Siyáh Chál dungeon in Tehran; mentioning, "The radiance of God's infant light shining within the walls of that pestilential Pit . . ." and adding that this was a "radiance, an infinitesimal glimmer of which [see QA. 28], as the Founder of the Faith [Bahá'u'lláh], Himself, later testified, caused the dwellers of Sinai [*túriyyún*] to swoon away . . ." (See *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950–1957*, p. 34).

193. Text in AQA, Vol. 4, p. 14.

194. Text in *ibid.*, p. 62.

195. Text in *ibid.*, p. 261. Cf., Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i sarráj* in MA, Vol. 7, p. 25.

196. Text in AQA, Vol. 4, pp. 126, 133.

197. Text in MA. Vol. 4, p. 297; also using a variant reading in ms. A00198 held at the Bahá'í World Center. Cf., Bahá'u'lláh/*Khádimu'lláh*, *Lawḥ-i istintáq* in *ibid.*, pp. 223–4.

198. Text in MAM, p. 214.

199. Text in *Ishráq-Khávarí*, *Risála ayyám-i tis'ih*, p. 98.

200. Text in Bahá'u'lláh *Ahwáh Bahá'u'lláh . . . /Kitáb-i haykal* (Lithographed: Bombay 1308 A.H.) p. 210. For examples of the Báb's use of the expression "Crimson Hill" see *Sáhifa bayn al-ḥaramayn* (Browne coll. MS. F7), pp. 53, 66; *Tafsír súrat al-aṣr* (in INBA, Xerox coll., Vol. 69), pp. 62–3. Cf., also Qur'an 73:14.

202. Text in AQA, Vol. 2, p. 35. See also INBA, Xerox coll., vol. 81, pp. 148–152, esp. 151, Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Šádiq.

203. From an untitled epistle of Bahá'u'lláh/*Khádimu'lláh* dated 1293 A.H./1876–7, text in MA, Vol. 7 (pp. 174–255) p. 207. In this

epistle Bahá'u'lláh defends his claim to divinity (*ulúhiyya*). He states at one point that all the Holy Books have it that "His Holiness the Self-Subsisting (*ḥaḍrat-i qayyúm*) [the eschatological manifestation of God] will in that 'Day' give voice to the word 'I am God' . . . " (See pp. 207–8 and cf., below p. 66f.)

204. From Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i ishraqát*; text in *Majmú'iyí az alváḥ-i Jamál-i Aqdas-i Abhá* (henceforth TB), p. 61, trans., Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (henceforth TB [Eng.]), p. 107. Cf., also TB [Eng.], pp. 104, 111, 106.

205. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to 'Andalíb, text in AQA, Vol. 2, p. 26; cf., also p. 28.

206. From Bahá'u'lláh's *Ṭarazát* (II); text in TB, p. 18, trans. TB [Eng.], pp. 35–6.

207. From Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i tajalliyát*; text in TB, p. 27, trans., TB [Eng.], p. 50. See further MA, Vol. 7, p. 139 (Epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to Mullá 'Alí Bajistání).

208. Text in Ishráq Khávarí, *Abwáb al-Malakút*, p. 2f; trans., Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 241.

209. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh written in honor of Mírzá Yahyá Šarráf, son of Karbalá'í Muḥammad Ḥasan Qazvíní; text in Samandar, *Tárikh-i Samandar* (pp. 297–314), p. 298 (MA, Vol. 4, p. 371).

210. Bahá'u'lláh, untitled epistle cited in *Muntakhabátí az áthár-i Ḥaḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh* (henceforth *Muntakhabátí*), p. 174; trans., Shoghi Effendi, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 270 (CXXVI).

211. Idem., cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 66.

212. Idem., from an epistle to Muḥammad Jawád Qazvíní (Ism-i Júdí); text in TB, p. 149; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 242.

213. Idem., text in TB, p. 172, trans. TB [Eng.], p. 265. Cf. also, among many other similar passages in epistles of Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i burhán* (text in TB, pp. 125–133): "Present thyself before Me [Bahá'u'lláh] that thou mayest hear the mysteries which were heard by the Son of 'Imrán [Moses] upon the Sinai of Wisdom (*túr al-'irfán*)" (text in TB, p. 129, trans., Taherzadeh, TB [Eng.], p. 210). Note that here, as elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh uses the genitive expression *túr al-'irfán* (Sinai/Mount of Wisdom [Gnosis]) since '*irfán*

(wisdom/gnosis) rhymes with the name of Moses' father 'Imrán (Amram)—the term *'irfán* also indicating the mystical significance of Sinai/the Mount. See further, for example, Bahá'u'lláh Tablet of Visitation for Imám Husayn (in Ishraq-Khávarí, ed., *Risála Ayyám-i Tis'ih*, pp. 235–244).

214. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh to 'Andalíb (and other Bahá'ís), text in AQA, Vol. 2, p. 23.

215. From an untitled epistle of Bahá'u'lláh, text in TB, p. 154, trans. TB [Eng.], p. 248 (adapted).

216. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh cited in MA, Vol. 8, p. 63. Cf., also *ibid.*, pp. 73, 75.

217. From Bahá'u'lláh's *al-Kitáb al-aqdas*, text in 'Abd ar-Razzáq al-Hasaní, *al-Bábtayn wa'l-Bahá'iyún*, p. 118; trans., Shoghi Effendi, cited in *A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 18.

218. From an untitled epistle of Bahá'u'lláh, text in TB, p. 147; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 239. See also, Bahá'u'lláh's Persian Tablet of Aḥmad (MAM, p. 317 and p. 330), *Lawḥ-i Sarráj* (MA, Vol. 8, p. 25), and *Súrat al-asmá' (Iqtidárát*, p. 90).

219. Text in Bahá'u'lláh, *Alwáh názilih khitáb bih mulúk wa rú'asáy-i arḍ* (see fn. 200 above; henceforth, *Alwáh názilih*) pp. 97–8; trans., Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 18–19.

220. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh, text in *Muntakhabátí*, p. 221; trans. *Gleanings*, p. 343 (CLXIII).

221. From Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Interrogation (*Lawḥ-i istintáq*), text in MA, Vol. 4., pp. 220–60), p. 259. Cf., the epistle of Bahá'u'lláh printed in MA, Vol. 7 (pp. 174–255; dated 1293 A.H./1876–7), p. 190, where the cryptic reference in the *Lawḥ-i sayyáh* (an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh of the late Adrianople period) to the “Vale of Nabíl” (*wád an-nabíl*) is interpreted in terms of the region around 'Akká (N.B. in abjad, Nabíl = 92, as does 'Akká and the name Muḥammad; cf., also Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 184).

222. Text in TB, p. 153; cf. trans. TB [Eng.], p. 246.

223. Text in *Alwáh názilih*, p. 122; trans., Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 33.

224. Text in *ibid.*, p. 131; trans., Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 34.

225. See Bahá'u'lláh, *al-Kitáb al-aqdas*, text in al-Hasaní, *Al-Bábíyún*, p. 118; trans., Shoghi Effendi in *Synopsis and Codification*, p. 18.

226. Bahá'u'lláh, *al-Kitáb al-aqdas*, text in *ibid.*, p. 121; trans., Shoghi Effendi in *Synopsis and Codification*, pp. 22-3.

227. *Idem.*, *al-Kitáb al-aqdas*, text in *ibid.*, p. 121; trans., Shoghi Effendi in *Synopsis and Codification*, p. 23.

228. Text in TB, p. 80 (cf. "Errata" issued by the Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa [n.d.]); trans., TB [Eng.], p. 137.

229. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh cited in "Errata" to TB [Eng.], p. 137.

230. Cf., above, p. 00.

231. Refer, Bahá'u'lláh, *Súrat al-a'ráb*, text in AQA, Vol. 4, p. 215 (cf., also pp. 217, 219); *idem.*, *Súrat al-haykal*, text in *ibid.*, p. 290.

232. Text in TB, p. 33, trans., TB [Eng.], p. 61.

233. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i basít al-ḥaqíqa*, text in MA, Vol. 7, p. 145.

234. From Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát al-firdawsíyya* citing (unique recension), *Lawḥ-i basít al-ḥaqíqa*, text in TB, p. 33, trans., TB [Eng.], p. 61.

235. Refer, Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i basít al-ḥaqíqa*, text in MA, Vol. 7, p. 146.

236. From an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh cited in MA, Vol. 4, p. 95.

237. Text in TB, p. 5; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 11.

238. Text in *ibid.*, p. 6; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 12-13.

239. Text in *ibid.*, p. 146; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 237.

240. Text in *ibid.*, p. 157; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 251.

241. Text in AQA, Vol. 2, p. 176.

242. Text in *ibid.*, p. 2.

243. Text in TB, p. 129; trans. Shoghi Effendi in TB [Eng.], p. 210.

244. Text in Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i mubáraka khitáb bih Shaykh Muḥammad Táqí Isfahání* (henceforth *Lawḥ-i Shaykh*), pp. 100, 101; trans., Shoghi Effendi in Bahá'u'lláh *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (henceforth ESW), p. 86.

245. *Ibid.*, p. 46; trans. ESW, p. 38.

246. *Ibid.*, p. 205; trans. ESW, p. 173.

247. Text in TB, p. 26; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 49.

248. Text in *ibid.*, p. 28; trans. TB [Eng.], p. 52.

249. Text in *ibid.*, p. 29; trans., TB [Eng.], p. 53.

250. *Ibid.*

251. Persian Bayán 8:1, cited TB, p. 29; trans., TB [Eng.], p. 53. Cf. H. Taherzadeh (trans.,) *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 97–98. Bahá'u'lláh quotes and comments upon Persian Bayán 8:1 in terms of his claim to divinity in a fairly large number of his epistles of the late Adrianople and 'Akká periods.

252. I have and shall refer to this untitled epistle of Bahá'u'lláh after its opening words (*jawhar-i ḥamd . . .*). It has not been published, though reference has been made to two mss, one of them photostatically reproduced in INBA. Xerox coll., Vol. 35, pp. 161–8.

253. In addition to the passages from Bahá'u'lláh's *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* which will be summed up or commented upon in the following paragraphs, see further, ESW, pp. 8, 18, 25, 40, 43, 65, 96, 114, 140, 141, 146, 147, 152, 156.

254. Text in *Lawḥ-i Shaykh*, p. 49; trans. ESW, p. 41 (cf. fn. 224 above). Worth noting at this point is the fact that in his *Lawḥ-i milád-i ism-i a'zam* (text cited in MA, Vol. 4, pp. 342–346), Bahá'u'lláh wrote, “. . . He [Bahá'u'lláh] hath been born Who neither begeth nor is begotten.” (See Qur'an 112:3; originally designed to counter Christian incarnationalism [p. 344]). This claim of Bahá'u'lláh is a striking illustration of the Bahá'í doctrine that whatsoever is said about God in the Holy Books revolves around the transcendent “Self” of the Manifestation or Messenger of God; God in his essence being unknowable and absolutely transcendent.

255. *Lawḥ-i Shaykh*, p. 49; trans. ESW, p. 41.

256. *Ibid.*, p. 50; trans. ESW, p. 41.

257. Refer, *ibid.*; pp. 50, 51; trans. ESW, pp. 41–42.

258. *Ibid.*, p. 53; trans. ESW, p. 44.

259. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 131; trans. ESW, p. 111. This tradition is frequently quoted in early *Shaykhí* literature; sometimes as a means of upholding a doctrine of the subordinationalist divinity of the Imáms.

260. *Ibid.*, p. 76; trans. ESW, p. 65.

261. For the text, full provisional translation, and some detailed

notes on the Arabic section of this epistle of Bahá'u'lláh, see Lambden, "The Mysteries of the Call of Moses."

262. See p. 72ff, and fn. 19 above.

263. Without going into details (see my article mentioned in fn. 261 above) the vast periods of time mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh refer to "mystic preeternity" and are symbolic.

264. For the text, see Lambden, "The Mysteries of the Call of Moses," pp. 42-3/47. Cf., p. 62ff.

265. Translated from an unpublished and uncatalogued manuscript of epistles of Bahá'u'lláh (photocopy in my possession).

266. Text in AQA, Vol. 2, p. 28; trans. Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 13 (adapted).

267. Text in *ibid.*, p. 7.

268. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, pp. 17-23 (Letter of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, dated April 19, 20, and 22, 1916).

269. 'Abdu'l-Bahá', cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 38.

270. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 19, 1947, cited in *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 448.

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MUḤAMMAD, ON GABRIEL'S SHOULDERS, (top)
arriving at the door to Paradise which is guarded by the An-
gel Riḍvān. At the bottom of the page, Muḥammad and Gab-
riel gaze at the Sadratu'l-Muntahá (the tree beyond which
there is no passing) from a window in Paradise. From a dis-
persed *Mír'ájnámih* attributed to Aḥmad Músá, c. 1360-70.
Topkapi Saray Museum.

RELATIVISM: A BASIS FOR BAHÁ'Í METAPHYSICS

by Moojan Momen

One of the first scholars to study the Bahá'í Faith, Professor Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University, commented on the fact that there is little in the corpus of works about that faith that can be described as systematic theological or metaphysical writing.¹ This is somewhat surprising for two reasons: first, there are ample passages in the Bahá'í scriptures that could serve as the basis of theology and metaphysics; and second, such Bahá'í teachings as the unity of religions appear to require theological and metaphysical elaboration and underpinning.

The concept of the unity of religions is one of the key doctrines of the Bahá'í Faith. At its most basic level, this doctrine can be expressed as the belief that the different religious systems of the world merely reflect different stages in a single process, the progressive unfoldment of religious "Truth." The observable differences between the various religions are regarded as only a function of the different social conditions that prevailed at the time and place that these religions first appeared.

However, this doctrine is open to some serious questions. It appears to work well enough when applied to the different religions in the Western Judaeo-Christian-Muslim tradition. One can easily conceive (whether one chooses to believe it or not) that a succession of prophets, each claiming to be a rep-

representative of God and each having a particular holy book, holy law, prophecies, and teachings, were in fact successive teachers in a chain sent by a Creator God and intended to take man through progressive stages in his social and spiritual evolution. Indeed, what may make this concept particularly attractive to many converts to the Bahá'í Faith is the manner in which such an idea fits into the general schema of evolutionary thought that predominates in the biological and social sciences. If man has evolved biologically and socially, then it makes sense to conceive of his religious life as having evolved also. Problems arise, however, when the theory is applied to other religious systems, in particular the Eastern systems: Indian, Chinese, and Japanese religion. In these systems there is frequently no concept of a Creator God, of prophethood, or of the revelation of a holy law and divine teachings.

The divergence between different systems of religious thought is very wide, particularly in the area of their ontology and metaphysical construction of the universe. There are religious traditions that point towards a monistic universe, where there is no essential difference between the self of man and the Absolute. This line of thought is pursued mainly in the Eastern religious systems such as the Hinduism of Shankara, some forms of Mahayana Buddhism, and Sufism of the *wahdat al-wujūd* school.² Man's goal in these systems is the cultivation of wisdom, through which man's true nature—his identity with the Absolute—is realised. On the other hand, the Western religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—at least as expressed by their major traditions) have adopted a dualistic view of the universe in which man and the physical world are seen as being completely "other" than the Absolute, which is identified as the creator God. The relationship between man and God is one of worshipper and worshipped. Man's goal is to achieve salvation by orienting his life in accordance with the will of God. Such differences between Western and Eastern religious thought are summarized in Table 1.³

TABLE 1: Differences between Eastern and Western Religious Thought

<i>Western/Dualist</i>	<i>Eastern/Monist</i>
1. A Creator God.	1. A concept of the Absolute as undifferentiated and impersonal.
2. Man is fundamentally different from God, i.e., dualism.	2. Either man is God (Atman is Brahman), i.e., monism; or else, as in Buddhism, no statement can be made about the person who has achieved nirvana.
3. Evil is transgression against the law of God.	3. Evil is due to man's ignorance and self-delusion.
4. The path to salvation depends either upon faith, or upon good works and adherence to the Holy Law, or is simply a matter of the grace of God.	4. The path to salvation is through the acquisition of knowledge or wisdom, i.e., the ability to see things as they really are.
5. The purpose of salvation is to escape from the threat of hell.	5. The purpose of salvation is to escape from the suffering of this world.
6. The goal of salvation is heaven or paradise.	6. The goal of salvation is to achieve the state of blissfulness, nirvana or moksha.
7. The most important ritual elements revolve around worship and sacraments.	7. Most important ritual elements revolve around meditation and achievement of altered states of consciousness.
8. Progressive "historical" time with a beginning and an end centered on a particular apocalyptic event.	8. Cyclical time in a world with no beginning or end.

Bahá'u'lláh's Statements of a Dualist Nature. Initially, it would appear that Bahá'í metaphysics and ontology belong firmly in the Western, dualist camp. Bahá'u'lláh himself was born in a Muslim society, spent all of his life in Muslim countries, and all of his followers were converts from one or another dualist tradition. Even during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (who wrote a great deal on metaphysical questions), although the Bahá'í Faith had spread extensively, this had been mostly to places where the religious system was Western and dualist. There were very few Bahá'í converts from a monistic background. By the time of Shoghi Effendi, there had grown up Bahá'í communities in the Eastern monist world, but he wrote little on metaphysical themes. Thus, most of the material that we have in the Bahá'í scriptures is addressed to persons of a Western dualist background.

There is, moreover, no lack of examples of statements by Bahá'u'lláh that indicate a dualist metaphysics:

Immeasurably exalted is He above the strivings of the human mind to grasp His Essence, or of human tongue to describe His mystery. No tie of direct intercourse can ever bind Him to the things He hath created, nor can the most abstruse and most remote allusions of His creatures do justice to His being.⁴

And also:

From time immemorial He hath been veiled in the ineffable sanctity of His exalted Self, and will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence. Every attempt to attain to an understanding of His inaccessible Reality hath ended in complete bewilderment, and every effort to approach His exalted Self and envisage His Essence hath resulted in hopelessness and failure.⁵

However, we must be careful about arriving at the conclusion that Bahá'u'lláh endorsed a dualist view of the world. Much of Bahá'u'lláh's writings were written in response to

specific questions from his followers and others. In answering these, it is clear that Bahá'u'lláh used the concepts and ideas current at the time and known to his questioner. However, Bahá'u'lláh was not in this situation acting as a philosopher and giving authority and support to these concepts and ideas. Rather his primary purpose was to give spiritual guidance, utilising such concepts as would be most intelligible to his questioners in order to lay open a spiritual truth. This point has been developed elsewhere by Juan Cole in relation to Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i ḥikmat* (The Tablet of Wisdom⁶). And, therefore, when we find Bahá'u'lláh using classical metaphysics from the Islamic and Western traditions, it must be borne in mind that perhaps he was merely expressing himself in this manner because this was the metaphysical system to which his questioner was accustomed.

A Cosmology Used by Bahá'u'lláh. Although, as indicated above, there are many statements of Bahá'u'lláh that indicate a dualist metaphysics, the schema of cosmology he uses most often in his writings is not so clearly dualist. This cosmology is his adaptation of the one used by many philosophers and mystics in the Islamic world. It is based on the Neo-Platonic cosmology of such philosophers as Plotinus, and it was also used extensively in Christian and Jewish philosophy and mysticism. Its Islamic development reached an apex in the writings of Avicenna during the eleventh century. Later, it was taken over by the philosopher-mystics of the School of Isfahan who expounded the Divine Philosophy (*ḥikmat-i iláhi*) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was also used extensively by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í, the founder of the Shaykhí movement, and by the Báb. Its importance to the present paper lies in the fact that it was used both by philosophers who were strongly attached to a dualist metaphysics, such as Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í, and by those who primarily followed a monist vision, such Ibn al-'Arabí.

A typical example of the type of schemata used by Bahá'u'lláh appears in the *Lawḥ-i kullu't-ṭa'ám* (Tablet of "All Food"). In commentary upon the meaning of the phrase "all food",⁷ Bahá'u'lláh states that there are diverse levels of meaning for it. He sets these levels of meaning in five of the cosmological realms described by Muslim writers:

A) *háhút*: This is the realm of the unknowable Essence of God, the realm of "He" (*huwa*); the paradise of absolute oneness (*aḥadiyya*). In this realm, God is known by such names as the "Hidden Mystery" and the "Absolute Unknown." This is God as the unmanifested Essence. In this station, all of the names and attributes of God are undifferentiated and inseparable from the Essence; 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens this to a dot of ink on paper within which are hidden and enclosed all letters and words in potential form, although no trace can be seen of these, nor are they in any way differentiated from the dot in this state of potentiality.⁸ This realm is so exalted that it is forever beyond all of the rest of creation; even the prophets of God have no access to this station. Bahá'u'lláh describes it thus:

To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery . . . No tie of direct intercourse can possibly bind Him to His creatures. He standeth exalted beyond and above all separation and union, all proximity and remoteness . . .

Gracious God! How could there be conceived any existing relationship or possible connection between His Word and they that are created of it? . . . All the Prophets of God and their chosen Ones, all the divines, the sages, and the wise of every

generation, unanimously recognize their inability to attain unto the comprehension of that Quintessence of all truth, and confess their incapacity to grasp Him, Who is the inmost Reality of all things . . . ⁹

The action of love within the Divine Essence results in the manifesting of the Absolute to itself. In this stage, the names and attributes of God became defined within the divine consciousness as the archetypal forms and essences of all created beings. However, since this is an event which takes place only within the divine consciousness, they are said to subsist within the Absolute and cannot yet be said to have achieved existence.¹⁰ Therefore this stage is regarded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as part of the Hidden Mystery.¹¹

B) *láhút*: This is the realm in which the potentialities hidden within the Essence of God are first actualized and revealed, but still within the Godhead; the realm of "He is He and there is none but He." In this realm, the divine names and attributes, potential and concealed in the realm of *há-hút*, achieve existence. This realm is the first emanation from God, the first revelation of the Essence of God. In Bahá'í terminology, it has variously been named the Heavenly Court, or the All-Glorious Horizon; and the manifestation of God in this station is called the Lord of Lords, the Tongue of Grandeur, the Most Exalted Pen, the Primal Will, the First Intelligence. In other religious dispensations it has been identified as Jehovah, the Speaker on Sinai, the *Logos* or Word of God, and the *Nous* or Divine Intellect.

C) *jabarút*: This is the realm of the revealed God acting within Creation; the realm of "Thou art He Himself and He is Thou Thyself". This realm is called the paradise of conditioned oneness (*wáḥidiyya*), the all-highest Paradise. This is the realm of God's actions and decrees. The manifestations of God in this realm, the agents of His Will, have in previous religious dispensations (and occasionally in the

writings of Bahá'u'lláh) been considered to be the archangels, to each of whom is delegated the execution of one aspect of the decrees of God: for example, 'Izrá'íl, the Angel of Death, and Isráfíl, the seraph who will sound the trumpet on the Day of Judgement.¹²

D) *malakút*: This is the angelic realm, the realm of those "whom neither business nor commerce distract them from the remembrance of God".¹³ The manifestations of God in this realm have in previous dispensations been referred to as angels, while in Bahá'í writings they are called the "Concourse on High." In Bahá'í terminology, the realm itself is called the all-glorious (*abhá*) Paradise. Concerning this realm, Bahá'u'lláh has written in the *Lawh-i varqá*:

The meaning of the Kingdom (*malakút*) in its primary sense and degree is the scene of His transcendent glory.¹⁴ In another sense it is the world of similitudes (*'álam-i-mithál*)¹⁵ which existeth between the Dominion on high (*jabarút*) and this mortal realm (*násút*); whatever is in the heavens or on the earth hath its counterpart in that world. Whilst a thing remaineth hidden and concealed within the power of utterance it is said to be of the Dominion (*jabarút*), and this is the first stage of its substantiation (*taqyíd*). Whenever it becometh manifest it is said to be of the Kingdom (*malakút*). The power and potency it deriveth from the first stage, it bestoweth upon whatever lieth below.¹⁶

E) *násút*: This is the physical world. This world may be subdivided into the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms. But, even at this level, each created thing is capable of manifesting some aspects of God.¹⁷

God is of course as indicated above manifested in all of these realms except the first, which is the unmanifested Essence. But, in Bahá'í terminology, the phrase "Manifestation [with a capital M] of God" refers to those major prophets who have appeared from time to time in human history and have

been perfect manifestations of all of the names and attributes of God. These Manifestations of God exist at all of these various levels except the first. Seen in their aspect of *láhu't*, they are the Word of God, the ones "through whom the letters B and E (Be!, that is, *káf* and *nún*, *kun*) have been joined." Indeed, one of the most interesting and original of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is his assertion that, since the Essence of God is hidden, unmanifested, and unknowable, in fact, all statements made about actions of God in former scriptures concern this level, and in fact, relate to the Manifestation of God—not to God's Essence.¹⁸ It is in this station that Bahá'u'lláh states that he was the speaker on Sinai and calls himself the Ancient (or Preexistent) Beauty, the Pen of the Most High, the Lord of Lords. Some of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh are set in the form of a dialogue between this higher aspect of the Manifestation and his lower aspect. In these circumstances, the higher aspect is imaged as the Maid of Heaven.

In their aspect of *jabarút*, the Manifestations of God are seen in their transhistorical function—each of them acts as spiritual guide and saviour to the world of creation:

These Manifestations have each a two-fold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attributes, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: "No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers." (Qur'an 2:285) For they, one and all, summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of prophethood, and are honoured with the mantle of glory . . . These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the Day Springs of His Revelation. . . .¹⁹

Seen in their aspect of *malakút*—which is their historical role within the world, however, each has a specific function and a particular teaching:

The other station is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation, and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, and is characterised by a special attribute, fulfills a definite mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation . . . ²⁰

The physical bodies of the Manifestations of God exist of course in the realm of *násút*.

Man exists on the interface between the realms of *násút* and *malakút*. If he chooses, he can live entirely in the world of *násút*, in which case he behaves like an animal. He is in fact lower than the animals in that he has failed to achieve his full station.²¹ His entire life is centered on material possessions and worldly ambition. But if he chooses, he can detach himself from the physical world and live in the realm of *malakút*. This is the realm which is man's true plane of existence. This is the plane on which man's full potential (in manifesting the names and attributes of God) is realized. Man then becomes the equivalent of the angels that inhabit this realm. According to Bahá'u'lláh:

By "angels" is meant those, who, reinforced by the power of the spirit, have consumed, with the fire of the love of God, all human traits and limitations, and have clothed themselves with the attributes of the most exalted Beings and of the Cherubim.²²

Similarly 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

Likewise angels are blessed beings who have been released from the chains of self and the desires of the flesh, and anchored their hearts to the heavenly realms of the Lord.²³

Although this particular schema of five realms is referred to in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, other schemata are also used. One breaks up the realms of God into two:

God and His Creation; another into three: God, the Manifestation of God and Man; and others that break up the five realms above described into smaller units: dividing the realm of *násút* into the mineral, vegetable, and animal worlds; etc.

Bahá'u'lláh's Statements of a Monist Nature. As was mentioned previously, this cosmological schema can and has been used in both monist and dualist metaphysical discourse. Examples of the manner in which this schema is used in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh from a dualist viewpoint have been given above. But it is also clear that it was not Bahá'u'lláh's intention to give this schema any absolute authority, as though it were exhaustive of reality. For example, he states: "Know thou of a truth that the worlds of God are countless in number, and infinite in range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God . . ." ²⁴

Thus the worlds of God, which have been described above as being five, can also be seen as being countless—with an infinite number of gradations. Nor is this far from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion that those whose vision is averted from the world of plurality can enter the ocean of oneness where all gradations and limitations disappear.²⁵ In this we can discern a more monist position. However, there are statements of Bahá'u'lláh which are very clearly monist:

Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me [God] standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.²⁶

Thus when the wayfarer gazeth only upon the place of appearance—that is, when he seeth only the many-colored globes—he beholdeth yellow and red and white . . . And some do gaze upno the effulgence of the light; and some have drunk the wine of oneness and these see nothing but the sun itself.²⁷

Yea, all he hath, from heart to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend . . . This is the plane whereon the vestiges of all things are destroyed in the traveler, and on the

horizon of eternity the Divine Face riseth out of darkness, and the meaning of "All on the earth shall pass away, but the Face of thy Lord . . ." (Qur'an 55:27) is made manifest.²⁸

Moreover, the concept that only God has an absolute existence and that man's existence is contingent and relative, a concept that is found in several places in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh,²⁹ is in essence a monist position.

Relativism as a Reconciliation of the Dichotomy. How then does Bahá'u'lláh reconcile these two seemingly contradictory stances? Let us first clarify the nature of the problem. The two positions have been summarised by Parry³⁰ as different answers to the question: "Are there from the Bahá'í perspective any fundamental differences in reality?"

To this question, the two positions would make the following responses with respect to two important states of affairs:

A) There is a fundamental difference between the human soul and the Absolute (the dualist position);

B) There is no fundamental difference between the human soul and the Absolute (the monist position).

Parry has put forward two possible ways of explaining the presence together in the Bahá'í writings of statements that tend towards both monism and dualism:

1) It is possible to postulate that one of these positions represents a "higher truth." As occurs in Mahayana Buddhism and some Hindu systems, the monistic viewpoint is regarded as the "higher truth" which the "true knowers" can see, while the dualist view is recognized as a valuable means of assuring the morality of the masses, a "lower truth."

2) It is possible to assume (and this is the more likely of the two alternatives) that the Bahá'í Faith is dualistic and that those expressions of monism that occur are a reference to what Parry

names an ethical monism—"an annihilation of one's egotistical desires and a merging of one's will with God"—rather than an ontological monism.

I would like to propose a third alternative but before doing so, a digression regarding the nature of logic is necessary. The laws of Aristotelian logic apply (i.e., are validated by experience) in the day-to-day world in which we live, and so it has generally been assumed that they have a universal applicability. Indeed, they are sometimes called the Laws of Thought, in that they are regarded as ontologically real (i.e., describing the ultimate nature of reality) and cognitively necessary (i.e., no coherent thought is possible without them). We will look at some of the basic assumptions that underlie Aristotelian logic. These are sometimes referred to as the Newtonian world view, since it was Newton who first explicitly stated most of them:

- a) That what we observe and experience in the outer world has some reality and existence independent of our observing and experiencing it,
- b) That time is a universal phenomenon; i.e., that the passing of time is the same for all people under all circumstances,
- c) That space is a universally uniform phenomenon,
- d) That, although matter can be broken down and built up, in any process matter is conserved (i.e., the sum total of mass at the beginning equals the sum total at the end). This is usually associated with a concept of an indestructible, irreducible, prime matter from which all else is built up,
- e) That if proposition A is the opposite of proposition B, and one of these is shown to be true, then the other must necessarily be false.

All of these are what one might call "common-sense" propositions that are continuously verified by our every-day experiences and, therefore, one might suppose, hardly worth stating.

However, these basic assumptions are, in fact, only approximations that happen to hold at our normal level of experience, but are falsified when we go beyond our "every-day world." Modern physics has shown that all five of the above "basic assumptions," although they appear correct in traditional Newtonian physics dealing with objects of every-day size, do not in fact hold (or have to be substantially modified) if one considers phenomena that are occurring at either of the extremes of largeness or smallness (i.e., when dealing with stars and other massive astronomic bodies or with atomic and, in particular, subatomic particles). At these levels, modern physics based on relativity and quantum theory has found that:

a) We can make no absolute statements about phenomena. The phenomena that we are observing are in fact affected by our observing them. Therefore, our observations are not objective and independent but relative. In other words, we cannot know anything in absolute terms. In particular, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle sets limits to our knowledge: the more we know about the position of a particle, the less we can know about its momentum. This is because our methods of measuring relate to only one of these factors, leaving the other uncertain. In general then, any statements that we make are purely relative to our method of observing and measuring this world.

b) Time is not universal, its rate of passing is relative to the observer.

c) Space is not uniform but is in fact curved by mass. Indeed, space-time is one interconnected entity.

d) Mass is not in fact conserved in subatomic reactions; it can be created and disappear with gains and losses of appropriate amounts of energy.

e) With regard to the fourth proposition, mass and electromagnetic wave energy were considered, in traditional physics, to be two fundamentally different phenomena. If X is a body with a mass, this in traditional physics excluded the possibility that it could be an electromagnetic wave. It is now considered, however, that subatomic particles can be considered as both electromag-

netic waves and as particles with mass—something that it is not even possible to conceive of intellectually, since our concepts are naturally based on our every-day experiences. The idea of something being simultaneously both a physical body and an electromagnetic wave is outside of our every-day experience.

Indeed, at the level of subatomic events, causality itself, one of the fundamental planks of the Newtonian world-view becomes meaningless. At this level, we can no longer speak of individual events and their causes. All we can do is to measure groups of events and assign probabilities to them. Thus we find the Law of Causality being replaced by the Law of Probability.

And so if the laws of Aristotelian logic do not apply when one goes outside of the world of every-day experience in terms of physical phenomena, one may also consider whether they apply in other areas which are also “outside” of the every-day physical world. For centuries now, mystics have been saying that the laws of Aristotelian logic do not apply to their experiences either. They consider, for example, that time passes at a different rates—or even stops—in the mystical state. They state that mass and space can alter their usual properties during these mystical experiences.³¹ Thus, these mystical experiences appear to confirm that much of what we consider universal and absolute is in fact relative.

Relativism as a Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics. In the area of metaphysics, which is also “outside” the every-day physical world, Bahá'u'lláh appears to put forward very much this same relativistic view. An absolute knowledge of the metaphysical structure of the cosmos is, Bahá'u'lláh states, impossible for man to achieve because of the finite nature of man's mind:

So perfect and comprehensive is His creation that no mind or heart, however keen or pure, can ever grasp the nature of the

most insignificant of His creatues; much less fathom the mystery of Him Who is the Day Star of Truth, Who is the invisible and unknowable Essence. The conceptions of the devoutest of mystics,, the attainments of the most accomplished amongst men, the highest praise which human tongue or pen can render *are all the product of man's finite mind and are conditioned by its limitations . . .*³²

Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality [the rational faculty], this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt *fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue*. Having recognised *thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee*, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development.³³

Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art Thou above the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy mystery, to describe Thy glory, or even to hint at the nature of Thine Essence. For whatever such strivings may accomplish, *they can never hope to transcend the limitations imposed upon Thy creatures . . .*

Far, far from Thy glory be what mortal man can affirm of Thee, or attribute to Thee, or the praise with which he can glorify Thee! Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves . . .³⁴

Therefore, no absolute knowledge of the cosmos being available to man, all descriptions, all schemata, all attempts to portray the metaphysical basis of the universe, are necessarily

limited by the viewpoint of the particular person making them. They are limited, relative truths only:

Thy verses of description are, while true, but a children's truth.³⁵

All that the sages and mystics have said or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, *the limitations to which man's finite mind hath been strictly subjected*. To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart *can never transcend that which is the creature of their own thoughts*. The meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either human pen or tongue, are but *a reflection of that which hath been created within themselves*. . . .³⁶

It is clear to thy eminence that all the variations which the wayfarer in the stages of his journey beholdeth in the realms of being, *proceed from his own vision*. We shall give an example of this, that its meaning may become fully clear: consider the visible sun; although it shineth with one radiance upon all things, and at the behest of the King of Manifestation bestoweth light on all creation, yet in each place it becometh manifest and sheddeth its bounty according to the potentialities of that place. For instance, in a mirror it reflecteth its own disc and shape, and this is due to the sensitivity of the mirror; in a crystal it maketh fire to appear, and in other things it showeth only the effect of its shining, but not its full disc . . .

In sum, the differences in objects have now been made plain. Thus when the wayfarer gazeth only upon the place of appearance—that is, when he seeth only the many-colored globes—he beholdeth yellow and red and white; . . . and some have drunk of the wine of oneness and these see nothing but the sun itself. . . .³⁷

In his commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a Hidden Treasure . . . ”³⁸, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appears to be stating that a situation of what might be called metaphysical relativism applies with regard to the Bahá'í view of ontology. In the third section of this treatise,³⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes about a fundamental

issue which may be regarded as a reflection of the dualism/monism dichotomy. The specific issue concerns Knowledge as one of the eternal, unchanging attributes of the Absolute. The essences (archetypal forms) of created things are, presumably, the objects of that Knowledge and must therefore also be eternal (since there cannot be knowledge without an object of that knowledge). Since the Knowledge of God is eternal, the question is whether these essences of created things (as the objects of that Knowledge) are external to and coeternal with the Absolute, or whether they are internal and originated within the Essence of the Absolute. Since these archetypal forms are the reality and essence of created things, this question becomes equivalent to asking whether the essence and reality of man is separate from the Absolute, or internal and originated within the Essence of the Absolute, respectively. In the first case, man is fundamentally different from the Absolute (the dualist position); in the second case, man is in essence nothing but an emanation or manifestation of the Absolute (the monist position). 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in this section of the treatise summarizes the traditional proofs advanced by the proponents of these two positions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's resolution of the dichotomy is most interesting. Having in the first section of the treatise already established that any knowledge of the reality or essence of the Absolute is impossible for man to achieve, 'Abdu'l-Bahá then states that, in his opinion, the proofs and evidences given for both of these positions are equally correct. These two apparently opposing groups of philosopher-mystics are, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts, viewing the same object from different viewpoints and so are arriving at different and even contradictory conclusions. The differences in the viewpoints arise from differences in the fundamental natures (i.e., the attributes predominant within the soul/psyche complex) of the observers. The fundamental nature of one individual inclines him to see Reality in a dualist mode, while another will see Reality in a monist mode.⁴⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá's position thus corresponds with that of

Relativity Theory which concludes that what is observed (i.e., the result of the process of observation) only has a reality relative to the observer.

Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that no matter how hard an individual strives in his efforts to gain knowledge of the Absolute, the only ultimate success is to achieve a better knowledge of his own self. 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens this state of affairs to a compass: no matter how far the compass travels, it is only going around the point at its center and, similarly, however much men may strive and achieve within the realms of spiritual knowledge, ultimately they are only achieving a better and greater knowledge of themselves (or of the Absolute manifested within themselves), not of any exterior Absolute.⁴¹

To return to the fundamental question posed earlier: "Are there from the Bahá'í perspective any fundamental differences in reality?"

Let us consider the statements:

- A) There is a fundamental difference between the human soul and the Absolute (the dualist position);
- B) There is no fundamental difference between the human soul and the Absolute (the monist position).

According to the Aristotelian Law of the Excluded Middle, since these are mutually contradictory statements, either one or the other can be true, but they cannot both be true. What 'Abdu'l-Bahá appears to be saying is that no absolute answer can be given to this question. Since it is human beings who answer the question, the only answers that can be arrived at are by definition "colored" by the viewpoint of the answerer.

It is as though each time we, as human beings, point a finger and say: "That is the Absolute" (i.e., God or Reality or the cosmological order), the finger turns around and points back at us and says: "No! That is only you" (i.e., the product of a particular soul/psyche complex in a particular cultural environment). And so these two statements (A and B above) are

both equally correct from their relative viewpoints, even though they appear to be contradictory. The contradiction only arises because we are incapable of intellectually conceiving of what it means for both positions to be correct. (We are just as intellectually incapable, as mentioned above, of conceiving of something as simultaneously both a body and an electromagnetic wave.) The fact that we are incapable of conceiving it is only an indication of its being outside of our every-day experience, rather than an indication of its being incorrect. This "understanding" of man's relationships with the Absolute is thus essentially a "nonunderstanding." It can be intuited, perhaps, but not known through any pattern of logical thought. This is in accordance with the Bahá'í position that God is "unknowable."

As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has commented:

All the people have formed a god in the world of thought, and that form of their imagination they worship . . .

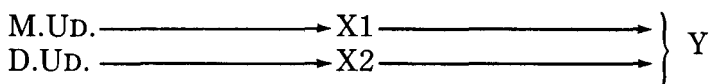
Therefore consider: All the sects and people worship their own thought; they create a god in their own minds and acknowledge him to be the creator of all things, when that form is a superstition—thus people adore and worship imagination.

That Essence of the Divine Entity and the Unseen of the unseen is holy above imagination and is beyond thought. Consciousness doth not reach It . . . This much is known: It exists and Its existence is certain and proven—but the condition is unknown.⁴²

Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh has written:

Ye bow the knee before your vain imaginings and call it truth.⁴³

To present this diagrammatically, it would be useful at this stage to take the diagram used by Parry:



where M.UD. = Monist Universe of Discourse

D.UD. = Dualist Universe of Discourse

X = The state of affairs depicted by (i.e., the referent of) each Universe of Discourse

Y = Ultimate Reality

What 'Abdu'l-Bahá appears to be saying is that Y, Ultimate Reality, cannot be directly known or experienced by human beings. It can only be approached through a particular UD and each particular UD shows Y from a different viewpoint (X). Thus, each X inherently tends to confirm its original UD, which is only another way of restating the conclusion of relativity theory that what is observed has no independent reality, but is dependent on the observer and his methods/viewpoint.

Thus it would appear that the following is a better representation of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá is intending:



where the fact that the arrows of M.UD. and D.UD. are pointing in opposite directions is an indication of their contradictory conclusions.

The only problem with this diagram is that it tends to imply that there is only a short distance between X and Y. A more accurate representation would be one where the circle in the diagram is made the base of a cone, the apex of which (Y) is situated at an infinite distance above the plane of the paper. Indeed if we are going to take a "strong" position on relativity, then we must say that a signifier no longer points to a fixed thing signified (i.e., some underlying transcendental or absolute essence) but only to another signifier which in turn points to another signifier and so forth *ad infinitum*. Significance, therefore, is built up from this pattern or network of relationships rather than being an attempt to uncover some underlying absolute "essence." Thus, even the second dia-

gram above no longer holds, for the arrows M.UD. — X1 and D.UD. — X2 should really point to a field of interrelated arrows. And indeed the arrows should point back to themselves (in accordance with the view expressed above that all we ultimately achieve is a better understanding of ourselves or of the Absolute manifested within us). The Ultimate Reality (Y) disappears from the diagram completely since there is no access to it.

Nor is this relativism to be found only in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the *Seven Valleys*, Bahá'u'lláh states that 'the wayfarer leaveth behind him the stages of 'oneness of Being and Manifestation' and reacheth a oneness that is sanctified above these two stations."⁴⁴ In another work, he clearly defines "oneness of Being" as monism and "oneness of Manifestation" as dualism and states that these are two stations (*maqám*, perhaps best translated in this connection as *viewpoints*) within belief in the Divine Unity (*tawhíd*).⁴⁵ Dealing with a related issue, that of whether the world of creation is coeternal with God or created in time (an issue which is a direct parallel to the issue of God's knowledge dealt with by 'Abdu'l-Bahá above; see also, Table 1, no. 8), Bahá'u'lláh gives much the same answer in the *Lawh-i hikmat*:

As regards thine assertions about the beginning of creation, this is a matter on which conceptions vary by reason of the divergences in men's thought and opinions. Wert thou to assert that it hath ever existed and shall continue to exist, it would be true; or wert thou to affirm the same concept as is mentioned in the sacred Scriptures [that the creation was created in time], no doubt would there be about it.⁴⁶

In this passage the two words that are translated "thought and opinions" are *al-af'ida*, which means man's heart or organ for understanding inner meaning, and *al-anzár*, which could be translated as points of view. Shoghi Effendi, moreover,

widens the scope of this relativism when he states: "The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh . . . is that religious truth is not absolute but relative" and that the teachings of the different world religions are "facets of one truth."⁴⁷

This highly interesting concept, which seems to be the basis of Bahá'í metaphysics, may be summarised by stating that we are unable to make any absolute statements about Reality or the structure of being (i.e., ontology) because any knowledge or understanding that we have of these is relative. That relativism is grounded in the very structure of our thinking. This may be termed a cognitive or epistemic relativism.

This Bahá'í position would appear to be an original formulation. Although it may be that this view is implicit within some of the Islamic philosophers and within Hinduism and Buddhism, in fact, it has never been explicitly stated. Previous writers on this theme have ultimately come down on one side or another of the two positions (dualism and monism), or have resorted to a "higher truth/lower truth" resolution of the problem. Many monist writers may appear to be advocating relativism, but in fact this is merely a facet of their "higher truth/lower truth" position.

The concept of the "God created in Faiths" of Ibn al-'Arabí⁴⁸ would certainly appear to be very close to the Bahá'í position. However, Ibn al-'Arabí himself, and certainly those that followed his school in later years, tended towards a "higher truth/lower truth" resolution of the dichotomy. Perhaps the closest to this position are some Buddhist schools and in particular the Madhyamika. However, while the Madhyamika school holds to a cognitive relativism, it differs from the Bahá'í position in that it considers that Absolute Truth (*paramartha satya*) can be experienced by those who attain to wisdom.⁴⁹

There is also some similarity between this Bahá'í formulation and the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the mystics whereby two apparently opposite statements are seen to be in fact polar aspects of the truth, rather than contradictory. Among

contemporary writers, John Hick would appear to hold a position very similar to the Bahá'í position. He uses the Kantian concepts of *Noumenon*, as the eternal, unchanging Absolute in itself, and *Phenomena* as the plurality of different divine forms seen in the world. He proposes what he calls a Copernican Revolution, whereby instead of each religion considering itself the center of the spiritual world, God or the Absolute is put at the center of the spiritual universe and all religious faiths are thus seen as circling around this center, and each expressing their religious experience from a certain cultural bias.⁵⁰

The idea that these two apparently contradictory metaphysical positions (dualism and monism) are the result of different soul/psyche constitutions in individuals would appear to be supported historically by the appearance, within a completely dualistic environment, of individuals such as Meister Eckhart in Christianity, the author of the *Zohar* in Judaism, and Ibn al-'Arabi in Islam. Although having no knowledge of the religious traditions of the East, they nevertheless came by themselves to monist conclusions. And conversely, within the predominantly monist environment of the East, there arose traditions that tended towards dualism such as the *bhakti* tradition in Hinduism and the Vatsiputriya movement in Buddhism. (Indeed, most folk religion in Buddhist countries is markedly dualist in nature.) It would appear that every religion that is going to be truly universal must evolve both of these types of religious expression in order to satisfy the religious aspirations of all types of people. 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to be referring to this phenomenon and also laying the basis of the Bahá'í reconciliation of fundamental differences of religious doctrine and outlook when he states: "The differences among the religions of the world are due to the varying types of minds."⁵¹

Some Consequences of Metaphysical Relativism: This concept of metaphysical or cognitive relativism helps the Bahá'í Faith

escape a problem that is troublesome for other religions. Relativism has in one form or another thoroughly permeated the thinking of the modern world. It has affected thinking in almost every field.⁵² Only religion today stands apart as being unaffected by relativistic thought. It can indeed be said that relativism has in the twentieth century replaced evolutionary theory as the major intellectual movement seen to be challenging the claims of religion.

The death of God is but a metaphor for man's loss of belief in an absolute, transcendent source of significance for the phenomena of his immediate reality and for the self.⁵³

Religion has attempted to stand out like a Canute, believing in its possession of an absolute truth, against the incoming tide of relativistic thought in all other spheres of intellectual life. Individual religions continue to believe that their doctrines represent an absolute truth. In Christianity, this absolute truth is represented by the person of Christ.⁵⁴ In Islam, the same position is occupied by the Qur'an, which is considered the final, complete revelation of the Word of God, the absolute truth. In Buddhism, similarly there is an Absolute Nirvana. It is the unconditioned, beyond all becoming and cessation; the sole final salvation.

There is a similar conflict between religion and the scientific concept that all things evolve and develop in time. Christianity and Islam have similar concepts of time. Although both Christ and the Qur'an, as the Word of God, have existed for all time in the divine world, time in the physical world revolves around one focal revelatory event—the appearance of Christ or the revelation of the Qur'an. Time has, in a sense, stood still since then. For everything stands in relationship to the event itself, and it makes no difference whether one lives one hundred years or one thousand years afterwards; everything relates back to that central event. The concept of time in Buddhism is that of a continuous chain of events (cause and

effect) that has been from eternity past and will continue to eternity in the future. But once again, it really makes no difference where one individual happens to live in this chain, because man's condition (in terms of the laws of Karma) is unchanging.

Thus religions, whether Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism (or indeed the other religions also), hold that their central religious truth as well as their path to salvation are Absolute Truth (in the sense that they are unconditioned and unchanging) and that knowledge of this Absolute Truth is attainable and is outside of considerations of time and evolution. Thus these religious traditions have put themselves outside the major intellectual trend of the twentieth century, relativism. Indeed, much of the loss of belief in religion in the modern world can perhaps be indirectly traced to this conceptual isolation.

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, however, accept the relativist concept that man can have no access to absolute truth in the field of religion as in other fields. However this does not mean that "God is dead," or ceases to act within the world, as the writings of some of those advocating relativism would assert.⁵⁵ For Bahá'u'lláh claims that God acts in the world through the major prophets (whom he calls "Manifestations of God") and these act fully within the dictates of relativism. Their teachings and guidance are not absolute and for all time, but rather limited both in terms of their geographical and temporal scope. Religious truth, as taught by these major prophets is subject, like all other branches of human knowledge, to a decline in its relevance. It is, moreover, relative to the culture in which it finds itself. As man's social and intellectual outlook changes from age to age and from culture to culture, so too do the teachings of successive prophets.

What then are the consequences of relativism within the Bahá'í system? First, it may be said that if, as we have seen is the consequence of relativism, all metaphysical viewpoints and dogmatic positions are ultimately relative and reflect only the soul/psyche composition of the individual rather than any

Absolute Truth, there must be a change of emphasis in what is considered important. In most religions, metaphysics—the structure of the spiritual world—is considered of primary importance. Even in Buddhism, where the Buddha himself played down the importance of metaphysics—and even went so far as to refuse to answer metaphysical questions—a vast amount of effort by Buddhist scholars through the ages has gone into defining and refining their metaphysics.⁵⁶ However, if it is considered that the truth of all metaphysical systems is only a provisional, partial, relative truth, the importance of metaphysics lessens considerably. Interest is no longer primarily in the structures of metaphysics, but rather in relationships. That is to say that the focus of interest is no longer so much in what the Absolute is, but in what the individual's relationship with the Absolute should be, and what the consequences of that relationship are. The emphasis has shifted from structures to processes and relationships.⁵⁷ And therefore ethics comes to the forefront of consideration.⁵⁸

Thus the relative lack of Bahá'í literature on metaphysics that we noted at the beginning of this paper is not surprising. As we might expect, published Bahá'í literature concerns itself primarily with social and personal ethics.⁵⁹ Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh's injunction: "Let deeds, not words, be your adorning"⁶⁰ can, perhaps, in relation to the subject here under discussion, be paraphrased thus: "As long as your actions and intentions are in accordance with divine ethics (for which there are universal standards) then it does not matter what your metaphysics are since these will, in any case, be valid only for a particular individual with a particular psychological make-up and cultural background."

NOTES

I am very grateful to Robert Parry who has seen and commented on the various preliminary drafts of this paper and who has thus contributed greatly to its development. I am also grateful to

Steven Scholl for his comments on an earlier draft of part of this paper.

1. Foreword to M. Phelps, *Abbas Effendi*, p. xxii.
2. I have here avoided the question of whether it is more correct to call some of these systems non-dualism rather than monism, since this point makes no difference to the rest of the argument of this paper. I have used the term monism throughout.
3. It will be clear to the reader that I have here taken the two terms monism and dualism to signify the differences between the Western and Eastern religious outlook. I am therefore using them in a somewhat wider context than the strict meaning of the two words.
4. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, No. CXLVIII, p. 204/317/318.
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, No. XXVI, pp. 48-9/62/63.
6. Cole, "Problems of Chronology", pp. 38-9.
7. This phrase is from the Qur'an: "All food was made lawful to the Children of Israel." (Qur'an 3:87) The text of this tablet can be found in *Ishráq-Khávarí, Má'iday-i Ásmání*, vol. 4, pp. 265-276; a provisional translation can be found in Stephen Lambden, "The Tablet of All Food".
8. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*Sharḥ-i Kuntu Kanzan Makḥfiyan*" (hereinafter referred to as "*Sharḥ*"), pp. 7-8. A provisional translation by the present author appears in Momen, "Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary."
9. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 73-4/63-4/98-9.
10. "They have not inhaled the breezes of existence" states 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "*Sharḥ*," p. 10, quoting Ibn al-'Arabí, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p. 76; trans., p. 85.
11. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*Sharḥ*," p. 10.
12. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a recorded talk, stated that these entities are in fact images rather than having an actual independent existence. Goodall and Cooper, *Daily Lessons received at 'Akká*, pp. 43-44.
13. Qur'an 24:37.
14. Bahá'u'lláh explains elsewhere that the "scene of His transcendent glory" [*manẓar-i akbar*] is the place of the residence of the Manifestation. *Ishráq-Khávarí, Má'iday-i Ásmání*, vol. 4, pp. 525-26.
15. *Álam-i mithál*. The French orientalist and philosopher, Henri

Corbin, has preferred to coin the phrase "imaginal world" to translate this term, since the usual translation "imaginary world" gives the idea that this is something that does not truly exist. Whereas, in fact, the realm of *malakút*, being ontologically closer to the Absolute, is if anything more real than this physical world.

16. *Ishrâq-Khâvarî, Má'iday-i Ásmání*, vol. 1, pp. 18-19.

17. These last four realms appear to be addressing the first realm in the Long Obligatory Prayer (*ṣalât-i kabîr*): "I testify unto that whereunto have testified all created things (*násút*), and the Concurrence on high (*malakút*), and the inmates of the all-highest Paradise (*jabarút*), and beyond them the Tongue of Grandeur itself from the all-glorious Horizon (*láhút*), that Thou art God . . ." Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, No. CLXXXIII, p. 246/321.

18. See, for example, Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be "He . . . Who in the Old Testament hath been named Jehovah," (cited by Shoghi Effendi in *Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 13) and his statement that it was he who spoke to Moses from the Burning Bush (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 50, 107).

19. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, No. XXII, pp. 41/50-51/50-51.

20. *Ibid.*, No. XXII, pp. 42/52/52.

21. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 42.

22. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 61/50-51/78-9.

23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 81.

24. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, No. LXXIX, p. 102/151/151-2.

25. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*Sharḥ*," p. 15.

26. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 13.

27. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys and Four Valleys*, pp. 20-21.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, No. LXXXI, p. 106/157/157; *idem.*, *Prayers and Meditations*, No. LVIII, p. 69/91.

30. R. Parry, "The Soul and God."

31. Frithof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, has demonstrated the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism.

32. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, No. XXVI, p. 48/62/62 (*italics added*).

33. *Ibid.*, No. LXXXIII, pp. 110/164-5/165-6 (*italics added*).

34. *Ibid.*, No. I, p. 11/3-5/3-5. Cf. No. XIX, pp. 38/46-7/46-7 (*italics added*).

35. Poem of Bahá'u'lláh, entitled *Qaṣṣiday-i 'Izz-i Varqá'iyya*, in

Bahá'u'lláh, *Áthár-i Qalam-i A'lá*, vol. 3, p. 210. Translation by Juan R. Cole (personal communication).

36. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, No. CXLVIII, pp. 204/316/317-8 (italics added).

37. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, pp. 18-21 (italics added).

38. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Sharḥ."

39. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Sharḥ," pp. 24-44.

40. For a more detailed consideration of the evidence that the preference for monistic or dualistic metaphysics in any particular individual is dependent on that individual's psychological constitution and method of approach to the spiritual world, see M. Momen, "The Psychology of mysticism and its relationship to the Bahá'í Faith."

41. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Sharḥ," p. 48. See also quotation of Bahá'u'lláh cited in note 34, p. 200.

42. *Bahá'í World Faith*, pp. 381-2. An alternative translation of this passage may be found in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 53.

43. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian, no. 45.

44. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys and Four Valleys*, p. 39.

45. "Tablet" of Bahá'u'lláh, in commentary upon the dictum of Mullá Šadrá: "That which is simple in its reality is all things," *Alváḥ-i mubáraka*, pp. 105-116; also Manuscript Or. 4971, University of Leiden. Of course, historically the issue of Oneness of Being (*wahdat al-wujūd*) and Oneness of Manifestation (*wahdat ash-shuhūd*) was the source of a prolonged and still unfinished debate within Islam. The great protagonist of *wahdat ash-shuhūd* was Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindí who attacked the *wahdat al-wujūd* concept of Ibn al-'Arabí; the former being supported by the legalistic divines and the latter by the more mystically inclined.

46. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 140.

47. Shoghi Effendi, *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, p. 2.

48. Ibn al-'Arabí, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p. 1131; trans. p. 137; see also H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, pp. 195-200; T. Izutsu, *Key Philosophical Concepts*, Vol. 1, pp. 244-5.

49. See T. R. V. Murti, *Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, especially pp. 136-140, 244. The conclusion that "samsara and nirvana are identical" (*ibid.*, p. 162) would appear to be a monistic ontology underlying this cognitive relativism.

50. On Noumenon/Phenomenon see Hick, *God Has Many Names*, pp. 53-5. On the Copernican Revolution, see Hick, *Ibid.*, pp.

29-37. On the problems of religious pluralism, see Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*.

51. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 63.

52. On relativism in sociology and anthropology together with a critique of relativism, see Hollis and Lukes, *Rationality and Relativism*. On relativism in literature and the arts, see Craige, *Literary Relativity*.

53. Craige, *Literary Relativity*, p. 16.

54. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh to the father but by Me" (John 14:6) is taken to mean that the person of Christ is the Absolute Truth, the only path to salvation.

55. Craige, *Literary Relativity*, pp. 16-21.

56. Indeed, most doctrinal disputes in Buddhism have revolved around metaphysical questions. And since it has been largely these controversies that have given rise to the religious literature, much of this literature is also about metaphysics.

57. This, of course, reflects exactly the shift in the physical sciences where research can no longer look at structures in any absolute sense, but rather must focus on relationships and processes.

58. We have noted above that this position whereby ethics is emphasized at the expense of metaphysics corresponds most closely to the position of the Buddha who refused to answer questions of a metaphysical nature and urged his disciples to concentrate instead upon the path to salvation through ethics. There is also a parallel with the thought of Wittgenstein in that the latter urges us to move away from a desire to understand concepts as though they represent a metaphysical structure in an absolute way and to concentrate instead on relationships. On the performatory nature of Bahá'í religious life, see R. Parry, "Rational/Conceptual/Performance—The Bahá'í Faith and Scholarship."

59. Apart, that is, from introductory historical and polemical works.

60. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 5.

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A GROUP OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN LONDON, c. 1912

Standing (l. to r.): Yu'hanná Dávúd, Beatrice Platt, unknown, Arthur Cuthbert, Lutfu'l-lah Hakim, Mr. Jenner, M. S. Hakim. Seated (l. to r.): Mrs. Ginman, Mrs. C. Morris, Ethel Rosenberg, Lady Blomfield, Elizabeth Herrick. On floor (l. to r.): Miss Phillips, unknown, Mary Basil Hall.

WHAT WAS A BAHÁ'Í? CONCERNS OF BRITISH BAHÁ'ÍS, 1900-1920

by Phillip R. Smith

In 1923, J. E. Esslemont published his book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, the first truly comprehensive examination of the Bahá'í movement. Chapter five of the book was entitled "What Is a Bahá'í?" and had been published as a pamphlet under that same title in 1919. His stated objective in that chapter was to present a clear picture of what it meant to be a Bahá'í. The purpose of this essay is to do the same.

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's religions and is, in a sense, still evolving. Certainly it has undergone many developments since its inception in Persia in 1844. What we intend to do here is to examine how it has changed since before the time of Dr. Esslemont in Great Britain. What did it mean to be a Bahá'í in Britain in the early years of this century? In what ways does this differ from what it means to be a Bahá'í today?

The British Bahá'í Community. How this community was constituted and, indeed, if it could truly be called a community, is a question that must be examined elsewhere in more detail. At this point, all we need to be aware of is the actual number

of Bahá'ís. In the years 1900 to 1920, the number of active Bahá'ís in Britain probably never grew above fifty. By the term "active" we mean those people who chose to designate themselves Bahá'ís or sought to spread the Bahá'í teachings. There was no formal registration and no membership roll. Undoubtedly, a larger number of people sympathized with the movement, and the meetings in London often attracted large audiences. However, it would be unwise to designate these passive supporters as Bahá'ís.

Between 1900 and 1910 almost all the Bahá'ís lived in London, and most of these came from well-educated, middle- or upper-class backgrounds. They maintained close contact with the Bahá'ís in Paris and 'Akká, but had less contact with Bahá'ís in North America. Their comparative nearness to Palestine, and the consequent relative ease of communication when compared with the Bahá'ís of the United States, made them feel spiritually as well as physically near to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The social center of the group was Ethel Rosenberg, with Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper, and later Lady Blomfield, also playing significant roles. The number of men involved was certainly less than the number of women, and men played a less prominent roles in the promotion of the movement.

Between 1910 and 1920 another group of Bahá'ís grew up in Manchester. This was a much smaller group and its members came largely from working- or lower middle-class backgrounds. The social center of this group was Edward Hall, and men seem to have assumed the dominant roles in the group. Towards the end of this decade, a small Bahá'í group developed in Bournemouth around Dr. Esslemont. These groups, together with one or two isolated individuals comprised the Bahá'í community of the British Isles.

It was clearly the London group which contained the most active Bahá'ís during the first twenty years of this century. Their activities at first consisted of meeting together to hear talks given by those people who had returned from 'Akká, or

gathering to read letters (or "Tablets") sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Unfortunately, as there was no formal organization, and no minutes or records were kept of these meetings, so we can only guess as to their content. Later the Bahá'ís held public meetings, wrote pamphlets, and published books. The expressed intention of all these activities was to further the Bahá'í cause. Our first task, therefore, is to examine these books and pamphlets in an effort to discover what they believed to be the important teachings. What was the "Bahá'í Message" they felt compelled to deliver? Second, we must try to ascertain if, and in what ways, this message is different from that accepted by the Bahá'ís of today.

The most striking feature of all these early Bahá'í works is their similarity. To read through a number of them is to experience a form of literary *déjà vu*. The same themes, the same stories, even the same wording constantly recur. The range of interests is narrow, the philosophy is not developed, and all the pieces clearly draw on the same primary material, even on each other. All Bahá'í literature of this period seems determined to propound the same basic tenets or themes of the movement. The Bahá'í message is generally seen as being a simple one, and is delivered in simple terms.

Progressive Revelation. The first of the themes that constituted the Bahá'í message was concerned with the origin and history of the movement. One of the primary purposes of Bahá'í literature, and indeed of all Bahá'í activity, seems to have been simply to inform the world of the existence of the Bahá'í prophets. Great emphasis was placed on the fact that these prophets had been—or were still—living in modern times, and that their message was therefore relevant for modern people.

Much of the Bahá'í literature was consequently concerned with recent history. The first stage in informing the world of the Bahá'í prophets was to place them firmly in the mainstream of religious history. To this end, it was emphasized

that all the great religions represented God's means of instructing and educating the peoples of the world. All religions contained truth, and all originally had come from the same God. None of them could claim to have a monopoly of the truth or to be the only way to gain a knowledge of God.

No thinking and unbiased man can believe that the Creator of a Universe has made to any man, to any institution, to any nation, or even to any age, alone and exclusively, those communications necessary for the welfare of all mankind in every age.¹

God's means of making these communications were through special men chosen to be His prophets or manifestations. These men, although not incarnations of God, were so perfect that they reflected something of God's character and personality. Although each appeared in a different age and to different peoples, they all came from the same God. By studying the lives of each of them, it was possible to discover something of the nature of God.

These supreme, holy souls are God-like in their attributes. The garments in which they appear are different, but the attributes are the same. In their real and intrinsic power, they show forth the Perfection of God. The reality of God in them never varies; only the garment in which the Primal Reality is clothed is different according to the time and place of their appearance and declaration to the world. One day it is the garment of Abraham, then Moses, then Jesus, then Bahá'u'lláh. Knowledge of this oneness is true enlightenment.²

It is this knowledge of the oneness of God's prophets that the Bahá'ís wanted all to acknowledge and accept. Once it was accepted, then the way was open to accept Bahá'u'lláh as yet another of these. It is interesting to note that Muḥammad is rarely mentioned as being part of this series of prophets. Presumably, it was felt that those of a Christian background, while they might be able to acknowledge the equality of

Moses and Jesus, would not be able to accept that of Jesus and Muḥammad. However, it is essential to the Bahá'í concept of progressive revelation, as it was accepted by Persians at that time and still is by all Bahá'ís today, that Muḥammad came between Jesus and Bahá'u'lláh, that he was equal to Jesus in reflecting God's nature, and that his revelation was in some ways an advance over that brought by Jesus.

In the Bahá'í notion of progressive revelation, a prophet was not someone who revealed a truth for all ages and all peoples. Rather, he was someone sent by God both to renew His message when men were in danger of forgetting it, and to expand and develop it.

He is essentially one who arises in a crisis of the world's history to inaugurate a new cycle of truth, and to declare a Revelation. He is charged with a special message to the age. The Bahais believe a prophet to be a perfect vehicle for the manifestation of the Light of the Holy Spirit, that 'Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'. Types of the greatest of these world prophets are Moses, Buddha, and Jesus the Christ.³

This idea of progressive revelation has an attractive simplicity about it. It was stated as an article of faith rather than as a logical conclusion. It is the point at which Bahá'í study of religions began, rather than the end at which it arrived. No attempt was made to analyze the often contradictory teachings of these prophets, nor to reconcile the obvious differences in character that even a rudimentary study of their lives would have revealed. The idea was presented as a fact which the reader could accept or reject on emotional rather than intellectual grounds. Its appeal lay in the fact that it provided such a simple solution to the complicated problem of the plurality of religions. To have its effect, it relied upon the reader's lack of detailed knowledge of other religions. Having stated their case, few of the early Bahá'í writings attempted to produce any evidence to support it.

Having established this sequential nature of God's revelation to mankind, the scene was set to describe the latest of this series of divine messengers. Many of the early Bahá'í books seem to be content with a simple description. Their intention seems to be, as Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper has been quoted as saying, to simply "mention the name of Bahá'u'lláh."⁴ They recounted details of his life, rather than presenting a detailed description of his teachings. At times, what he said seems to be less important than the fact that he spent his life in prison and exile for saying it. The early Bahá'í writers seem to expect their readers to accept Bahá'u'lláh as a prophet and then to enquire about his teachings, rather than to accept him as a prophet because of his teachings.

The Báb. Before giving details of the life of Bahá'u'lláh, it was first necessary to explain the importance of the Báb. The Bahá'í teachings had grown out of those of the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh had himself been imprisoned for being a follower of the Báb. All of the early British Bahá'í literature did, therefore, give a brief account of the life of the Báb.

The first and most striking feature of the accounts of the Báb are their brevity and similarity. This is because virtually the only source of information about the Báb available to Western readers was Browne's translation of *A Traveller's Narrative*.⁵ Although Browne was unaware of it at the time, this account of the Bábí/Bahá'í movement was, in fact, written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This book was written, as some scholars have pointed out, following a difficult time of the transition of leadership and, therefore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is more concerned in this book with supporting the claims of Bahá'u'lláh than with producing an objective historical account of the Báb's career. The Báb and his teaching are, therefore, presented from a Bahá'í point of view. This way of presenting the Báb was then repeated in the versions of Western Bahá'í writers.

The second feature of these writings is the reduced status

of the Báb. In this they take their cue from 'Abdu'l-Bahá who, in *A Traveller's Narrative*, explained his title in the following manner:

Now what he intended by the term Báb (Gate) was this, that he was the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections, by whose will he moved, and to the bond of whose love he clung.⁶

The great Person here referred to is obviously intended to be Bahá'u'lláh. But this passage is written with hindsight, from a Bahá'í view. The followers of the Báb during his lifetime, and arguably even he himself, had a very different interpretation of his title. However, as stated, Western Bahá'ís, following 'Abdu'l-Bahá, assigned the Báb a role and status far lower than that of Bahá'u'lláh.

This role was seen almost entirely as being one of preparing the way for the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh. It was Dreyfus who first turned to the Christian gospels to find a comparable role to that filled by the Báb. He stated that Bahá'u'lláh's "... annunciator had been the Bab, as John the Baptist had been the annunciator and forerunner of Jesus."⁷ The comparison with John the Baptist was one to which many other Bahá'í writers of this period would return. Eric Hammond entitled his chapter dealing with the Báb, "The Foreteller," and clearly thought of this as the most important part of his mission.

Scarcely, perhaps, can too much stress be laid on the Bab's insistence upon the coming of One who should open up and augment the way and the end of his pious design.⁸

Clearly, then, the Báb was not considered the equal of Bahá'u'lláh but simply one who was preparing the way for one to follow who was to be mightier than he.

The third feature of the treatment of the Báb was the lack

of information about his teachings. The Báb produced an enormous number of written works on a wide variety of subjects. He wrote his own book of laws, the *Bayán*, that was to replace the *Qur'an* as the guide to both secular and religious life. If the Western Bahá'ís were aware of the content of these works, they displayed no evidence of it. Rather, they gave the impression that his teachings were largely focused on one theme.

The greater part of the teachings and writings of the Bab referred to the Coming Great One, 'He whom God would manifest,' who would reveal the light of Truth in its full splendour, and would declare himself after nineteen years.⁹

This statement about the Báb's writings we now know to be simplistic and misleading, but this was not known by the early Western Bahá'ís and probably not even by the writer herself. Their ignorance about the content of the Báb's writing was due to the fact that only a few isolated passages from them had been translated into English.

It may be worthwhile at this point to examine some of the reasons why the Báb's writings were not made available to the West. One reason seems to have been a deliberate attempt made by the Bahá'í leadership in 'Akká to play down the importance of the Báb. Browne found in his research that the Bahá'ís in 'Akká sought "... to ignore or suppress the earlier history and literature of their religion."¹⁰ Wilson and Miller, both critics of Bahaism, ascribe sinister motives to this behavior which may not be fair. At a time when the religion was still evolving and developing, it may simply have been considered expedient to concentrate on the major features of the faith. A more objective history may be something that only those whose present is secure can afford. Faced with the task of translating the voluminous Bahá'í scriptures into English, it may not be all that surprising that priority should have been given to the works of Bahá'u'lláh. Even

seventy years later, only a small proportion of these Bahá'í scriptures have been translated into English.

Browne suggests another reason why the Báb's writings were given less priority when it came to translation. He himself, a professor of Arabic, found the Báb's style of writing very difficult and said of his works: "... some are so confused, so full of repetitions, extraordinary words, and fantastic derivatives of Arabic roots, that they defy the most industrious and indefatigable reader."¹¹ By contrast he found no such problems with the writings of Bahá'u'lláh or those of Persian Bahá'í scholars. "... the tendency of Baha'i thought was to avoid abstruse metaphysics and unintelligible rhapsodies, and to treat chiefly of ethical subjects."¹²

If this is the case, as later scholars have confirmed, then it may be that the Báb's writings were not translated because they would have been less intelligible, or of less interest, to Western readers. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as has often been pointed out, was skilled in the art of presenting the Bahá'í teachings in a way that appealed to Westerners. Whatever his reasons, it must be concluded that the Báb's writings were little known in the West because 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose not to emphasize their importance. In the same way, Western pilgrims seem to have been given little information about the teachings of the Báb.

The fourth feature of Western Bahá'í accounts of the Báb is how little information they contained about his life. The one event they chose to emphasize was his death. Even the accounts of this event are brief and lacking in detail. It was the symbolism of his death that Bahá'í writers seem to have found compelling and, once again, it was to the Christian gospels they turned in search of a comparable event. "By this foul deed the Barrack Square of Tabríz became a second Calvary."¹³

To sum up, we can say that the early British Bahá'ís had very little knowledge of the Báb's life and teachings and

regarded him as important only in that he foretold the coming of, and prepared the way for, Bahá'u'lláh. He was admired for the fact that he had suffered humiliation and imprisonment in performing this task, and had ultimately died for it. As late as 1923, Esslemont described the station of the Báb in the following manner:

Like John the Baptist, the Bab always insisted that he was but a forerunner sent to prepare the way for One greater than himself who was to come after him . . . He counted himself happy in enduring any affliction, if by so doing he could smooth the path, by ever so little, for 'Him whom God shall make manifest,' who was, he declared, the sole source of his inspiration as well as the sole object of his love.¹⁴

This view of the Báb is very different from that accepted by later Bahá'ís. In later years, when the relative stations of the three central figures of the religion had been authoritatively defined by Shoghi Effendi, this passage in Esslemont's book was revised to read as follows:

The Báb has been compared to John the Baptist, but the station of the Báb is not merely that of the Herald or Forerunner. In Himself the Báb was a Manifestation of God, the Founder of an independent religion, even though that religion was limited in time to a brief period of years. The Bahá'ís believe that the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were Co-Founders of their Faith . . .¹⁵

But this was for later generations of Bahá'ís to believe. For the first Bahá'ís in the British Isles, there was only one founder of their movement, and that was Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh is clearly identified by Bahá'í writers of this period as the founder and inspiration of their movement. He is set alongside other manifestations of God, such as Moses, Jesus, and the Buddha as their equal. He is written

about with admiration and reverence, often being given the title "the Blessed Beauty," or "the Blessed Perfection." However, what is far less clear is his precise station or spiritual rank.

Esslemont, writing in a private letter to another Bahá'í in 1915, expressed his confusion on this matter:

Another point that is not quite clear to me is as to the station of the manifestations. According to Prof. Cheyne, Baha'o'llah's dearest wish was that his disciples should become even as he was (i.e., I presume attain to the same station as himself). Christ also is reported to have said "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." In [*Some*] *Answered Questions*, however, Abdul Baha says that a disciple however far he might progress, could never reach the station of Christ. He puts the Universal Manifestations on a plane to which the disciples can never reach.¹⁶

Admittedly, Esslemont had only been a Bahá'í for a few months at the time he wrote this letter. However, during this period he had read the bulk of the Bahá'í literature available in Britain at that time. From this literature it is, indeed, difficult to ascertain whether Bahá'u'lláh is a prophet, a saint, or the incarnation of God. Although the term "manifestation" is widely used by different writers, it is not clear whether they all agree on a precise definition of this term.

The early American Bahá'ís had been taught by Ibrahim Kheiralla, a Lebanese convert who was the first Bahá'í teacher in America, that Bahá'u'lláh was God incarnated in human form and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the reincarnation of His son, Jesus Christ. This idea was quickly refuted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá once contact was established with the North American Bahá'ís. A series of Persian teachers sent to America corrected this erroneous teaching. The idea, however, did probably persist for several years in slightly different forms. The British Bahá'ís, never having been exposed to Kheiralla's version of

Bahaism, should have been spared this particular misconception. They may, however, have been exposed to this notion in the books of American Bahá'ís that were widely read by the British community.

Thornton Chase, for example, was one of the most gifted American writers and as such was influential among British Bahá'ís. He tended to use language and terminology, when describing Bahá'u'lláh, that had previously been used by Christian writers to describe the incarnation. He may, or may not, have intended them to do so, but when his readers read phrases such as: "The Word Incarnate, the Glory of God, BA-HA'O'LLAH . . .", they may, not unnaturally, have inferred that Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded by Bahá'ís as Jesus is by Christians. Namely, that he was "of the same substance" as God.

Myron Phelps was an American, but one who first met Bahá'ís in London during the summer of 1902. He subsequently spent a month with the Bahá'ís in 'Akká during December of that same year. He should, therefore, not have been influenced by Kheiralla's teachings. Yet he reaches very similar conclusions. He refers to God as the Divine Essence and identifies all earlier manifestations with the spirit of that Essence. But Bahá'u'lláh he regards as being more than this: "Now the world has advanced. It was necessary for the Essence itself of God to become manifest and this it did through the person of Beha Ullah."¹⁷

It is true that later Bahá'ís rejected Phelps's book, and that in 1939, Shoghi Effendi wrote "... it is full of inaccuracies that are misleading and for this reason should be ignored by believers."¹⁸ However, for many years it was a popular book among Bahá'ís and must have influenced the thinking of many of them.

Certainly Alter, after his research among British and American Bahá'ís, reached the conclusion that Bahá'u'lláh was not merely regarded by them as a prophet, but was worshipped as

God. He reached this conclusion despite many denials of Bahá'u'lláh's divinity from Western Bahá'ís.

But these negative interpretations of the doctrine of Baha Ullah's divinity are very few and unconvincing, when compared to the abundance of positive evidence. At the first interview with some American and English Bahais, they would seem to deny all divinity to Baha Ullah. But if one returns and appears to have accepted the first lesson, they would begin to teach his divinity, until finally it is presented in the orthodox Bahai form.¹⁹

This may have been the impression gained by Alter in private conversations, but certainly many Bahá'ís in their published works endeavored to put forward these "negative interpretations" of Bahá'u'lláh's divinity. But the argument was, indeed, a subtle one. The commonest form of this argument was copied from one presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself when dealing with this question during his tour of England:

Is the Divine Manifestation, God?

Yes, and yet not in essence. A Divine Manifestation is as a mirror reflecting the light of the sun. The light is the same and yet the mirror is not the sun.²⁰

In the same way, Bahá'ís would argue that while it would be true to say God was in the manifestation or perfectly reflected in his character, it would be wrong to say that the manifestation was God. This argument is put forward in many books of the period and, indeed, is implied by the very term "manifestation."

If Bahá'u'lláh is a *manifestation* of God's power and character he cannot also be an *incarnation* of God: this would be the position adopted by modern Bahá'ís. But for many early British Bahá'ís, reared on the concept of the incarnation of Jesus, it may have been a difficult concept to grasp. For many of them also, these subtle theological distinctions were of no in-

terest or importance. Having voiced his difficulties over the stations of the manifestations, Esslemont went on to say in the same letter quoted above: "Sometimes I think it is of little importance to worry over these doctrinal difficulties, that the important thing is to 'live the life.'"²¹

Many would have agreed with this statement. To a large extent, this is the reason why Bahá'ís to this day have not established a developed theology. To them, God is not greatly interested in what you believe, He is far more concerned with how you live your life. It is probably true to say, therefore, that while all Bahá'ís of this period would have accepted the universal importance of Bahá'u'lláh, and were obedient to his teachings, there was, as yet, no consensus as to his precise station. Alter clearly endorses this view of Bahá'u'lláh as being the center of the Bahá'í movement:

Bahaism is essentially a religion which centres around the law and personality of Baha Ullah, who claimed to be the channel for all blessings, especially the knowledge of God and the relationship with Him, which will ensure happiness for the present life and for that of the future.²²

As has been already stated, one of the primary aims of the early Bahá'í movement was simply to inform the world of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. They wanted people to recognize that the world was moving into a new era as a result of God sending a new prophet or manifestation to mankind. To this extent, Alter is right in saying that the movement centered around the law and teaching of Bahá'u'lláh. But he underestimates the tremendous significance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was his personality that provided the focus and unifying center of the Bahá'í movement.

'Abdu'l-Bahá. The first British people to become Bahá'ís were those who actually went to 'Akká and met 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They returned both impressed and inspired, and it was only

then that they began to work for the movement. During these early years, contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá was constantly maintained either through the visits of pilgrims or through letters. Of course, during his visits to the West all Bahá'ís endeavored to meet with him, and others—like Professor Cheyne—became Bahá'ís as a result of meeting him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the medium through which they came into contact with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and it was generally his personality and way of life that convinced them of their truth.

Although the British Bahá'ís never accepted Kheiralla's teaching of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the reincarnated Jesus, they drew many Christ-like comparisons. He, too, lived in the Holy Land. Despite imprisonment and suffering, he remained gentle, wise, and generous, caring more for the poor than he did for himself.

Phelps, in his book about 'Abdu'l-Bahá, relates many stories of his generosity to the poor of 'Akká, despite the fact that his family's wealth was by then exhausted.

Now that he has not much he must spend little for himself that he may give to the poor . . . He does not permit his family to have luxuries. He himself eats but once a day, and then bread, olives, and cheese suffice him.²³

For Phelps, it was this spectacle that convinced him of the Bahá'í teachings, and he believed that others too would accept them because of the personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Here is a man who proves to us that self can be utterly forgotten; that all-embracing love can be substituted for egotism as the motive power of a human life; that the recorded lives of Buddha and Christ may indeed be realized by those who follow in their path. There are many men for whom this spectacle will change belief into conviction with the certainty of knowledge.²⁴

Many others also saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá as living the life of Christ and seemed to revere him in a way similar to Christians' love and reverence for Jesus:

Truly, no prophet, or man of God, has endured what he has endured. The sword has been ever hovering over his head. The way of Calvary has been trodden many times. He has been betrayed in the house of his friends, nay, even in that of his very brother. But through all the mists and clouds of these sorrows and afflictions pierces ever the sun of his countenance—that radiant and divine smile of his which scarcely ever leaves his face, and which to see is to have a glimpse of ‘one like unto the Son of Man.’²⁵

Almost all the accounts written by those who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá contain similar statements and eulogies. He was obviously a focus of admiration, even love, for the Bahá’ís in a far more personal way than was Bahá’u’lláh. This is apparent in an obvious physical way in the widespread use of photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Those few that were taken of Bahá’u’lláh were held especially sacred and not reproduced or circulated. This had the effect of keeping Bahá’u’lláh as a rather vague, shadowy figure while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, even for those who had never met him, was a real person. These photographs showing him with a gentle face, white hair, and full beard, coupled with the stories brought back by pilgrims, helped to increase the Christ-like image of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as he was presented in the West.

Of course, it may be that the pilgrims were presented in ‘Akká with a carefully stage-managed meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as Miller and others have suggested. Certainly care was taken to ensure that pilgrims never met with his half brother, Muḥammad-‘Alí, or with his brother’s supporters who opposed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s leadership. Some visitors seem to have remained completely unaware of the bitter rivalry and hostility between the two. Wilson in particular claims that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s image was a totally false facade produced to delude Western pilgrims, and he is scathing in his descriptions of their gullibility: “When Abdul Baha says: ‘I am glad to see you,’ the pilgrims thrill at such wondrous words! ‘His heavenly smile’ gives them happiness! His trite platitudes are written

down beside the midnight lamp, for the delectation of similar dupes."²⁶ Whether or not they were dupes remains a matter of opinion rather than fact. Undoubtedly 'Abdu'l-Bahá had what would now be called charisma, and it was his personality that provided the center for the Bahá'í movement and around which it turned.

What is, once again, far less clear is his precise spiritual station in the minds of Bahá'ís at this time. Some of them, like Cheyne, clearly accepted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion, as the title he chose for himself suggested, that he was the servant of his father, and therefore lower in spiritual rank. Of Bahá'u'lláh, Cheyne says: "There was living quite lately a human being of such consummate excellence that many think it is both permissible and inevitable to identify him mystically with the invisible Godhead."²⁷ While still admiring 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he does not assign him quite such an exalted station: "I entertain the highest reverence and love for Baha'u'llah's son, Abdul Baha whom I regard as a Mahatma—'a great-souled one'—and look up to as one of the highest examples in the spiritual firmament . . ."²⁸

Ethel Rosenberg, on the other hand, seems to set the two on a more equal level: "Baha'u'llah before he departed this life, declared, in his turn, that the work would be developed and carried on by his eldest son."²⁹ This statement that Bahá'u'lláh's work would not simply be continued but would also be developed, would seem to imply that the manifestation was not at an end, that the revelation would continue. Hammond, too, seems unclear as to whether this new message and spirit was coming from Bahá'u'lláh or from 'Abdu'l-Bahá ('Abbás Effendi):

Out of the East, Abbas Effendi's humanising, spiritualising influence is spreading near and far. In the Eastern firmament a Star has again arisen and its beams are shedding light upon the dark places of the earth.³⁰

Perhaps, once again, the precise theological status of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was considered unimportant to the Bahá'ís. It would be left to later Bahá'ís, again under the influence of Shoghi Effendi, to decide that he was not a manifestation of God but rather was the perfect Bahá'í, as Muḥammad is the perfect Muslim to his followers. What is certain is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his words were far more familiar to early Bahá'ís than were the life and words of his father. And certainly it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá that held the dominant place in their affections and to a large extent united them and their different ideas and attitudes.

Millennialism. It is probably fair to say that the first major theme of early British Bahá'í writings is the history of their movement as has been explained above. This largely involved a simple outline of the lives of the Bahá'í prophets. Their concern seems mainly to have been to inform the world of the arrival of these prophets rather than to analyze, or give a detailed presentation of, their teachings. This was undoubtedly because the Bahá'ís believed that the simple fact of their arrival, the arrival from God of a new revelation to mankind, signaled the dawn of a great new era or millennium.

As Peter Smith has pointed out elsewhere,³¹ the early Western Bahá'ís had many of the characteristics of a typical millennial movement. They believed that through His manifestation, God was intervening in human history to bring about an end to war and suffering, and to establish an era of peace and prosperity for the whole world. Like most millennial movements, the Bahá'ís were united around a charismatic leader in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is this concern, the advent of the new millennium, that forms the second major theme of early Bahá'í literature.

Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be the fulfillment of many religious prophecies concerning the coming of a great messenger or peacemaker. Much of his writing was concerned with the need

for world unity and an end to all wars. He proclaimed that God's spirit would soon accomplish these things and that then the "Most Great Peace" would commence. This would be an era when people of all races and religions would live in harmony, serving God's will and seeking to benefit all mankind.

Kheiralla had predicted that the millennium would begin in 1917, but there is no evidence that this date was accepted by the British community. Indeed, unlike many other millennial movements, the Bahá'ís had no fixed date for when the new era would begin. It could even be argued that, for them, the era had already begun. Like most millennial movements, there was a feeling among the Bahá'ís that they were living in the "last days" characterized by man's ignorance of God and obsession with the material world. However, there was also a strong sense of optimism that they were also living in the first days of God's new plan for the earth. The manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh had released the Spirit of God, and this spirit was already changing and transforming the world.

Like many other Westerners, the Bahá'ís saw the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the early years of the twentieth, as a period of unprecedented scientific advance and social change. However, they did not see the glories of science and advancing social awareness as evidence of the triumph of human reason, but rather as proof of the fact that God was once more at work in the world.

Man is emerging from barbarism into civilization, from childhood to manhood, from darkness to light: he is just now passing out of his period of adolescence, of little wisdom and callow pride, into a noble maturity of conscious strength, knowledge and manly stability. A great cycle of past conditions is closing and we stand upon the threshold of a new age, which is beyond all our present conjectures in its values to man. In its reality, it is the Manifestation of God, the Glory of the Lord revealing itself upon the plane of humanity.³²

This optimistic view of human progress is a feature of Bahá'í thought at this time. However, not only is human progress seen as evidence of God's handiwork, but ultimately it is seen as proof of Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be a Manifestation of God. For Bahá'ís, it was no coincidence that scientific and technical progress began to accelerate during the eras of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Nor was it coincidence that many of Bahá'u'lláh's ideas on the need for an international auxiliary language, a world tribunal, and the equality of men and women were now becoming commonplace. Most Bahá'ís, like Eslemont in the concluding chapter of his book, saw these things as proof of the power of Bahá'u'lláh to influence the world, even if the world was unaware of his doing so.

That the world, since the advent of Baha'u'llah has been changing incomparably faster than it ever did before none can deny. That this phenomenal progress is taking place, to a marvellous extent, along the lines laid down by Baha'u'llah more than half a century ago, must also be evident, we think, to every fair-minded reader of the foregoing chapters. That one who so clearly anticipated and so powerfully advocated these changes must have been a factor of some importance in bringing them about is, surely, therefore, an entirely reasonable conclusion. Readers who have some acquaintance with the phenomena of telepathy, or knowledge of the dynamic power of prayer, will have no difficulty in conceding also that one endowed with the spiritual power which Baha'u'llah so abundantly showed could not fail to exert a potent influence on people of sympathetic and receptive minds, no matter in what part of the world they lived, or whether they had ever heard of his existence.³³

From this we can see why there was no need for the Bahá'ís to have a precise date fixed for the commencement of the Most Great Peace. This was not to be some dramatic change to the world brought about by cataclysmic, cosmic intervention. It was rather the inevitable result of a process begun by the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh decades before. There is,

however, strong evidence that they believed the end result of this process was close at hand. Although the imminent arrival of the Most Great Peace is only implied in official publications, Esslemont's private letters probably reflect the feeling common among Bahá'ís at the time. He often referred to the horrific events of the First World War as "ploughing and harrowing the ground in which good Bahai seed will presently grow and flourish abundantly."³⁴ However, as the end of the war drew in sight he was able to write far more optimistically: "It really looks as if the 'Most Great Peace' were at hand now. What wonderful times we are living in. It is a wonderful privilege to be alive in these days—but to be a Bahai as well, and to be able to help, however little, in the coming of the New Heaven and the New Earth is glorious."³⁵

It is not unreasonable to imagine that other Bahá'ís shared these feelings. With the end of the "war to end all wars," the seeming establishment of a world tribunal in the League of Nations, and the growing popularity of Esperanto, many of Bahá'u'lláh's prophecies seemed fulfilled. Certainly, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, later to be the head of the Bahá'í Faith, was able to express similar sentiments in a letter to Esslemont written in Haifa at the end of the war.

Praise be to God that the swords have been sheathed, the awful carnage has stopped, the battleflags have been unfurled, and the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world is well nigh being established. Thanks that although the war has brought untold difficulties and problems to the Beloved, yet the outcome has been most gratifying, for the Holy Land has been occupied by a just and victorious army, that the 'Most Great Peace' which has been foretold by Bahá'u'lláh—may my life be a sacrifice to Him—will soon be realised.³⁶

Clearly the arrival of the millennium was of major concern to the early Bahá'ís and was the very reason for their existence. The Most Great Peace was inevitable, for the spirit of

God as expressed through Bahá'u'lláh was irresistible. Even people who had never heard of Bahá'u'lláh could become converts to his ideas of world peace, religious and racial unity, as they were subject to his spiritual influence. However, those who had heard of Bahá'u'lláh could hasten the arrival of the Most Great Peace by alerting the world to the fact of his existence and by encouraging the spread of his ideas. Although the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh had released the spirit of God, Bahá'ís could amplify its power and accelerate its progress through their actions.

For the early Bahá'ís in Britain, this did not mean a search for converts. Their aim was to hasten the arrival of the Most Great Peace by proclaiming the existence of its prophets, and by spreading their ideals. Esslemont stated that the only way "... the real success of the Movement can be gauged is, not by the number of its professed adherents, but by the way in which its principles are permeating and changing the world."³⁷

The Unity of Religions. Thus we can see that the second major feature or concern of the early British Bahá'ís was the coming of the millennium. Although the date of its arrival was not fixed, they believed that they could hasten its approach through their activities. The means whereby this could be achieved provides the third distinguishing feature of early British Bahá'í literature. The Bahá'ís believed that the Most Great Peace would not be achieved through political means, nor through the establishment of a new world religion, but rather through unifying and respiritualizing the existing world religions.

The spiritual unification of the race is the great aim of Bahaism. It does not propose the wholesale disintegration of creeds and cults, but, looking through these, discerns the shining of the light, behind, beyond. It recognizes the truth in each religious phase, but decries any attempt of any phase to pose as sole interpretation of the truth.³⁸

For many Bahá'ís this was the purpose of their movement: to awaken all people to the fundamental unity of all religions. It is also most important that we realize that theirs was a "movement." The term Bahá'í Faith did not come into common usage until much later. In the early years in Britain, the terms Bahá'í cause, Bahá'í movement, or simply Bahaism were most often used. Although modern Bahá'ís think of themselves as belonging to a separate world religion, and often go to great lengths to prove it, the early Bahá'ís were equally emphatic that they were not a new religion. A common phrase used by Bahá'í writers was originally written by Hippolyte Dreyfus in 1909: "Bahaism is not a new religion; it is Religion renewed."³⁹

As stated previously, Bahá'ís believed all the founders of the great religions to be Manifestations of God. As such, they had all delivered basically the same message. They all wanted men to live in peace and harmony, and to worship the same God. Unfortunately, after their passing, men corrupted their message so that religion often became a cause of discord and suffering.

True Religion has been given to the world to create Unity; but through the perpetuation of vain traditions, superstitions, and blind dogmas, which in the course of time have obscured the Light given in successive Revelations, Religion, through misunderstanding, has often been the cause of divisions, persecutions and strife.⁴⁰

Bahá'u'lláh, as the latest Manifestation of God, had not come to sweep away the old religions, but to reaffirm the message of their founders. His followers were to strip away the "vain traditions, superstitions and blind dogmas" that had accumulated around the teachings of his predecessors and to release once more the "Light" within their message. Once each religion was renewed in this way, their followers would see that the same light shone from each of the great religions.

Renewed, reinvigorated, and united, the religions could then bring about the Most Great Peace.

Someone who became a Bahá'í at this time did not, therefore, feel that he was joining a new religion. Rather, he allied himself with the aims of the movement and returned to his own faith.

No man is asked to desert his own faith; but only to look back to its own fountainhead and discern, through mists of and accumulations of time, the true spirit of its founders.⁴¹

Ethel Rosenberg said that the Bahá'í Cause was "... a widening of the basis of our faith,"⁴² rather than a replacement of it. In this way, it was possible for most of the early Bahá'ís to still consider themselves Christians. Sydney Sprague, writing in 1908 of his meetings with Bahá'ís in the Middle and Far East, refers to a "Sikh Baha'i" and clearly regards the Persian Bahá'ís as "Mohammedans" and himself as a Christian Bahá'í.⁴³ There were many British Bahá'ís who continued to be active members of their churches. Indeed, there were several church leaders who allied themselves with, and actively supported, the Bahá'í cause.

Rev. R. J. Campbell was the pastor of the City Temple in London, and he invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to speak in his church in 1911. He introduced 'Abdu'l-Bahá to his congregation with these words: "The Bahá'í Movement is very closely akin to, I think I might say is identical with, the spiritual purpose of Christianity."⁴⁴ Similarly, Archdeacon Wilberforce introduced 'Abdu'l-Bahá to his congregation at St. John's the Divine in Westminster. At the end of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's address, he knelt to receive his blessing and was followed by his congregation. Henry Harrold Johnson was a minister in Birmingham (1897-1900) and was involved in the introduction of moral education into schools in Britain. It is not known when he came into contact with the Bahá'í movement, but a poem of his was included in the first edition of *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*. In 1912, he

wrote an article about Bahaism that was published in the *Contemporary Review*. In the course of this article he clearly stated the aims of the movement:

It is not a sect nor even a new religion . . . It does not bid us abandon allegiance to our individual loyalties. On the contrary, it encourages us to cleave to these, to remain intimately connected, if at all possible, with the particular Church or Faith in which we have been nurtured, and to work therein to purify, ennoble, enlarge, spiritualise, and merge in the large Unity the expression of our particular faith.⁴⁵

This seems to be the course that he himself followed, as he became the minister of Cross Street Chapel in Manchester from 1919 to 1928. However, he maintained some contact with the Bahá'ís, occasionally inviting them to give talks in his church. In February 1925, the Bahá'ís in Manchester listed the Reverend H. H. Johnson among their "Friends of the Cause."⁴⁶ On this same list was the Reverend A. H. Biggs who was himself elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in 1927.

George Townshend first wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1919, when he was Rector of Ahascragh in County Galway. He considered himself a Bahá'í, but also was active in the Anglican Church, rising to be a Canon of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. It was not until 1947 that he left the Church, although he had been openly active as a Bahá'í for many years.

Another leading Anglican who identified himself with the Bahá'í movement was the Reverend Thomas Kelly Cheyne, Oriel Professor of Interpretation of Scripture at Oxford from 1885 to 1908, and Canon of Rochester during the same period. His last published work dealt with the need to unify religions and the place of Bahaism in achieving this task.⁴⁷ He had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Oxford during his visit to the West and was clearly impressed by him. In his book, he still classifies himself as an Anglican. However, in a private letter to a Bahá'í in

Manchester, he declared that he was more than this: "I am one of the Bahá'ís who remain within their mother church."⁴⁸

All of these prominent Christians, to a greater or lesser degree, allied themselves with the Bahá'í movement. Clearly, this would not have been possible if they had considered it a separate religion. Some Bahá'ís came from agnostic or even atheist backgrounds, and for them the situation was somewhat different. But many others from religious backgrounds found no contradiction in remaining within their churches once they had become Bahá'ís.

Of course, that is not to say that their faith remained unchanged. Dreyfus stated that any man who became a Bahá'í would keep only "... as much of his original belief as will agree with his broadened conception."⁴⁹ As his conception broadened, it might be that he would come to view much of what he previously believed to be "vain tradition, superstition, and blind dogma." Once this had happened, there might be some question about whether he remained a Christian.

Samuel Wilson was an Anglican, had been a missionary in Persia, and was a fierce critic of Bahaism. In particular, he attacked the claim that Bahá'ís could also be considered Christian. "... Bahaism has no Christian era, no Christian sabbath, no Easter, no Christmas, no Trinitarian formula in benediction, doxology or sacrament, no symbol of the cross, no hymns to Christ, no Apostles Creed, no Lord's Prayer. Yet it claims to be Christian!"⁵⁰

Of course, some Bahá'ís would have argued that the things that Wilson mentions are nonessentials and that the essential part of Christianity is the words and actions of Jesus as contained in the gospels. However, these would generally have been Bahá'ís from an agnostic background who had an imperfect understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. On the other hand, it might be said that those Christians who also considered themselves to be Bahá'ís, had an imperfect understanding of what it meant to be a Bahá'í. Wilson had the advantage of having met Persian Bahá'ís, and he was familiar

with Bahá'í teachings, customs, and practices generally unknown in the West. When they became known, there would be many who would also question whether it was possible to be a practicing Christian and a Bahá'í. Ultimately, the Bahá'ís agreed with Wilson that it was impossible.

Wilson also viciously attacked those church leaders we have mentioned who aided the Bahá'í movement. Some of these he sees as simply misguided, others he views as having been deluded by Bahá'ís. Yet others he finds impossible to understand.

How can I classify the late Professor T. K. Cheyne of Oxford? This widely known critic in his last work (1914) 'The Reconciliation of Races and Religions,' bewilders me by his credulity. It is only charitable to excuse it as a product of his dotage.⁵¹

The reason he is so annoyed by them is that he sees them as aiding a cause which eventually seeks to replace Christianity. Wilson saw, perhaps before the majority of Bahá'ís, that theirs was not just a movement but that with its own prophets, laws, calendar, holy days, scriptures, and prayers it was, in fact, a religion. "It is a new and a different, an inferior and a false religion."⁵²

It may well have been that there were some Bahá'ís who even at that time would have agreed that they were part of a new and different religion. They may even have seen the process of confirming a new believer in his own faith as a first stage before leading him to new truths. They may have believed that all religions would be unified in the one Bahá'í Faith. If this was the case, they kept their intentions well hidden. On the whole, it is probably safe to assume that for the majority of early British Bahá'ís their movement was intended to revitalize all religions and return them to the simple teachings of their founders. In doing this, the essential unity of them all could be emphasized.

Certainly as late as the mid-1920s, it was possible for Nancy Musgrove, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly and a leading British Bahá'í to also be a member of a Christian church. She argued that "... you need not give up such membership to join the Bahá'í movement" and was also "... very emphatic that the 'movement' must not be called a 'religion.'"⁵³ This, indeed, was the third dominant theme to run throughout the literature produced by the early British Bahá'ís.

Conclusion. From the evidence gathered from the published works of early British Bahá'ís, it is indeed possible for us to conclude that to be a Bahá'í meant something different for them than it does for Bahá'ís today. A Bahá'í then was a member of an inclusive millennial movement that centered around the charismatic personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A Bahá'í today in Britain considers himself to be a part of an independent world religion.

As Wilson was aware, most of the features of the later religion were already present in Western Bahaism, but they were largely in embryonic form, as yet undeveloped. Indeed, all the features mentioned above are still to be found within the modern Faith, although in a slightly altered form. There is still an emphasis on the lives of the three figures of the "Heroic Age" of Bahá'í history but their relative values are different. The Báb has increased in importance, and is now regarded as a manifestation in his own right and cofounder of the Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is seen as holding a lesser station than the other two because he was an ordinary man, albeit of exemplary character. The Most Great Peace is still awaited, although few Bahá'ís today expect it to arrive in their lifetimes. The fundamental unity of all religions is still a major tenet of the Faith. However, it is no longer possible for a Bahá'í to work for the rejuvenation of the older religions. For modern Bahá'ís, the unity of religions will only be fully achieved when the old religions are abandoned and all become Bahá'ís.

It is this last point that gives us our clearest difference between what is, and what was, a Bahá'í. How this evolution took place, from a bridging movement between different religions, to becoming itself a separate and distinct religion, is a process that needs more careful and detailed analysis elsewhere.

NOTES

1. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, p. 253.
2. Hammond, *The Splendour of God*, p. 15.
3. Rosenberg, *A Brief Account of the Bahai Movement*, p. 12.
4. Whitehead, *Some Early Bahá'ís of the West*, p. 56.
5. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*.
6. ['Abdu'l-Bahá], *A Traveller's Narrative*, p. 4.
7. Dreyfus, *The Universal Religion: Bahaism*, p. 41.
8. Hammond, *The Splendour of God*, p. 24.
9. Rosenberg, *The Bahai Movement*, p. 6.
10. Browne, "Báb, Bábís." In Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 2, p. 307.
11. Browne, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 305.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 1923, p. 27.
14. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 1923, p. 28.
15. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 1974, p. 20.
16. Esslemont to Lotfullah Hakim, 22 August 1915. Hakim was raised as a Bahá'í, his grandfather having been the first Jew to embrace the Cause. He first came to England in 1910 to study physiotherapy. He was a close friend of Dr. Esslemont and other British Bahá'ís. He returned to Haifa in 1920, and later worked for the Bahá'í Cause in several parts of the world. He was elected to the first Universal House of Justice in 1963. This letter is one of a large collection of correspondence from Esslemont to Hakim, March 1915 to December 1924. United Kingdom National Bahá'í Archives.
17. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, p. 149.
18. Quoted from the September 1939 issue of the *Bahá'í Journal*, a magazine sent free to all British Bahá'ís.
19. Alter, "Studies in Bahaism," p. 30.

20. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 66.
21. Esslemont to Hakim, 22 August 1915. See note 16.
22. Alter, "Studies in Bahaism," p. 42.
23. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, p. 7.
24. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, p. 256.
25. Sprague, *A Year with the Baha'is in India and Burma*, p. 7.
26. Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 125.
27. Cheyne, *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions*, p. 5.
28. Ibid.
29. Rosenberg, *The Bahai Movement*, p. 12.
30. Hammond, *The Splendour of God*, p. 50.
31. Smith, Peter, "Millennialism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions."
32. Chase, *The Bahai Revelation*, p. 47.
33. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 1923, p. 216.
34. Esslemont to Hakim, 30 April 1915. See note 16.
35. Esslemont to Hakim, 13 October 1918.
36. Shoghi Rabbani to Esslemont, November 1918.
37. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 1923, p. 216.
38. Hammond, *The Splendour of God*, p. 14.
39. Dreyfus, *The Universal Religion*, p. 24.
40. Herrick, *Unity Triumphant*, p. 7.
41. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, p. xiii.
42. Rosenberg, *The Bahai Movement*, p. 21.
43. Sprague, *A Year with the Bahais in India and Burma*.
44. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 17.
45. Johnson, "Bahaism: the Birth of a World Religion." p. 397.
46. Whitehead, *Some Bahá'ís to Remember*, p. 75.
47. Cheyne, *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions*.
48. From a letter to John Craven quoted in Whitehead, *Some Bahá'ís to Remember* p. 45.
49. Dreyfus, *The Universal Religion*, p. 153.
50. Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 128.
51. Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 13.
52. Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 129.
53. Richards, *The Religion of the Baha'is*, p. 137.

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SHOGHI EFFENDI RABBANI
Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GUARDIANSHIP

by Dr. Loni Bramson-Lerche

Transition periods are critical for any movement, especially religious ones. Often, a religion splinters into sects after the death of a central charismatic figure. Equally critical is the point in the development of a religious movement when it must either expand, become politically mature, and viable as a community, or collapse and fragment.

The Bahá'í Faith has successfully weathered a number of these transitional periods, for example: Bahá'u'lláh's death (1892) and his appointment of his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921) as his successor¹; 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death and his appointment of Shoghi Effendi² (1897-1957) as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith; and Shoghi Effendi's death and the transition to the Universal House of Justice (elected 1963).³

The concepts of transition and progression inherent in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith are possible reasons why this religion has so far proven to be resistant to permanent schism.⁴ However, any transition period is always both dangerous and difficult. The movement is placed in a vulnerable position. The trials it must undergo at these times will either strengthen, cripple, or destroy it. This article will examine some aspects of one transitional period in Bahá'í history: the

establishment of the Guardianship and the initial reaction of the Bahá'ís of the West to this institution.

References to the Appointment of a Successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The institution of the Guardianship was first clearly announced to the Bahá'ís in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament. Before the reading of this will, there were very few references to an institution or individual intended to bridge the gap between the "Master," as 'Abdu'l-Bahá was called by the Bahá'ís, and the Universal House of Justice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had given almost no indication that he had decided to establish an institution such as the Guardianship.

Bahá'ís generally believed that, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death, leadership of the Bahá'í Faith would fall upon the Universal House of Justice. An editorial footnote in an article on the Bahá'í covenant written before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing states:

The cycle of BAHÁ'O'LLAH extends for one thousand or thousands of years from 1844 A.D.; but it is unique in that the 'Most Great Characteristic' of the New Covenant is the appointment of *a Center*, which now is in the person of Abdul-Baha, and after him shall be vested in the Universal House of Justice for a period of one thousand or thousands of years.⁵

To date, only six references have been documented in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and in diverse memoirs of conversations held with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which could be regarded as intimations that an institution such as the Guardianship would be founded. These intimations were generally unknown or not significant to the Bahá'ís of the period in question.

A first reference is in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, revealed in 1873. In this book of laws, Bahá'u'lláh ordains that endowments to charities be paid to God:

Endowments which are apportioned to charity, are confided unto GOD. The Revealer of the Signs! And no one has any right to dis-

pose of them—save by permission of the Day-Spring of Inspiration. After Him the decision of such disposal to be confined to the Branches; after the Branches to the House of Justice when it becomes dominately [*sic*] established in countries . . . ⁶

The “Day-Spring of Inspiration” is Bahá’u’lláh, and the “Branches” are his male descendants. Shoghi Effendi was Bahá’u’lláh’s great-grandson and therefore among those eligible to be appointed as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s successor. (All future Guardians were to be Branches.) Bahá’u’lláh did not define rules for succession. It was left to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to delineate the line of succession. He did this in his *Will and Testament*, at the same time giving his successor, the Guardian, control over the finances of the Bahá’í Faith.⁷

It is known that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once intimated to an American Bahá’í that he would designate an individual as his successor, but his explanation was so vague that no one could have guessed its true significance. In 1897, shortly after Shoghi Effendi’s birth, and before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had written his will, an American Bahá’í asked him if the Biblical passage “a little child shall lead them”⁸ referred to a living child. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered, “Verily, that child is born and is alive and from him will appear wondrous things that thou wilt hear of in the future.”⁹

Of those Bahá’ís who had access to these Tablets, most did not suspect that they implied someone would succeed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and those who did were too absorbed by their love of him to wonder or try to guess who that person might be.¹⁰

Infallibility of Shoghi Effendi. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in his will, appointed Shoghi Effendi as his successor and first Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, at the same time further defining the institution of *ḥuqúqu’lláh*.¹¹ As Guardian, Shoghi Effendi was, above all, the only authorized interpreter of the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Every individual Bahá’í has the right to hold and express his own opinions about the sacred writings

of the Bahá'í Faith. In accordance with the principle of consultation,¹² Shoghi Effendi explains that this even becomes a duty and an obligation.¹³ None of these opinions, however, is authoritative; only 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and after him, Shoghi Effendi as Guardian, had the right to impose their opinions on the Bahá'í community as authoritative interpretations.

One of the key factors that enhanced the position of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian is the fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá states in his *Will and Testament* that the Guardian is to be infallibly guided:

The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh], under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted one [the Báb] (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contendeth with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turned aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him! The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghsán [Branches], the Afnán (Twigs) [relatives of the Báb], the Hands of the Cause of God¹⁴ to show their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him. He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One . . . ¹⁵

The concept that the Guardian is infallibly guided was central to the relationship between the Bahá'ís and Shoghi Effendi. There are two major kinds of infallibility, according to

Bahá'í scripture: the unconditional or innate infallibility of the Manifestation of God, called the Most Great Infallibility, and a conditional or derivative infallibility.¹⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have conditional infallibility because their jurisdiction is limited and they depend upon Bahá'u'lláh for guidance. Their decisions and writings are considered to be inspired (by Bahá'u'lláh) rather than creative in nature, a status reserved for the writings of the Manifestation.¹⁷

Shoghi Effendi himself asserts that his infallibility is limited. He is infallibly guided only while fulfilling his function as Guardian:

The infallibility of the Guardian is confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretation of the teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects, such as economics, science, etc. When he feels that a certain thing is essential for the protection of the Cause, even if it is something that affects a person personally, he must be obeyed, but when he gives *advice*, such as that he gave you in a previous letter about your future, it is not binding; you are free to follow it or not as you please.¹⁸

The Guardian's infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application. Likewise any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith, or its well-being must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith.¹⁹

The Guardian's writings help illustrate when he is or is not infallibly guided. During his ministry, Shoghi Effendi revealed prayers; wrote letters to individuals and Bahá'í institutions interpreting Bahá'í scripture and giving them instructions and encouragement; translated (and thus interpreted) many of the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá; translated and edited the first of two volumes of the historical work, Nabíl's narrative (or *The Dawn-Breakers*) by Mullá Muḥammad-i

Zarandí, Nabíl-i A'zam; wrote an historical survey of the first hundred years of the Bahá'í Faith, *God Passes By*; wrote expositions on various topics explaining different aspects of the Bahá'í Faith to its members, establishing doctrine, and giving Bahá'ís instructions on how to carry out the aims of their religion; and supervised the preparation of an annual reference book, *The Bahá'í World*. Most of his works in interpretation and guidance fall within the limits of his infallibility; some, though, such as his historical works, fall outside this range, except in his interpretation of the theological significance of historical events.²⁰

Early Reaction to the Appointment of Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian, through 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, had been firmly established as the infallibly guided head of the Bahá'í Faith, holding the ultimate responsibility for its protection and propagation. After 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he was the sole authoritative interpreter of its scripture. But his appointment, having been such a well kept secret, was to produce mixed reactions.

Upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death on November 28, 1921, Bahíyyih Khánúm, his sister and the senior member of his family, immediately cabled the important Bahá'í centers: "HIS HOLINESS ABDUL BAHÁ ASCENDED TO ABHA KINGDOM INFORM FRIENDS."²¹ She, and others in the immediate family, by this time knew the contents of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, having examined it to see if he had left any instructions for his burial. On December 21, she informed the American Bahá'í community that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had left full instructions in his will and that they would be informed of them later on.²²

It was necessary to wait for Shoghi Effendi's return from Oxford University, in England, for the will to be officially read since it was addressed to him as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest male descendant. Few outside the family suspected the rank 'Abdu'l-Bahá had bestowed upon Shoghi Effendi. Most Bahá'ís, including Shoghi Effendi himself, were awaiting instructions on how to form the Universal House of Justice.

The Bahá'ís in Palestine prepared themselves to receive the instructions in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will and had a positive, though anxious, outlook. Muḥammad-'Alí, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's excommunicated half brother, sought to establish himself as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's successor.²³ On December 22, Munavvar Khánum, one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's four daughters, wrote to Ruth Wales Randall, a Boston Bahá'í:

He has written His last instructions enclosed in an envelope addressed to Shoghi Effendi—therefore we cannot open it until he arrives, which will be, we hope, about the end of this month, as he is now on his way here.

Dear sister, we ought to prepare ourselves in order to obey every single word which these instructions contain—and if we are assisted from the Kingdom of Abha²⁴ to do this then His departure will be no loss to the Cause but rather a gain, as His spirit will now be free to help us universally!²⁵

This letter was published in the *Star of the West*, a widely read Bahá'í magazine, so that all Bahá'ís could be aware of what was happening. On November 29, Ahmad Tabrizi, then resident in Palestine, wrote to Dr. Zia Bagdadi (residing in America):

The Master has left a will which is His Covenant, written with his own blessed hand. As soon as it is read, I shall write to you what it contains. It is the hour of firmness and the moment of steadfastness. Blessed are those who are faithful to the Cause and loyal to the Covenant.²⁶

Shortly after his arrival in Haifa, on December 29, Shoghi Effendi received a shock. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest male descendant, he had expected to be given some sort of responsibility, probably nothing more than possibly being designated as the convener of the convention to elect the first Universal House of Justice.²⁷ But at the reading of the will, he learned that he had been appointed head of the Bahá'í Faith. The will

was read a second time on January 3, 1922, in front of nineteen Bahá'ís.²⁸ Shoghi Effendi's appointment was announced publicly on January 7.²⁹ Bahiyyih Khánum sent a cable to America on January 16: "IN WILL, SHOUGHI EFFENDI APPOINTED GUARDIAN OF CAUSE AND HEAD OF HOUSE OF JUSTICE."³⁰

In America the reaction to Shoghi Effendi's appointment varied. Most people were surprised and passively accepted the appointment. They did not really know what a Guardian was or what he was supposed to do. Others accepted it eagerly, glad they would still have an individual to turn to for guidance. In the early years of the Guardianship, no one was openly against Shoghi Effendi's appointment. Individuals and groups of Bahá'ís in America sent him and the rest of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family letters and cables of support and confirmation of loyalty. One such was the following:

Beloved of our beloved . . . how our hearts sang with joy at the news that the Master had not left us comfortless but had made you, His beloved, the centre of the unity of His Cause, so that the hearts of all the friends may find peace and certainty.³¹

In the March 1922, issue of *Star of the West*, an article entitled "The Baha'i Revelation—The Religious Need of the Time" included a paragraph explaining that Shoghi Effendi was Guardian of the Cause and head of the House of Justice. This support of Shoghi Effendi, published in the *Star of the West*, shows that very early on at least some of those Bahá'ís in a position to influence others were ready to give their full support to the new Guardian. The editorial in the same issue stated:

The rolling away of the stone of sadness from the tomb of last year's profound grief—because of the disappearance of the physical form of His Holiness Abdul-Baha from this material world—will come through the trumpet call sounded in his last Will and Testament—the *Book of the Covenant*.

And the arising of the united body of the Bahais with the chosen Head and Guardian of the Cause—Shoghi Effendi—to fulfill the commands of God in this great *Book of the Covenant*, will be this new Resurrection.³²

Letters of support were not the only mail that Shoghi Effendi received. The American Bahá'ís were used to pouring out their problems to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, asking his advice on every conceivable subject, important or petty.³³ This dependence was immediately transferred to Shoghi Effendi.

In January 1922, an American wrote to Shoghi Effendi:

As you know we are having great troubles and sorrows with violators in the Cause in America. This poison has penetrated deeply among the friends . . .³⁴

Indeed, at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death, the American Bahá'í community was in the midst of the Reading Room/*Reality Magazine* Covenant-breaking episode, the result of the tension between the pro-organization and the anti-organization elements in the American Bahá'í community.³⁵ The American Bahá'ís did not hesitate to unburden their worries to Shoghi Effendi. This unburdening, although certainly sincere, was often done in the spirit of accusation and with the hope that Shoghi Effendi would pronounce the correspondent to be right and the others wrong.

In February 1922, the House of Spirituality of Chicago wrote a letter to Shoghi Effendi which was carried to him in person by Corinne True, a prominent American Bahá'í, who was to give Shoghi Effendi the details. This letter begins:

To the Guardian of the Cause of God and the Head of the House of Justice Shoghi Effendi Rabbani. May God confirm us to be of his loyal servants who are standing by his Commands.

Beloved of our hearts!

It is indeed needless to say [that from] the time the bolt of the

Most Great Calamity pierced the ear and the heart of every Bahai, our lives have been in utter darkness until the blessed cablegram of the Greatest Holy Leaf [Bahíyyih Khánúm] arrived with the first ray of light, and that is, your appointment by the Merciful Lord as our Guardian . . . ³⁶

The letter continues, saying that it was thanks to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the Bahá'í Faith had begun and grown in Chicago, that the Chicago Bahá'ís had been showered with infinite blessings, but that the tests had been as great as the blessings. Following this they list and briefly explain the four major episodes of Covenant-breaking that had arisen³⁷ and how they had dealt with them. (As the American Bahá'í community was still relatively small, what happened in one area, especially an area as important as Chicago, affected the entire national community.) They complained:

Strange to say that every time a storm swept the City of Chicago, the Chicago House of Spirituality and the loyal friends became the target of bitter criticisms even by some of the prominent friends of other cities, because of our stand for the protection of the Cause. Unfortunately, this attitude of sympathy towards the Nakazeen [Covenant-breakers] has been and is the hardest problem confronting the true Bahais of America. It is the cause of the present agitation.³⁸

Shoghi Effendi was a sensitive person. The state of the Bahá'í community directly affected his emotional state. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had even written in his Will and Testament:

O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi, the twig that hath branched from and the fruit given forth by the two hallowed and Divine Lote-Trees, that no dust of despondency and sorrow may stain his radiant nature, that day by day he may wax greater in happiness, in joy and spirituality, and may grow to become even as a fruitful tree.³⁹

These actions of the American Bahá'í community added greatly to Shoghi Effendi's problems.

Despite being overwhelmed by problems, Shoghi Effendi did not hesitate to begin his work as Guardian or to consolidate his control. He translated 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will into English; he wrote letters to Bahá'ís around the world and to various Bahá'í institutions, encouraging and guiding them; and he directed the formation of local and national spiritual assemblies in the stronger communities.⁴⁰ If Shoghi Effendi had had the complete support of those around him, he might have been able to withstand all the pressures; but he did not. He refused to follow many of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's customs, such as attending mosque on Friday, shocking certain Bahá'ís as well as certain members of his family. These same people also considered the Guardian to be very young, and felt that the Universal House of Justice should be elected as soon as possible.⁴¹

After three months, the responsibility became too much for Shoghi Effendi. Early in April of 1922, he left Palestine for Germany and Switzerland to rest, meditate, and consult with doctors. Before leaving, he appointed Bahíyyih Khánum as temporary head of the Bahá'í Faith. She was to be aided by the other members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family and by an Assembly of nine Bahá'ís, also appointed by Shoghi Effendi.

In April, not long after the Guardian left, Rúḥá Khánum, another of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's daughters, wrote to the American Bahá'ís:

I am glad to say that our dear Protector of the Cause, Shoghi Effendi, is now resting from the work which was so immense. He felt it necessary to go into retreat, in order to pray, and concentrate and meditate on the glorious and difficult task entrusted to him, and to gain the strength needed for its fulfillment.

Shoghi Effendi is precious to all the Bahai friends, for he is our leader, bequeathed to us by Abdul Baha. . . .

I conclude my letter by asking all the dear friends to pray for the family of Abdul Baha that they may receive power to trans-

mute the agony of the parting into determination to help Shoghi Effendi in his work, for indeed we all miss the Master more and more every day! He was all the world to us, our spiritual and our earthly father, our comfort, our hope, our companion and our guide in all the affairs of our daily life.⁴²

Also in April, Shoghi Effendi wrote a letter explaining the reasons for his departure, which was published in *Star of the West*:

This servant, after that grievous event and great calamity—the ascension of His Holiness Abdul-Baha to the Abha Kingdom—has been so stricken with grief and pain and so entangled in the troubles (created) by the enemies of the Cause of God, that I consider my presence here, at such a time and in such an atmosphere, is not in accordance with the fulfillment of my important and sacred duties.

For this reason, unable to do otherwise, I have left for a time the affairs of the Cause, both at home and abroad, under the supervision of the Holy Family and the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf—may my soul be a sacrifice to her—until, by the Grace of God, having gained health, strength, self-confidence and spiritual energy, and having taken into my hands, in accordance with my aim and desire, entirely and regularly the work of service, I shall attain to my utmost spiritual hope and aspiration.⁴³

Shoghi Effendi's retreat was an extended one. In the fall of 1922, Bahíyyih Khánum sent his mother to Switzerland to ask him to return.⁴⁴ He arrived in Haifa on December 15, now ready to pick up the reins of leadership. The next day he cabled America of his return and also wrote a letter which begins:

Now that my long hours of rest and meditation are happily at an end I turn my face with renewed hope and vigour to that vast continent the soil of which is pregnant with those seeds that our be-

loved Master has so tenderly and so profusely scattered in the past. Prolonged though this period has been, yet I have strongly felt ever since the New Day has dawned upon me that such a needed retirement, despite the temporary dislocations it might entail, would far outweigh in its results any immediate service I could have humbly tendered at the Threshold of Baha'Ullah.

I am now confident that the energies of my beloved brethren and sisters across the seas, far from being damped by my sudden disappearance from the field of service, will henceforth be fully maintained, nay redoubled in their intensity, that we may all together carry triumphantly to the uttermost corners of the world the glorious Standard of Baha.⁴⁵

It took Shoghi Effendi longer to adjust to the Guardianship, but he was now over the largest hurdle.

Pro-Organization and Anti-Organization Sentiments in the American Bahá'í Community. Shoghi Effendi's main desire was to develop Bahá'í communities so that the Universal House of Justice could be elected. For this, a strong base of local and national spiritual assemblies was needed, so Shoghi Effendi concentrated on developing the Bahá'í administrative order. Some Bahá'ís were anti-administration though, and it was at this point that opposition to Shoghi Effendi's appointment appeared. In this vein, one woman in particular, Ruth White, went to great effort to try and prove that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will was a forgery.

During the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Bahá'í community was loosely knit and individualistic.⁴⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the source of authority and guidance. Nurturing the new community, he gave the Bahá'ís a great deal of flexibility. For instance, until well into Shoghi Effendi's ministry, Bahá'ís were not required to abandon their previous religious affiliation. Some Bahá'ís even considered the Bahá'í Faith to be more of a spiritual attitude or movement, rather than a religion. Most

Bahá'ís, however, did not hold such an extreme view. They believed the Bahá'í Faith to be a new and independent religion with dogmas, albeit very few.

Ibrahim Kheiralla⁴⁷ had been the leader of the early American Bahá'í community. After his expulsion, the Bahá'ís did not again trust another individual. They relied instead on organizing committees. These embryonic local spiritual assemblies had been initiated by Kheiralla and given a variety of names, such as "Board of Counsel" and so forth. The power of these institutions to initiate rather than just carry out instructions was very limited. They were weak institutions due to what Smith terms as the "fierce individualism" of the American Bahá'ís.⁴⁸ In fact, much of the work of the Bahá'í community was not even done by the Boards of Counsel. Rather Bahá'ís who had the desire and ability took up the work, often bypassing institutions. But a sufficiently large number of Bahá'ís supported these institutions, enough for them to accomplish some things.

In the early years, most Bahá'ís were opposed to any form of organization. The section written by the Bahá'ís for the 1906 Census states:

There is no regular organization of Baha'is, the propagandism being through the medium of assemblies, in which the believers and inquirers meet . . . All are welcome to these meetings, at which questions are answered and scriptures expounded by teachers . . .

The membership is on a society basis and as stated above is not exclusive.⁴⁹

During this period, opposition to organization took a variety of forms. Some people remained on the periphery of the Bahá'í community, never fully associating themselves with this "new version" of the Bahá'í Faith—that is with institutionalized administrative bodies. Smith points out that the tension between the pro- and anti-organization groups was not simply

over who should have authority, but involved a more profound dispute on the very nature of the Bahá'í Faith. Was the Bahá'í Faith a free, completely spiritual movement with no dogmas? Or was it an independent religion with its own laws, system, and doctrines?⁵⁰

Of course, there were not just two extremes. There was also a moderate group which included those Bahá'ís who did not wish to take sides and proposed what they perceived as a moderate approach to be adopted:

the impossibility of organizing the Bahai Cause does not mean that the people cannot organize and co-operate for the accomplishment of the work of the Cause.⁵¹

The development of a form of organization really began when the American Bahá'ís decided to build a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* (or temple), an institution ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be the heart of every town and village. The central building is a house of worship open to people of all religions. This temple is to be surrounded by social, humanitarian, and educational institutions, such as schools, hospitals and hostels. 'Abdu'l-Bahá approved the building of a temple by the American Bahá'ís knowing that such an undertaking would force them to cooperate and establish a form of administration: "... the founding of this *Masrek-el-Azkar* is to be the inception of the organization of the Kingdom."⁵²

By the 1916 Census Report, the Bahá'ís still claimed there was no regular organization, but the various administrative bodies in existence were evolving and beginning to initiate decisions rather than just carry them out. By 1920, the administrative bodies were becoming standardized: women could be elected as members, and they all had nine members.

Before Shoghi Effendi, the Bahá'í Faith in America was basically an informal network of groups whose members had generally been attracted by the broad social and spiritual

teachings in the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'ís remained together only through their attachment to the personalities of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and especially to that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The Bahá'í administrative order began to truly function in 1924. There was a national spiritual assembly, a number of local spiritual assemblies were meeting, and frequent interaction between the national and local levels was established. This last achievement was aided by the establishment of the *Baha'i News Letter* (later simply *Bahá'í News*) which circulated information, and especially Shoghi Effendi's letters, to all American Bahá'ís.

During the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the powers and functions of the present-day Bahá'í administrative institutions were vested in his person. The emphasis of the day was on teaching the Bahá'ís that their inner spiritual lives needed to change and on helping them understand the general ideas within the Bahá'í Faith, such as world unity and unity among religions. The personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which was accessible mainly through pilgrimage to 'Akká, his trip to America, and through letters (Tablets) to individuals, was enough to keep the Bahá'ís working together in relative harmony. What there was of an actual administrative order was more of a reflection of American culture and practices than an apparent precursor to a Bahá'í world order.⁵³

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá died, Shoghi Effendi did not wish to replace his grandfather as a charismatic center toward which the Bahá'ís could turn. Instead, he set about building the administrative order established in theory in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.⁵⁴ The administrative order was intended principally to help the Bahá'ís propagate their religion and unify their community. This unification of diverse membership would come about both through the experience of working together to form the various institutions, such as the local spiritual assembly, and by the institutions themselves, once formed, helping the Bahá'ís to learn to live together as a true spiritual community, to cooperate and work

together in unity as they advanced towards the ultimate goal of establishing the Bahá'í Faith as a major world religion.

Though the task was not easy, today we can see that there was never any doubt that the pro-organization forces would eventually gain ascendancy over the individuals who did not want organization introduced into the movement. This was not only because the pro-organization side, by then, included the larger number of Bahá'ís, but also because they naturally had control over organs, such as *Star of the West*, through which they were able to spread their views.⁵⁵

The transition from a loosely organized movement to a fully organized one could be said to have been finished by 1925. This end was symbolized by Shoghi Effendi's instruction in that year to the American National Spiritual Assembly that the word "assembly" was not to be used to refer to a community as a whole, although for a while afterwards there were still occasional references to an assembly being both or either the community or the local elected body.

The Campaign of Ruth White. Interestingly, it seems that no Bahá'í openly attacked 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will while Shoghi Effendi consolidated his authority. In fact, only a few people ever attacked the validity of this will and disputed the establishment of the Guardianship, Ruth White being the first. In reality, she was attacking the administrative order being established by Shoghi Effendi.

White was squarely in the anti-organization camp. She felt strongly that organized religion was the bane of society. She had been attracted to the Bahá'í Faith during the days of 'Abdu'l-Bahá because, at that time, the Bahá'ís taught that the Bahá'í Faith was trying to lead society to a universal consciousness. She felt that the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly explained that this universal consciousness excluded all forms of organization.

White knew and accepted that nine Bahá'ís living in the

same locality could form an assembly, but, according to her, this was not obligatory.⁵⁷ According to White, the purpose of an assembly was to promote international good will and to help propagate the Bahá'í Faith.⁵⁸ It had nothing to do with the House of Justice ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, nor had it any authority to govern the Bahá'í community. She believed that when the majority of the world became Bahá'í and achieved a spiritual state, people would automatically replace their current laws and forms of government with those revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The senates and parliaments would be replaced by Houses of Justice, and these would establish the Universal House of Justice. The Houses of Justice, which would have the right to control the finances of a new world government, would put into effect the *ḥuqúqu'lláh*, equalizing the wealth of the world and eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty.⁵⁹ These Houses of Justice for her were the true form of government and were not to be a sectarian organization for a religion as she felt assemblies were.

White had always avoided participating in any aspect of Bahá'í activity that seemed tainted by organization. She was proud that she had never been a member of a spiritual assembly.⁶⁰ She had been offered the chance to travel as a paid teacher to propagate the Bahá'í Faith, but she had refused this offer because she felt it would close the door to further spiritual enlightenment. She wanted to keep her religious experience free from materialism and love of leadership.⁶¹

Shoghi Effendi's English translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will arrived in America in February 1922. Horace Holley, a prominent American Bahá'í and one of the leaders of the pro-organization movement, read it to a gathering of Bahá'ís at which White was present. In her attacks at a later date, she states that:

The appointment of a successor came as a thunderbolt out of a clear sky to all the Bahais, as Abdul Baha had given no hint that he intended to appoint a successor.⁶²

Even as Holley was reading the will, White asserts that she found it very hard to accept. She had many doubts, such as why 'Abdu'l-Bahá had appointed Shoghi Effendi as Guardian when, according to White, everything he had said and written indicated that he had never meant to appoint a successor. And the *huququ'lláh* gave Shoghi Effendi more "potential power and wealth than a king and pope combined."⁶³ After the reading, according to White: "Those present filed out of the room shocked into silence."⁶⁴ White states that she did not want to condemn the will right away. She would wait to see what Shoghi Effendi would do as Guardian. She felt that the results of his actions would be one of the proofs of the will's authenticity. "Time and circumstances," she said, "would eventually cause the truth to become known."⁶⁵

White soon became unhappy with the development of the Bahá'í Faith under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi. She felt that spiritual assemblies were gradually assuming the position of Houses of Justice, with their original purpose being forgotten. She believed that the Bahá'í Faith was becoming commercialized. She was against Bahá'ís being asked to contribute money to their religion and was not at all sure that the money she did contribute was being used for what she contributed it for.⁶⁶

White was strongly disturbed by the incorporation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada and by the contents of its by-laws. She had a particular dislike for Horace Holley, then the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, and called him the leader of the "sectarian, dogmatic group"⁶⁷ that was primarily responsible for allowing the Bahá'í Scriptures to be misinterpreted. In 1926, White traveled to many Bahá'í communities in large cities, unsuccessfully seeking to convince them of her views on Bahá'í organization.⁶⁸ She also tried to persuade Mary Hanford Ford (d. 1937) to support her. White considered Ford the leader of the group wishing for a more moderate form of organization.⁶⁹ In this effort she was also unsuccessful.

White had contributed to the Mount Carmel Fund (to buy land around the Shrine of the Báb). She asked the National Spiritual Assembly to tell her how much land had been bought with her contribution: the number and size of the lots and where they were situated. The National Spiritual Assembly informed her that her contribution had been pooled with others. White then wished to know who these "others" were; the National Spiritual Assembly informed her that this was confidential information. Because she had contributed money and could not get an exact financial statement, White decided to expand her anti-organization campaign.

In 1927, White began a one-woman campaign to prove the falseness of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will by demanding a photographic copy of it from Horace Holley:

I request that you, in your official capacity as one of the officers of this organization, present to me legal evidence that your organization, in its acceptance of Shoghi Effendi as the successor of Abdul Baha, is founded on a legal claim, by presenting to me, on or before the 19th day of January, 1928, an authentic photocopy of this document which purports to be the will of Abdul Baha.⁷⁰

The National Spiritual Assembly tried to resolve White's doubts. Letters were exchanged with the National Spiritual Assembly presenting various proofs of the will's authenticity. Mountford Mills, a lawyer who was in Haifa at the beginning of Shoghi Effendi's ministry, also wrote to White in an attempt to answer her questions, but she was not satisfied. The National Spiritual Assembly then invited her to meet with it, which she did in February 1928. Nothing was resolved by this meeting. The National Spiritual Assembly then sent for photographic copies of the will. They also wrote to Shoghi Effendi their consensus that White was not mentally responsible for her actions, that she claimed to be acting on a command that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had given to her in a dream, and that she felt she was protecting 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í Faith

from its enemies.⁷¹ White's opinion that she was protecting 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í Faith is quite apparent throughout her writing, as is her belief that she was "guided" by higher powers.⁷²

In the meantime White, not completely trusting the National Spiritual Assembly, went to London where she obtained a photocopy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will. Her photocopies were partly illegible. By the time she returned to New York in May 1928, the photographs of the will had arrived at the National Spiritual Assembly's office. She used these to replace her sheets that were illegible.

White then wanted to hire the best handwriting expert she could find. The first person she approached would not take the job, but advised her to examine the will from a spiritual, literary, and scientific point of view: "spiritual" meaning whether the contents of the will agreed with the known teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "literary" meaning the style of his writing, and "scientific" meaning an analysis of the handwriting. She was also advised that it would be preferable to examine the original document, rather than a photocopy.

The handwriting expert she consulted recommended that she contact a British analyst in Palestine. Not being able to find one, White wrote to the High Commissioner of Palestine in December 1928, asking him to investigate the authenticity of the will. The Chief Secretary replied that he was not interested in examining the will, and he went so far as to advise White to hire a lawyer if she wished to examine it.⁷³

White decided that it was time she undertook the task of proving that the contents of the will did not agree with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings. In 1930, she published *Abdul Baha's Alleged Will is Fraudulent* as an appendix to *The Bahai Religion and Its Enemy, the Bahai Organization*. It was in the appendix that she publicly challenged the will's authenticity.

She then went to London and hired Dr. C. Ainsworth Mitchell, a handwriting expert who worked in the British Museum. She gave him the photocopies of the will to analyze.

She also gave him a photographic copy of two signatures and an inscription by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and a photocopy of another inscription.

Dr. Mitchell sent her a report in June 1930. He prefaced his conclusions with:

In the absence of an opportunity to examine the original document, any conclusions to be drawn from an examination of the photographic enlargements must necessarily be of a provisional character contingent upon the accuracy of the photographic records. Moreover, some of the facts which are taken into consideration in the scientific examination of an original document cannot be perfectly studied in a photographic reproduction, such as, for example, the ink, paper, penstrokes, and so on.⁷⁴

With this grave reservation and two other qualifications, Mitchell still felt that there was enough positive evidence to conclude that the writing of the will was not 'Abdu'l-Bahá's.

Shoghi Effendi counseled the American Bahá'ís to ignore White as nothing could come of her efforts. He felt it unnecessary to comment on the question of the authenticity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will. For Shoghi Effendi, White was only the symptom of a problem. He paid little attention to her but dealt with the root of the problem itself, that is the Bahá'ís' lack of understanding of the nature of the Bahá'í administrative order he was developing.

White's efforts brought her insignificant results. Even Ahmad Sohrab, who also opposed the Bahá'í administrative order, and was eventually expelled from the Bahá'í community as a Covenant-breaker, attested to the validity of the Will:

I have seen countless examples of his handwriting and have watched him as he wrote letter after letter. Through those years of close association I became fully familiar with the turns, strokes and trims of the calligraphy as used by him, which in Persian is called *Shekasteh*. I have read and copied volumes of his works and am thoroughly conversant with his choice of words, his mode of

expression and his manner of phraseology. I have listened to his talks, translated his Tablets by the hundreds and interpreted his lectures before all manner of audiences, both in the East and in the West. Besides these experiences, I have in my possession numerous examples of his handwriting, more than a hundred of which are in the form of Tablets addressed to me, some of the latter wholly in the Master's handwriting; the majority simply signed by him. Now, I have compared the photostat copies of the Will with the handwriting of Abdul Baha which is in my possession, and I find that both are written by the same person.

Therefore, I can assert, without any hesitation and with no mental reservations, that the Will and Testament was written, signed and sealed by Abdul Baha, every word being in his own handwriting.⁷⁵

Shoghi Effendi's Response. Shoghi Effendi's self-proclaimed main task was to continue the work begun by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, especially to complete the transformation of the Bahá'í Faith into an organized, independent, institution-oriented religion. In order to accomplish this, he heavily emphasized the expansion of the Bahá'í communities in the West. An important goal for him was to have the Universal House of Justice elected, thereby permitting the Bahá'í administrative order to enter into its final stage of evolution and advancement. The administrative order, in turn, was the first step in the development of Bahá'u'lláh's world order and the attainment of the Most Great Peace. The administrative order was to be the foundation of this world order.

Before Shoghi Effendi could arrange for the election of the Universal House of Justice, it was first necessary that the Bahá'í Faith be firmly established around the world. The Universal House of Justice was to consist of the elected representatives of an international community. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had considered having the Universal House of Justice elected in his lifetime, but he was unable to do so because of the conditions under the Turkish regime.⁷⁶ However, it was necessary that local spiritual assemblies, and especially national spiritual

assemblies (whose members, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will, are to elect the Universal House of Justice), be "harmoniously, vigorously, and efficiently functioning throughout the Bahá'í world."⁷⁷ These institutions are the "bedrock" of the Universal House of Justice and, therefore, it could not be elected until the local and national spiritual assemblies functioned properly. Therefore, Shoghi Effendi explained, Bahá'ís who longed for the world order of Bahá'u'lláh and the Most Great Peace to come would work to strengthen these assemblies. This necessarily included attaining a better understanding of their purpose and helping them to work in a spirit of unity.⁷⁸

Shoghi Effendi's first and primary task was the expansion of the number of Bahá'ís around the world, followed closely by an increase in the number of local spiritual assemblies and, as soon as possible, the number of national spiritual assemblies. Continuing the work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi first worked to firmly establish the Bahá'í Faith in America. White's attack contributed to this development, since it caused Shoghi Effendi to begin to synthesize and expound those doctrines in the Bahá'í Faith which would lay a solid foundation for expansion and give the Bahá'ís a more profound understanding of their religion, especially of the administrative order and world order.

In February 1929, and in March 1930, Shoghi Effendi wrote two letters outlining the nature and development of the Bahá'í administrative order and the world order of Bahá'u'lláh, at the same time answering White's attacks on the administration he was developing.⁷⁹ These two letters began what would become a series of letters outlining the world order of Bahá'u'lláh, the goal towards which all Bahá'ís are working.

In the first of these letters, Shoghi Effendi explains that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will, along with the Kitáb-i Aqdas, are the basic documents of the future Bahá'í civilization and that the establishment of this civilization is the "primary mission of

the Bahá'í Faith."⁸⁰ The *Will and Testament* and the Kitáb-i Aqdas are closely linked documents. They have the same purpose and use the same methods. They are complementary and confirm one another. They are "inseparable parts of one complete unit."⁸¹ When one compares the contents of the will to the rest of the Bahá'í scriptures, one sees that it conforms to them in spirit and letter. The Kitáb-i Aqdas, he states, even anticipates the institutions 'Abdu'l-Bahá created in his will.

Whereas Shoghi Effendi did not feel it necessary to discuss the authenticity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will, he did deal specifically with the issues underlying the conflict between the pro-organization and anti-organization sides of the American Bahá'í community, that is the "essential unity" of the spiritual, social, and administrative principles of the Bahá'í Faith.⁸²

Most of the problems, according to Shoghi Effendi, stemmed from certain Bahá'ís clinging to one poorly translated statement made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, completely ignoring his written statements. The translator had either been unable to properly understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or to properly translate what he had understood. This was an example of why Shoghi Effendi consistently discouraged Bahá'ís from relying on reports of oral statements as being either authentic or accurate.⁸³

Shoghi Effendi denied he was innovating anything. Rather, everything he did had firm roots in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will, the Kitáb-i Aqdas, and many other Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The local spiritual assembly and the Universal House of Justice had been ordained in the Kitáb-i Aqdas. The national spiritual assembly and the method of its election was described not only in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will, but also in many of his other Tablets. Local spiritual assemblies had existed during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and he also established the institutions of local and national funds:

The concentration of authority in the hands of the elected representatives of the believers; the necessity of the submission of every adherent of the Faith to the considered judgment of Bahá'í

Assemblies; ['Abdu'l-Bahá's] preference for unanimity in decision; the decisive character of the majority vote; and even the desirability for the exercise of close supervision over all Bahá'í publications, have been sedulously instilled by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as evidenced by His authenticated and widely-scattered Tablets. To accept His broad and humanitarian Teachings on one hand, and to reject and dismiss with neglectful indifference His more challenging and distinguishing precepts, would be an act of manifest disloyalty to that which He has cherished most in his life.⁸⁴

Shoghi Effendi expressed compassion and pity for White in the World Order letters. Many of her arguments against the will, he said, were nonsensical. For example, how could it be believed that Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, who opposed 'Abdu'l-Bahá, could work with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family to produce a will which recounts much of what he had done to hurt 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í Faith.

As to the need for an organization, this, he felt, should be obvious when one sees:

the international character of the Cause, its far-flung ramifications, the increasing complexity of its affairs, the diversity of its adherents, and the state of confusion that assails on every side the infant Faith of God . . . ⁸⁵

Organization was an integral part of the Bahá'í Faith:

To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.⁸⁶

Organization was needed to insure "the unity of the Faith, the preservation of its identity, and the protection of its interest."⁸⁷ But, Shoghi Effendi emphasized, it was just a means, and not an end in itself. It was an instrument through which

Bahá'u'lláh could work—not a substitute. There should be no rigidity in Bahá'í administration. In order for the nascent Bahá'í institutions to succeed, it was necessary for them to develop:

their capacity to further the interests, to coordinate the activities, to apply the principles, to embody the ideals and execute the purpose of the Bahá'í Faith.⁸⁸

The Fund, Shoghi Effendi states, is also a Bahá'í institution, one that is completely voluntary in nature. General appeals can be made for Bahá'ís to financially support the work of the Bahá'í institutions, but there should be no form of coercion or solicitation. Supporting teachers and administrators financially was a temporary necessity. The World Unity conferences White so opposed were an experiment to test the validity of an indirect approach in the propagation work.⁸⁹

In the second World Order letter, Shoghi Effendi deals primarily with the institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, their powers and prerogatives. Shoghi Effendi explains that these institutions are two of the unique features of the Bahá'í Faith. They are sources of divine guidance, and this guidance clearly has its roots in Bahá'í scripture. This he claims, is unlike any of the institutions of Christianity or Islam, which do not clearly derive their authority from their holy scriptures.

The Aftermath of Ruth White's Campaign. Even White's husband could not continue to support her. In 1941, he contacted the Spiritual Assembly of Los Angeles and informed them that he wished to reenter the Bahá'í Faith.⁹⁰ The condition demanded for his reentry was that he sever all association with his wife, who was continuing her fight against the Bahá'í administration. He was not able to do this, so he was not accepted back.⁹¹ White herself appears eventually to have lost interest not only in her fight, but also in the Bahá'í Faith. In

1946, she became attracted to Mehr Baba. Later, she became a devotee. In 1969, a 100-year-old White left for India "to take Mehr Baba's Daushan."⁹²

White did manage to convince a few German Bahá'ís of her claims. They formed the "Bahai World Union." But this group, which still exists under a different name, has had little effect.

Wilhelm Herrigel was the founder of the Bahai World Union. Only a few Bahá'ís followed him, and when he died in 1932, many of them returned to the Bahá'í community.⁹³ In 1937, the Bahai World Union, along with the Bahá'í Faith, was banned by the Nazi government. After that, the Bahai World Union "practically no longer existed."⁹⁴ The few remaining "Free Bahais" (as they call themselves) formed the World Union for Universal Religion and Universal Peace.

Hermann Zimmer, a "Free Bahá'í," published a polemic, *A Fraudulent Testament Devalues the Bahai Religion into Political Shoghism*, which was translated into English in 1973, and widely distributed around the world. Zimmer maintains that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will is false for many of the same reasons that White does. He feels that the contents of the will contradict all the other teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and that Shoghi Effendi's actions, and his development of an administrative order, corrupted the Bahá'í Faith into a political organization devoid of spirituality.⁹⁵

Conclusion. It seems that Bahá'ís have managed so far, although sometimes with difficulty, to weather transitional periods and to withstand attempts to create permanent schisms within their ranks. In the case of the establishment of the Guardianship, White and the Bahai World Union were unsuccessful in attracting any significant following. In 1963, five and a half years after Shoghi Effendi's death, the Bahá'í community had developed sufficiently to elect the first Universal House of Justice, the culmination of Shoghi Effendi's efforts toward the development of the Bahá'í administrative order.

NOTES

1. Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of his covenant. The doctrine of the covenant is central to Bahá'í theology. Bahá'ís believe that God, through Abraham, made a pact with man to never leave him without guidance. This is called the Greater or Eternal Covenant. Man's part of this pact is to obey God's messengers, that is the prophets of God. Each religion also has a Lesser Covenant, that is the pact made between the prophet and his followers in regards to his successor. This aspect of the covenant has, according to Bahá'ís, been made explicit for the first time in the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as his successor in the Kitáb-i Aqdas (Most Holy Book) and the Kitáb-i Ahd (Book of the Covenant). 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in turn, arranged for his succession, again with a written will and testament. The Bahá'ís are therefore obligated to obey the current head of the Bahá'í community. Procedures exist to insure the unity and stability of the Bahá'í Faith. In extreme cases, if the authority of the head of the Bahá'í Faith is attacked, or an attempt is made to usurp this authority, then the Bahá'í involved may be declared a Covenant-breaker (*náqid-i mitháq*) and excommunicated.

2. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest grandson.

3. The Universal House of Justice is the supreme legislative body in the Bahá'í Faith and currently has ultimate responsibility for the Bahá'í community.

4. An important doctrine of the Bahá'í Faith is progressive revelation. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that God can be known only through prophets (or manifestations of God, in Bahá'í terminology) who perfectly reflect the attributes and qualities of God. From time to time, when a renewal of God's teachings is needed, God sends a prophet. These prophets renew the spiritual teachings of God and reveal new social teachings which regenerate an ever-advancing civilization. Bahá'ís believe that there is only one religion of God, and it is progressively revealed to man through each prophet.

'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi prepared and forewarned the Bahá'ís of the many stages they would have to traverse before their ultimate goal was attained. Bahá'ís believe that their religion is currently in the midst of a transition and that its emergence from a state of "unmitigated obscurity" to one of "active repression"

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 15.) began in the late 1970s with the most recent wave of persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Active repression is still primarily a problem only in the Middle East.

5. *Star of the West*, IV, no. 16, p. 268.

6. This translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas was made by Anton Haddad (c. 1900) and was passed around among the early American Bahá'ís in manuscript form. (Helen S. Goodall Papers, National Bahá'í Archives.) A more recent translation of the same passage follows: "The endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. No one has the right to lay hold on them without leave from the Dawning-Place of Revelation. After Him the decision rests with the Aghṣán (Branches), and after them with the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then . . ." (Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 41.)

The author wishes to thank the National Bahá'í Archives of the United States for having provided her with the extract of Haddad's translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas regarding endowments.

7. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 15.

8. Isaiah 11:6.

9. Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 2; Furutan states that this tablet was written in 1902 (Furutan, "Essay," 3).

10. For examples of the Bahá'ís' fascination with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, see Peter Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community."

The other references to an intended successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá either were not available to the Western Bahá'ís or were made available after the time period under consideration. It would be of interest, however, to note them here.

Dr. Yúnis Khán, then staying in 'Akká, asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá in reference to his letter to an American Bahá'í: "... someone has written to me from America that we have heard the Master has said that the one whose appearance will follow me has recently been born and is in this world. If this is so we are answered, but if this is not so then—? Yúnis Khán, records in his diary, "After waiting a moment, with a look full of meaning and secret exaltation, He said: 'Yes, this is true.' " (Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 2; Furutan, "Essay," p. 3)

Not long before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death, he informed the Spiritual Assembly of Tehran that it was to transfer the registration of all

deeds of Bahá'í property into the name Shoghi Effendi. (Furutan, "Essay," p. 3; Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 47.)

Three Persians once asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá, if any one person would succeed him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who had already written his will, replied: "As to the question ye have asked me, know verily that this is a well-guarded secret. It is given as a gem concealed within its shell. That it will be revealed is predestined. The time will come when its light will appear, when its evidences will be made manifest, and its secrets unraveled. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 150.)

The following account of a 1910 conversation that Dr. J. Fallscheer, a German who was not a Bahá'í, had with 'Abdu'l-Bahá is another reference. It appeared in the German Bahá'í magazine *Sonne der Wahrheit* in 1930: "At first I did not notice that behind the tall, dignified man his eldest son, Shoghi Effendi, had entered the room and greeted his venerable grandfather with the oriental kiss on the hand. I had already seen the child fleetingly on a few other occasions. Behia Khanum [Bahíyyih Khánúm, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister] had recently informed me that this young boy of perhaps twelve years of age was the oldest direct male descendent of the family of the Prophet and destined to be the only successor and representative (vazir) of the Master. . . . After [Shoghi Effendi's] father and the man with him had taken their leave of the Master, his father whispered something to him as he went out, whereupon the youth, in a slow and measured manner, like a grown up person, approached his beloved grandfather, waited to be addressed, answered distinctly in Persian and was laughingly dismissed, not, however, without being first permitted the respectful kiss on the hand. I was impressed by the way the youth walked backwards as he left the room, and how his dark, true-hearted eyes never for a moment wavered from the blue, magical glance of his grandfather.

"Abbas Effendi ['Abdu'l-Bahá] rose and came over to us. . . . As usual in silence we waited for Him to speak to us, which he did shortly: 'Now my daughter,' he began, 'How do you like my future Elisha?' 'Master, if I may speak openly, I must say that in his boy's face are the dark eyes of a sufferer, one who will suffer a great deal!' Thoughtfully the Master looked beyond us into space and after a long time turned His gaze back to us and said: 'My grandson does not have the eyes of a trailblazer, a fighter or a victor, but in

his eyes one sees deep loyalty, perseverance and conscientiousness. And do you know why, my daughter, he will fall heir to the heavy inheritance of being my Vazir (Minister, occupant of a high post)? Without waiting for my reply, looking more at His dear sister than at me, as if He had forgotten my presence, He went on: 'Bahá'u'lláh . . . chose this insignificant one to be His successor, not because I was the first born, but because His inner eye had already discerned on my brow the seal of God.

"Before His ascension into eternal Light, the blessed Manifestation reminded me that I too—irrespective of primogeniture or age—must observe among my sons and grandsons whom God would indicate for His office. My sons passed to eternity in their tenderest years, in my line, among my relatives, only little Shoghi has the shadow of a great calling in the depths of his eyes. . . ." (Universal House of Justice, to Francesco Ficicchia, 2 October 1974. In private hands. Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl*, pp. 11-12.)

11. The *huqúqu'lláh* (the Right of God) is a tax (19% of one's profits), ordained in the Kitáb-i Aqdas, to be paid to the head of the Bahá'í Faith.

12. For a brief description of the Bahá'í doctrine of consultation, the Bahá'í method of decision making, see *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 42-43.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

14. The institution of the Hands of the Cause of God is comprised of individuals who have a purely advisory function. They are responsible for promoting the spiritualization of the Bahá'í community in order to ensure the propagation and protection of the Bahá'í Faith.

15. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will*, p. 11.

16. For more information on the Bahá'í doctrine of infallibility, see the forthcoming *La Foi bahá'íe* by Loni Bramson-Lerche (Centre Cerfaux-Lefort, Université Catholique de Louvain) and Juan Cole, *The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings*.

17. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 68.

18. Shoghi Effendi's secretary, on his behalf, to John Ashton, 17 October 1944, quoted in National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to Shoghi Effendi, 26 March 1945. National Spiritual Assembly records, National Bahá'í Archives.

19. Shoghi Effendi's secretary, on his behalf, dated 1956, quoted in the Universal House of Justice to Richard Grieser, 25 July 1974. In private hands.

20. Shoghi Effendi was a skilled and meticulous researcher, but he did make mistakes, as he had to rely on the historical evidence available to him. *God Passes By* may be taken as an example. On page 76, Shoghi Effendi states that Sulaymán Názim Bey, a Turkish author and poet, wrote a book on the Bábís. The man who wrote the book was Sulaymán Nazif Bey. On page 159, Shoghi Effendi writes that Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Şafá aided the Persian Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Mushíru'd-Dawlih, Mírzá Husayn Khán, in damaging Bahá'u'lláh's reputation during the Istanbul period. The man's name was not Husayn, but Ridá-Qulí. A last example is on page 163, where Shoghi Effendi erroneously states that Abú-Jahl was an uncle of Muḥammad. The person he wished to refer to was Abú-Lahab. (The author wishes to thank Drs. Denis MacEoin and Moojan Momen for locating these three examples of historical error in *God Passes By*.)

21. *Star of the West*, XII (12 December 1921) p. 245.

22. *Ibid.* (2 March 1922) p. 303. America, as used in this article, refers to the United States and Canada.

23. Bahá'u'lláh, in his will and testament, had appointed Muḥammad-'Alí interpreter of his writings and head of the Bahá'í Faith after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death. But Muḥammad-'Alí tried, from the time of Bahá'u'lláh's death, to usurp 'Abdu'l-Bahá's position. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in his will, declared that Muḥammad-'Alí was "cut off from the Holy Tree" because of his activities and could no longer succeed him. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will*, p. 9.) For more information on this matter see Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, specifically ch. 5.

24. The realm of life after death. Bahá'ís believe that, through prayer, souls in the Abhá Kingdom can aid people who are still on this earth.

25. *Star of the West*, XII (12 December 1921) p. 276.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

27. Recorded talk by Leroy Ioas; see also Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 43.

28. Furutan, "Essay," p. 2.

29. *Ibid.*; *ihá'í News*, no. 511, p. 10.

30. *Star of the West*, XII, (12 December 1921) p. 258.

31. Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, pp. 50-51.

32. *Star of the West*, XIII, no. 1, p. 16.

33. Ahmad Sohrab, a one-time secretary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, wrote of him: "The many different problems of the Bahá'í world are solved by him. Now he writes to Persia on how to hold an election, then he writes to far-off America on how to rent a hall. One Bahai desires to know whether she should cook food for her child; another person asks how to proceed to buy a piece of land. There are some misunderstandings in this assembly to be removed; the feelings of some person are ruffled and must be smoothed down. One man's mother or father is dead, he requests a Tablet of Visitation. Another desires to have a wife. To one a child is born, she begs for a Bahá'í name; another has taught several souls, he asks for Bahá'í rings for them. This man has had business reverses, he must be encouraged, another has fallen from a ladder, he implores a speedy recovery. One has quarrelled with his wife, and he wants advice on how to be reconciled; another supplicates for blessings on his marriage." (Ahmad Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp. 136-37, quoted in Smith, "The American Community," pp. 105-06.)

34. Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 50.

35. Luella Kirchner, a Chicago Bahá'í, opened a Reading Room which espoused the teachings of W. W. Harmon, a Boston Bahá'í who gave the Bahá'í teachings a metaphysical and occult interpretation. In 1917, the conflict between the Reading Room supporters and the supporters of Bahá'í Temple Unity, an organization created to build the temple, came to a head. The Reading Room Bahá'ís were excommunicated for trying to usurp the authority of the Chicago House of Spirituality, the local administrative body. (See Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community", pp. 189-94.)

36. Chicago House of Spirituality to Shoghi Effendi, 2 February 1922. National Spiritual Assembly records. National Bahá'í Archives.

37. The Chicago House of Spirituality listed several different Covenant-breaking episodes. However these were actually spinoffs of two major episodes: one centered around Ibrahim Kheiralla, the first Bahá'í teacher in America, and the second around the Chicago

Reading Room. (See Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community," pp. 93-99, 111-12, 183-85, and 189-94.)

38. Chicago House of Spirituality to Shoghi Effendi, 2 February 1922.

39. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will*, p. 25.

40. The national spiritual assemblies and local spiritual assemblies combine legislative, judicial, and executive functions in order to regulate the day-to-day affairs of the Bahá'í community.

41. Rabbání, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 55.

42. *Star of the West*, XIII, no. 5, pp. 119-20.

43. *Ibid.*, no. 4, pp. 81-82.

44. Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 63.

45. *Star of the West*, XIII, no. 11, p. 299.

46. The section to follow on the growth of an administrative structure in the American Bahá'í community is partially drawn from Smith "The American Bahá'í Community" and Bramson "The Bahá'í Faith in the United States."

47. See note 37.

48. Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community," p. 139.

49. U.S. Bureau of Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, p. 42.

50. Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community," p. 140.

51. Dime, Eric, "Is the Millennium Upon Us?" *Forum*, LVIII (1917) p. 175; quoted in Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community," p. 141.

52. Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community," p. 20; Bramson, "The Bahá'í Faith," p. 41.

The literal translation of *mashriqu'l-adhkar* is "dawning point of the mention of God."

53. *The Bahá'í World*, III, pp. 105-06.

54. See, for instance, the Kitáb-i Aqdas and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will and testament.

55. See for example, the editorial in *Star of the West*, XIII, no. 8, p. 219, and the article prepared on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly by three prominent Bahá'ís, Louis Gregory, Agnes Parsons, and Marian Haney, in *Star of the West*, XIII, no. 12, pp. 323-28.

56. See, for example, *Bahá'í News*, no. 10, p. 5.

57. In the Kitáb-i Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh ordains that in every city a House of Justice is to be found. The term local spiritual assembly is being temporarily used for this body while the Bahá'í administrative order is still in an early stage of development. A local spiritual assembly is now elected annually by all adult Bahá'ís living within its jurisdiction. The local spiritual assembly has authority over all local affairs and activities within its community. It is responsible for the protection and propagation of the Bahá'í Faith within its area, as well as for: handling all marriages and divorces; aiding the poor, sick, disabled, orphans, and widows within its community; arranging holy day commemorations and other meetings; and providing for the material and spiritual education of the children in the community.

58. White, *Is the Bahai Organization the Enemy of the Bahai Religion?*, p. 8.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

60. In the use of the word "assembly" here, White used a contemporary definition. During the ministry of Shoghi Effendi the term was used to refer only to either a local or national spiritual assembly. An assembly at the time of the reading of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will was considered to be any gathering of Bahá'ís and/or people interested in the Bahá'í Faith where the Bahá'í teachings were studied. The few administrative bodies that existed at the time were usually called Boards of Council, Houses of Spirituality, or Executive Boards.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 5. In the beginning, subsidizing teachers to proselytize was controversial. Kheiralla had emphasized in his teachings that all truth must be given free. If the teacher was paid, his message would be corrupted and an unhealthy love of power would develop. Early opponents of paying teachers also believed that this would lead to the development of a clergy. (There are no priests or clergy in the Bahá'í Faith.) But some subsidization was always done. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá increased the responsibilities of the American Bahá'ís for spreading the Bahá'í Faith, this became increasingly more common. When White was offered a position as a paid teacher, this practice was better accepted, but as is evidenced by her reaction, some controversy still surrounded it.

There is, in fact, a passage from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh

which implies that the support of Bahá'í teachers is not only permissible, but, in some cases, a moral obligation: "Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation . . ." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 196-97.)

62. White *Bahá'í Organization*, p. 3.

63. White, *Abdul Baha's Questioned Will and Testament*, p. 27.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

65. White, *Bahá'í Organization*, p. 4.

66. Some of the ongoing projects of White's time were the building of the American Bahá'í temple; buying land on Mt. Carmel, in Israel, surrounding the Shrine of the Báb; the development of a permanent Bahá'í school at Green Acre, Maine; and organized activities to propagate the religion, especially the World Unity Conferences.

67. White, *Bahá'í Organization*, p. 18.

68. Zimmer, *Fraudulent Testament*, p. 17.

69. White, *Bahá'í Organization*, p. 18. Mary Hanford Ford, an art critic, was a prominent, international proponent of the Bahá'í Faith. She became a Bahá'í in the early 1900s and was previously a spiritist.

70. White, *Abdul Baha's Will*, p. 42.

71. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada to Shoghi Effendi, 7 March 1928. National Spiritual Assembly records. National Bahá'í Archives.

72. In the early years of the American Bahá'í community, many Bahá'ís were occultists, including those who believed they had acquired special knowledge or instructions through dreams or visions. As the community grew, the number of occultists declined. In 1917-1918, the orthodox Bahá'ís tried to expunge the esoteric Bahá'ís from the community. This was the Chicago Reading Room affair. 'Abdu'l-Bahá discouraged esoteric beliefs and warned the Bahá'ís against tampering with psychic forces. (See Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community," pp. 91, 92, 113-14, 121, 125, 126, 139-40, 161-70, 189-94.)

73. White, *Abdul-Baha's Will*, p. 55.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

75. *New History*, XII, no. 4, pp. 9-10.
 76. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 7.
 77. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 41.
 78. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 79. See Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 3-26.
 80. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
 81. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
 82. *Ibid.*
 83. Bahá'ís call reports of oral statements by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or Shoghi Effendi "pilgrim's notes."
 84. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 6.
 85. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
 86. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 87. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 88. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
 89. The indirect approach, for Bahá'ís, is a method of teaching the Bahá'í Faith in which one talks about the Bahá'í principles without mentioning the station of Bahá'u'lláh or even, at times, the religion.
 90. Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Los Angeles to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, 1 July 1941. Assembly records. Los Angeles Bahá'í Archives, Los Angeles, Calif.
 91. Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 120; White had been declared a Covenant-breaker. Her husband had also been so declared, since he continued to associate with her.
 92. Mollie Lux of the Mehr Spiritual Center, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to J. Anthony Siström, undated, quoted in Miller, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 262.
 93. Zimmer, *Fraudulent Testament*, p. 105.
 94. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
 95. Zimmer did go beyond what White wrote by putting forth what he considered to be additional proof of the falsity of the will. His arguments are historical and linguistic.
- Zimmer's historical proof stems from his conviction that Shoghi Effendi must have used the Donation of Constantine (an eleventh-century forgery used in the Middle Ages to bolster the authority of

the pope) as a model for the falsification of a will and testament for 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He finds twenty-five parallels between the two which, he asserts, conclusively prove their connection: 1) Both documents are long; 2) Both consist of two parts—'Abdu'l-Bahá's will has three parts, but Zimmer insists that the third part is only a repetition of the first and which, in fact, only existed in translation; 3) The will was supposedly signed, sealed, and written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the Donation was supposedly signed and dated by Constantine, the emperor of Rome; 4) According to Zimmer, the first hint that there was to be a Guardian came only after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death, and likewise the Donation of Constantine was forged well after the death of its alleged author; and so forth.

Zimmer also produces three pages of linguistic comparison between 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, originally written in Persian, and Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By*, an English history of the Bahá'í Cause. Zimmer, with neither Persian nor English, relied for his comparison on a German translation of *God Passes By* and a German translation of the English translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will. Nonetheless, Zimmer states that with these translations in hand anybody can follow his linguistic analysis. (Zimmer, *Fraudulent Testament*, pp. 18–21)

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