

Inquiry and Revelation

The Questions of Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i¹ and the Báb’s Epistle in Reply

Mohammad Norozi²

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Introduction and background

Among the extant writings of the Báb is a brief yet significant Epistle addressed to Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i. From Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl’s own letter, it is evident that he had submitted a series of questions to the Báb, chiefly concerning the doctrine of the Eightfold Vertical Chain (*Silsilat al-Thamāniyyah al-Ṭūliyyah*) and the nature of the relationship between the Báb and the two luminaries of Shaykhism: Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’i and Siyyid Kāẓim Rashtī. In reply, the Báb revealed an Epistle that addresses these inquiries.

For the purposes of this provisional English translation, I have included in full Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl’s questions, along with the Báb’s response to the specific issues concerning the relationship between Shaykh Aḥmad, Siyyid Kāẓim, and the Báb. Although the Báb’s answer to this matter is brief, it is luminously phrased and rich in its implication.

¹ Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i (d. February 2, 1849) was one of the first eighteen Bábís and one of the Letters of the Living. He actively taught the Bábí religion, particularly in Qazvín, before being martyred at the Battle of Shaykh Ṭabarsí in 1849.

² Contact email address: nsm_dist@hotmail.com.

Section I: Letter of Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i to the Báb

” In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Our Master and our Lord, upon Whom in all matters we rely, and to Whom alone we look for support—Certain questions have arisen before me, causing much perplexity—I humbly beseech Your Exalted Grace to vouchsafe to Your servant a response thereto, even if only in general terms, according to the measure of my understanding and perception.

Verily, the utmost purpose of my desire and the final portion of my share therein is that Ye make clear to Your servant, through the explicit explanation drawn from the Book and the Tradition, the ordering of the eightfold vertical chain (Tartīb al-silsilah al-thamāniyyah al-ṭūliyyah)³.

And the condition that every lower realm is but a ray of its higher counterpart — and among these, the distinction between the third interior and that which is above it. And that which lieth between the interpretation of the innermost inner and the most manifest of the manifest of the manifest, and that which transcendeth it.

And among these is the relation between our Master (Siyyid Kāẓim Rashtī) and our Shaykh (Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī)—upon them both be the blessings of God—And likewise the relation between the Remembrance (the Báb) who standeth forth with the Cause after them—upon Him be peace and blessings; my soul be His ransom.

What is this relation? Make it manifest. May God make me Thy ransom and cause Thy proof to shine resplendent.”

³ The “ordering of the eightfold vertical chain” (Tartīb al-silsilah al-thamāniyyah al-ṭūliyyah) is a metaphysical framework found in Shaykhism, a Shi‘ite mystical tradition. It delineates a vertical hierarchy of eight spiritual realms or stations, representing the graduated descent of divine reality from the Divine Essence to the manifested world. The eight levels are: the Divine Essence, Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, Prime Body, Universal Body, Sphere of Divine Command, Sphere of Divine Decree, and Sphere of Divine Decree’s Manifestation.

Section II: Selected Passages from the Epistle of the Báb in Response to the Questions of Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i

“In the Name of God, the Wondrous—there is no God but Him, the Almighty, the All-Wise

Verily, there hath come unto me this day a letter from the servant of God (‘Abdu’llah) ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl. Know thou, O thou who art acquainted with the sacred script, and set thy feet firmly upon the Straight Path. And prepare thyself for that which God shall cast upon thee through the paths of division...

As for the relation between the two gates⁴ (al-bābayn)—peace be upon them both—perfect it, then fear God, besides Whom there is no God. And ask not concerning that which exceedeth thy perception by a hundred and seventy thousand years—for God burdeneth not a soul beyond what it hath been given.

And grieve not over the rejection—for God hath irrevocably decreed rejection upon the schemer. And none shall repel the decree of God—truly, a matter ordained and accountable.

Nor hath God placed between them any barrier, save that which He hath appointed between motion and stillness. If thou succeedest in discerning separation from union, thou shalt attain unto thy allotted share of the Book—ordained and prescribed.

And as to thy question concerning the relation between Me and the two—how small thy frame⁵, and how great thy question!

None knoweth that save God—my Lord and the Lord of all the worlds. He is the Exalted in the heavens and the earth, in the Mother Book, by the decree of the Book—praised be He!

And as to thy questions—who shall withhold thee from the Gate of Mercy?

Fear God! He will teach thee wondrously the interpretation of the Traditions. Guard thou My counsel unto thee, for God hath decreed for the preservers an exalted station and a goodly abode, lofty and secure. Praise be to God, the Lord of all worlds.”

⁴ Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī and Siyyid Kāzīm Rashtī.

⁵ Although this remark refers to Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i’s physical stature as a small individual, the Báb metaphorically indicates that the explanation of this matter transcends his comprehension.

Letter of Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i to the Báb—Based on a Typed Copy

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

سيدنا و مولانا ومن في كل الأمور اعتمادنا واليه استنادنا قد أشكل على مسائل متعددة وارجوا من فضلكم العالی ان تمنوا على عبدكم بالتعرض لجوابها ولو بالاجمال على حسب فهمي و ادراكي فان غاية مقصودي و نهاية حظي منها ان تبينوا لعبدكم بالبيان الواضح من الكتاب و السنة ترتيب السلسلة الثمانية الطولية وكون كل سافل شعاعا لعالیه ومنها التفرقة بين البطن الثالث و ما فوقه و ما بين تأويل الباطن الباطن و ظاهر ظاهر الظاهر و ما فوقه ومنها النسبة بين سيدنا و شيخنا صلى الله عليهما و كذا النسبة بين الذكر القائم بالأمر بعدهما عليه الصلوة و السلام روى فداه ای نسبة هي بينوا جعلني الله فداكم و انار برهانكم

(Source: Vahid Rafati, *Nasím-i Şaharī*, p. 73)

Selected Passages from the Epistle of the Báb in Response to Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Jalíl-i Urumiyyih-i’s Questions — Based on a Typed Copy

بسم الله البديع الذي لا اله الا هو العزيز الحكيم

و لقد ورد الى اليوم كتاب من عبد الله عبد الجليل فاعلم أيها الواقف على خط القيم و ثبت قدميك على الصراط المستقيم و استعد لما القى الله اليك من طرق التقسيم ...

و اما النسبة بين الباين صلى الله عليهما فاتقن ثم خف عن الله الذي لا اله الا هو و لا تسئل عن شيء فوق مشعرك بمأة و سبعين الف سنة. فان الله لا يكلف نفسا الا ما اتيتها و لا تحزن على الرد فان الله قد احكم على المدبر بالرد و لامرد لامر الله بالحق مسؤولا و ما جعل الله بينهما الاكما وضع الله بين الحركة والسكون فان تعرف الفصل من الوصل تبلغ الى حظك من نصيب الكتاب مفروضا. و اما السؤال من النسبة بيني و بينهما فما صغرت جثتك و كبرت مسئلتك لا يعلم ذلك الا الله ربي و رب العالمين جميعا، و هو العلي في السموات و الأرض في ام الكتاب بحكم الكتاب محمودا و اما الاظهار بالسؤالات من يمنعك من الباب بالرحمة اتقوا الله يعلمك من تأويل الاحاديث بديعا فاحفظ وصيتي عليك فان الله قد قدر للحافظين حسن المقام و حسن المآب مرتفقا و الحمد لله رب العالمين

(Source: Vahid Rafati, *Nasím-i Şaharī*, pp. 74-75)