The Báb's Mystical Commentary on the Hadith[1] of the Maid[2] (*Hadith al-Jāriyyah*) and the Knowledge of the Unseen

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Introduction and background

The *Hadith al-Jāriyyah* stands among the most renowned Islamic narrations concerning the knowledge of the Unseen (ʿIlm al-Ghayb) possessed by the Imāms. Its original form may be found in *Usūl al-Kāfī*,[4] the classical Shi'í compilation of ḥadīth. The narration recounts that Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq sought to punish one of His maids. On a particular occasion, she fled and concealed herself within a chamber, and even the Imām, exalted in station, did not immediately perceive her whereabouts. His companions, observing this, remarked: "You who possess knowledge of the Unseen, surely you must know where she is." The Imām, however, disclaimed such knowledge as His own, affirming that knowledge of the Unseen belongs solely to God.

The Báb's commentary on the *Hadith al-Jāriyyah* unveils the profound mysteries of the Imām's station and the nature of the Unseen. The apparent interaction with His maid symbolizes the interplay of multiplicity with the immutable station of Divine Unity: the maid embodies creation's receptivity, while the Imām, anchored in God's Self-manifestation, apprehends the Unseen solely through divine knowledge. The flight of the maid signifies the incapacity of contingent beings to endure the radiance of the Manifestation.

To the spiritually discerning, these words reveal mercy, illumination, and the recognition of God's singularity; to the heedless, they offer a warning of error, polytheism (*shirk*), and self-deception. Thus, the narration is not merely historical, but a luminous allegory of the eternal distinction between the realm of absolute Unity and the fleeting multiplicities of creation, and of the Imām's majesty, immutability, and perfect subservience to the Divine Self.

According to Abul-Qasim Afnan (*Ahd-i Ala*, p. 457), the Báb revealed this commentary in Shiraz prior to His public declaration. Written in Arabic, this treatise is preserved in the Iranian National Bahá'í Archives (INBA), vol. 67, pp. 157–160, and offers remarkable insight into the esoteric understanding of the Imām's station and the nature of the Unseen.

Presented below is a provisional English rendering of this sacred commentary, offered for scholarly study and reflection. The typed version of the original text has been employed as the principal textual basis for the present translation, ensuring fidelity to the original Arabic script.

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[1] The term *ḥadíth* (lit. "utterance" or "report") refers to a narration attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad or one of the Imáms of His lineage, transmitted through chains of tradition (*isnād*). In Shí'ih Islam, the *aḥádíth* of the Imáms are regarded as authoritative expositions of divine truth and as extensions of the Prophet's own guidance.

[2] The term *maid* refers literally to the Imam's servant in the historical narration. In the Báb's commentary, this "maid" symbolizes multiplicity within creation, and her flight signifies the unrest of contingent beings at the moment of Divine Manifestation.

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[4] Abu Ja'far Muhammad al-Kulaynī, *al-Usūl min al-Kāfī*, 4 vols. (Tehran, 1392/1972–73), vol. 1, pp. 495–496. See also C. Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1879–1883), vol. 1, p. 30; Hamadānī, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd*, p. 62.

Thus Doth the Báb Reveal:

"In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

In the Name of God, the Exalted

I (the Báb) begin, seeking the assistance of God, in offering an exposition of certain narrations preserved in al-Kāfī,[5] *pertaining to the knowledge of the Unseen (ʿIlm al-Ghayb), as transmitted by Ṣadīr.*[6]
He said: I, together with Abū Baṣīr, Yaḥyā al-Bazzāz, and Dāwūd ibn al-Kathīr,[7] *was present in the assembly of Abī ʿAbd Allāh,*[8] *may peace be upon Him, when He appeared before us, manifesting righteous indignation. When He assumed His seat, He said: 'How astonishing are those who assert that I possess knowledge of the Unseen! Verily, none knoweth the Unseen save God alone. Indeed, I had intended to chastise my maid, yet she fled from Me; and I knew not in which of the dwellings of the abode she had taken refuge…'*

The intention of His Holiness—may peace be upon Him—in these words is to disclose the loftiness of His station and the majesty of His being, in describing the realm of Divine Unity—a reality which neither intellect nor imagination can encompass, and of which none share a portion save those endowed with insight and spiritual understanding.

We shall mention a mere sprinkling from the effusions of His grace, as perceived by this feeble soul, derived from His exalted words, in response to the questioner and as a token of servitude. There is no power nor might except through God.

Know, then, that His words—may peace be upon Him—possess an inward dimension wherein lies mercy for the people of knowledge: those who have discerned in Him the sublimity of His majesty and the greatness of His station, and who seek neither exaltation nor corruption in the realm of spiritual understanding. Yet outwardly, for the ignorant and the arrogant who cleave to appearances, there lies chastisement; for they have exchanged the bounty of God—that is, His knowledge—for denial. They shall be seized by remorse and plunged into the abyss of their own hearts; upon their tongues shall burn the fire of polytheism[9] *and the venom of disbelief. They imagine that they act righteously—nay*

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[5] Al-Kāfī is a principal collection of Shiʿī ḥadīths, compiled by al-Kulaynī (d. 941 CE), and holds a central place in Twelver Shīʿī jurisprudence and theology. Its extensive corpus of narrations from the Imāms has profoundly influenced Shiʿī legal, theological, and mystical thought, and it remains a foundational source for understanding the sayings and guidance of the Imāms.

[6] Ṣadīr is recorded as one of the transmitters of ḥadīth in the classical Shīʿah collections, likely a companion or student of Imām Ṣādiq. In Shīʿah ḥadīth scholarship, reports are typically prefaced with the transmitter's name to indicate the isnād, or chain of transmission. Here, "from Ṣadīr" signifies that the Imām's words were conveyed through him.

[7] Abū Baṣīr, Yaḥyā al-Bazzāz, and Dāwūd ibn al-Kathīr are early transmitters of Shiʿī ḥadīths. They are frequently cited in classical Shīʿah collections as companions or students of the Imāms, forming part of the isnād, or chain of transmission, through which the Imām's sayings were conveyed.

[8] Abī ʿAbd Allāh (أبي عبد الله) refers to Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (702–765 CE), the sixth Imam in the line of the Twelver Shīʿah. He occupies a central place in Shīʿah thought and jurisprudence and is renowned for his profound mastery of both exoteric and esoteric knowledge, encompassing fiqh (Islamic law), theology, and ʿilm al-ghayb (knowledge of the Unseen). His teachings and narrations have shaped subsequent Shiʿī scholarship and spiritual thought.

[9] Polytheism (شرك, shirk): Literally meaning "association" or "partnership," shirk denotes the act of ascribing partners to God or attributing divine qualities to created things. In the Qur'anic and theological tradition, it constitutes the gravest violation of tawḥīd (divine Unity). In the esoteric context of the Báb's commentary, shirk is employed metaphorically to signify attachment to multiplicity or to created entities in place of recognizing the singularity and absolute unity of God, thereby symbolizing spiritual error, misguidance, and deviation from true knowledge of the Unseen.

rather, they slay and destroy themselves through the works of their own hands. And God is indeed fully aware of the wrongdoers.

As for the state of His wrath—may peace be upon Him—it was for the sake of God's self-manifestation through Him; for His inmost reality and outward being were drawn by God, exalted be He, unto the station of His Manifestation. In this station He is the sign of His [God's] Identity and His overpowering Might; He utters naught save that which proceeds from God alone.

Hence, the Unseen is established for God alone, to intimate that My knowledge of the Unseen is none other than God's own knowledge. There is no utterance proceeding from My self save that which is from God, for none knows the Unseen except God.

For He—may peace be upon Him—spoke only in the station of manifesting His knowledge in the realm of Divine Unity. And that station is the station of God's Identity, His unalloyed Unity, and His absolute Hiddenness. He makes no mention of His own self save in relation to the Divine Identity alone, for the Unseen is that which is veiled from the world of multiplicities; it is the station of Divine Unity. The Knower of the Unseen is the Unseen itself, and the Unseen itself is none other than God—none knows the Unseen except God.

And whoso supposeth that His —peace be upon Him— anger was for the sake of the maid hath verily disbelieved in his Lord, for anger signifieth change from one state to another. The alteration of His station occurred only for the sake of the manifestation of God and of His overpowering might revealed unto Him through Him. Yet He never departeth from the immutable form of His station.

In this station, the existence of the maid availeth Him not, nor doth her absence harm Him. He is the Most Exalted, far above that He should ever change—exalted is He above what the wrongdoers describe.

And if it be said that in the station of His Imamate[10]—peace be upon Him—change might be possible, I reply: the station of His Imamate is never bereft of His station of declaration. For in His station of utterance He hath ever been, and shall ever remain, unchanged and imperishable.

As to His words, 'I intended to strike my maid,' He—may peace be upon Him—intended by the act of striking the Manifestation of Divine Self-revelation. By the maid He signifies all the multiplicities abiding within the Greater Depth, for the maid, by reason of her femininity and receptivity, represents the station of multiplicity. And by His words, 'She fled from Me,' He indicates that at the moment of Divine Manifestation, the contingent beings could not abide the radiance of that effulgence: the mountain was crushed, and all things fell down in a swoon.

When He says, 'I knew not in which houses of the abode she had taken refuge,' He alludes to the very water—the water of negation (al-mā' al-nāfiya). This mystical symbol signifies that His exalted station is veiled, and that knowledge of the Unseen is withheld from all save Himself. For He—peace be upon Him—was speaking from the station of His Unity, wherein there is no mention save the mention of God, the Most Mighty, the Most Glorious. Verily, Unity is His station—peace be upon Him—in which no mention of multiplicity hath place.

[10] The term *Imamate* denotes the divinely ordained station of leadership and guidance held by the Imāms in Twelver Shīʿīsm. In this context, it refers to the Imam's unchanging authority and spiritual station, which remains constant in its capacity for exposition and clarification. Though human perceptions might imagine fluctuation, the Imam's Imamate is eternal, never ceasing, diminishing, or altering, reflecting the immutable nature of divine guidance as transmitted through him.

In His august presence—would you presume to inform Him of that which He knoweth not? Or hath He a maid abiding in the dwellings of the abode? Exalted is He! He—peace be upon Him—is verily the All-Knowing; naught is known, neither in name nor in form. Indeed, He—peace be upon Him—is fully aware of the maid and of her places wherein she had taken refuge—those that are the abodes of multiplicity; yet He—peace be upon Him—abideth in His own station, in the sanctuary of His Oneness, wherein there is never any mention of multiplicities. Glorified be God above that which they ascribe unto Him, and praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

بسم الله تعالى

فاقول مستعينا بالله فى تفسير بعض احاديث المروى فى الكافى فى ذكر
علم الغيب عن سدير قال كنت انا و ابوبصير و يحيى البزاز و داود بن
الكثير فى مجلس ابى عبد الله عليه السلام اذ خرج الينا و هو مغضب فلما
اخذ مجلسه قال يا عجبا لاقوام يزعمون انا نعلم الغيب ما يعلم الغيب الّا
الله لقد هممت بضرب جاريتى فلانة فهربت منّى فماعلمت فى اى بيوت
الدار هى قصد عليه السلام عن هذه الكلمات اظهار علو مقامه و جلالته
فى وصف عالمه فى التوحيد ما لا تدركه العقول و الاوهام و لا نصيب الا
للعارفين من اولى الالباب و انا نذكر رشحة من رشحات فيضه مما
ادركت نفسى الضعيف من كلماته الشريف اجابة للسائل و اظهارا للعبودية
و لا حول و لا قوة الا بالله فاعلم ان لكلامه عليه السلام باباباطنه
فيه الرحمة لاهل المعرفة ممن عرفوا منه علوّ جلاله و عظم مقامه و لا
يريدون فى ارض المعرفة علوّا و لا فسادا و ظاهره من قبله العذاب لاهل
الجهل و الطغيان الذين استمسكوا بظاهرها فبدلوا نعمة الله اى معرفته
تبدليلا فسوف يلقونهم غبا و بحرى فى قلوبهم الهاوية على لسانهم نار
الشرك و سموم الكفر و يحسبون انهم يحسنون صنعا كلا يزرقون و يميتون
بايد اعمالهم و الله عليم بالظالمين اما حالة غضبه عليه السلام لاجل تجلى
الله به حيث انجذب بالله تعالى سرّه و علانيته لمقام تجليه و هو فى هذا المقام
اية هويته و قهاريته لا حكاية له الا عن الله وحده و لذا ثبت الغيب
لله وحده اشعارا بان علمى بالغيب علم الله و لا حكاية عن نفسى الاعن
الله و لا يعلم الغيب الا الله لانه عليه السلام ما اراد الكلام
الا فى مقام اظهار علمه فى التوحيد و ذلك المقام مقام هوية الله
وحدته الصرفة و عمائه البحتة لاذكر من نفسه الا
عن هوية الله وحده لان الغيب هو المستور عن عالم الكثرات هو مقام
التوحيد و العالم بالغيب نفس الغيب و الغيب نفسه و لا يعلم الغيب الا
الله و من زعم

ان غضبه ع لاجل الجاريه فقد كفر بمولاه لان الغضب

التغيير من حالة الى حالة و تغيير مقامه عليه السلام ما كان الا لاجل

ظهور الله و سطوته المتجلية له به و لا يتغير عما فى نحت مقامه ابداً

و هو فى هذا المقام لا ينفع عن وجود الجارية كما لا يضره عدمها و هو الاجل

الاعظم من ان يتغير عن علوكم سبحانه عن وصف الظالمين و ان قيل انه ع

فى مقام الامامة يمكن ان يتغير فاقول مقام امامته لا يفقد مقام بيانه

هو عليه السلام فى مقام البيان لم يزل و لا يزول و لا تغير فيه ابداً و اما

قوله لقد هممت بضرب جاريتى فلانه قصد عليه السلام بالضرب بالتجلى

و بالجارية كل الكثرات من فى عمق الاكبر لان الجارية مقامها التانيث

و الانفعال و هى مقام الكثرة و بقوله هربت منى اى حين التجلى لم تستقّر

الممكنات و اندك الجبل و خّر الاشياء صعقا و اما قوله فماعلمت فى اى

بيوت الدار اراد عليه السلام بالماء الماء النافية لدلالته على علوّ

مقامه بنفى العلم عن غير نفسه لانه ع فى ذكر مقام وحدته الذى لا

ذكر الّا ذكر الله الاعز الاكرم ان الوحدة مقامه ع لا ذكر للكثرات لدى

جنابه اتنبئونه بما لا يعلم ام له جارية فى بيوت من الدار سبحانه

هو العالم و لا معلوم لا ذكرا و لا عينا و هو ع عالم بالجارية لها بها فى

امكنتها التى هى مقام الكثرات و هو فى مقام له و وحدته لا ذكر للكثرات

هنا ابداً و سبحان الله عما يصفون و الحمد لله ربّ العالمين