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VOLUME FIVE

**STUDIES IN HONOR OF
THE LATE HASAN M. BALLYUZI**

Edited by
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STUDIES IN THE BĀBĪ AND BAHĀ'Ī RELIGIONS

VOLUME FIVE



DR. WILLIAM CORMICK (1820–1877)

personal physician to Náṣiru'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 Fátima, 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*,” “*Fátimí*,” 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," "Íráqí," 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-tafṣíl*)"; 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 fí't-Tawrátt 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 Aḥmad⁹; 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 (*awḥá*) 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 [. . . Hájí Mullá Muhammad-‘Alí of Bárfurúsh, afterwards called *Jenáb* or *Hazrat-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 súrat Yúsuf* 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 Sunní 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 Hadrat-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" (*samá'*). 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-'alí* (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 Akhbárí 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-Hasan al-Iṣfahání (d. 1138/1725-6). Iṣfahání 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 *imáma* (divinely sanctioned leadership; both terms imply absolute obedience to the Imám), 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 Imáms. Işfahání then cites the appropriate verse, together with its explanation by one of the Imáms, for each of these possibilities.³⁴ The epithet *adh-dhikr al-ḥakím* (Qur'an 3:58) is said to apply both to 'Alí and the other Imáms. These latter, according to 'Alláma al-Ḥillí,³⁵ are referred to as *adh-dhikr* because they mention those things which benefit mankind, like the sciences of divine unity (*'ulúm at-tawḥíd*), the return (*al-ma'ád*), and the other verities which are connected with *waláya*. Işfahání cites another tradition from aṣ-Şádiq in explanation of Qur'an 20:124 ("but whosoever turns away from my remembrance"). The Imám said: "That is (*ya'ni*) from the *waláya* of 'Alí."³⁶ Işfahání quotes the seventh Imám, Músá, as saying that the *waláya* of 'Alí is the password (*tadhkíra*, i.e., to enter paradise) for the godfearing. Işfahání says that, in general, all of the interpretations (*ta'wílát*) of the word *dhikr* refer either explicitly (*şaríḥán*) or implicitly (*ḍimnan*) to the *waláya* of 'Alí.³⁷ Işfahání closes his discussion of this word, with the following statement:

In *al-Káfi*, aṣ-Şádiq 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 Imám] 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 *waláya* of him for whom God commanded *waláya* . . ." This is why the Imáms are the only possessors of the remembrance (*ulú adh-dhikr*), as in the statement of aṣ-Şádiq: "We are the possessors of the remembrance and the possessors of knowledge . . ." And thus they are the ones who follow the Remembrance, as aṣ-Şádiq is quoted in *al-Káfi* 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-ṣāmit*), while the latter is referred to as the "speaking Book" (*al-kitáb an-nāṭiq*).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 *waláya* contains within it profound implications for the principles of interpretation, as a result of which the preeminent function of the *walí* (who may be, in this case, either the Prophet or one of the Imáms) is precisely that of interpreter (*mutarjim*) par excellence. This function is designated in early Ismá'ílí literature by the epithet *an-nāṭiq al-wāḥid* (the single speaker), a term which bespeaks the absolute authority (ontological, eschatological, hermeneutical, legal, and political), involved in the office of *imám/walí*.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 Shaykhís. The distinguishing feature of the Shaykhí concept of *wahdat al-nāṭiqā*, however, resides in the very fact that its bearer must remain unknown. The *nāṭiq wāḥid* occupies the summit of the Shaykhí spiritual hierarchy of categories of believers such as *abwáb*, *nuqabá'*, and *nujabá'*, who are likewise unidentifiable during the time of the occultation of the Twelfth Imám. Corbin states:

The shaykhs of the Shaykhí tradition have always affirmed that in every age this *nāṭiq wāḥid*, the "perfect Shí'í" and supreme *báb* of the Imám 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-Qásim Ibráhímí, Sarkár Áqá (d. 1389 A.H./1969 C.E., the fifth successor of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í), 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 bâbisme*. 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 *sábiquín* [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 (*dhikríyan*) of Our name Yaḥyá [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 (*ṣirát 'alí*) 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-Ímán*, of the Báb's *tafsír* is constructed around the *Súrat Ál-i 'Imrán* 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 (*náṭiq, 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 '*álam 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-rafí*), 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 *dhálika al-báb al-a'zam* (that/this Most Mighty Gate).⁸⁷ These usages find their parallel in others, such as *adh-dhikr 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 nuqtati 'l-báb hawl an-nár qad kána fí umm al-kitáb mahtúman.

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-dhikr 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*

alláh al-akbar), he who desires God let him enter the gate." As we have seen, the Báb has appropriated this very title to himself. Işfahání 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

Işfahání 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

Işfahání 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-Şádiq from the *Ma'ání al-akḥbár*:¹⁰⁷ "'Alí said, 'I am the gate of repentance (*ána báb ḥiṭṭatīn*, Qur'an 2:58). Işfahání 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 *Baní 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 (*hiṭṭatun*)!' 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 *Káfí*, 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'nawiyya*). "The prophets themselves are the gates of the religion (*dín*) of God, and the signposts of His religion (*ma'álim dīnihi*),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-íman*), and repentance of sins (*ḥaṭṭ adh-dhuniúb*), 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'wíl* 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'minín*.¹¹³ Aside from referring to the recitation of the *fātiḥa* as a means of "opening" the gates of heaven to the believer,¹¹⁴ Bursí quotes (in addition to quoting some of those *ḥadíth* 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 Akhbārī 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 Kāẓim. 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 Kāẓim as the "two gates (*al-bábayn*)," and Sayyid Kāẓim himself as "the earlier gate of God" (*báb alláh al-muqaddam*). Sayyid Kāẓim 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 Kāẓim, 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 Kāẓim 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 Kázim, 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 (*wahí*). In the esoteric interpretation, the "house" is the Messenger of God himself in whom *nubúwa* 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 *Kitáb al-iḥtijáj* of Ṭabarsí, which contains the statement of 'Alí 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 *waláya* 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 Iṣfahání, indicating his own veneration of the Akhbárí tradition.¹²⁵ This veneration was either already shared by, or passed on to, his successor Sayyid Kázim Rashtí.

Sayyid Kázim speaks of the "Gate of God" in various ways. In one place, he refers to Muḥammad himself as the *báb alláh*, from which those who claim to be independent have turned away.¹²⁶ Elsewhere he speaks of the divine bounties (*al-fuyúḍát*) as being the gate of God to creation (*báb alláh ilá al-khalq*).¹²⁷ And in another passage, relating the three categories of *abdál* ("substitutes," "saints")—*arkán*, *nuqabá'*, and *nujabá'*—to the idea of gate, he says that they are three, but one in essence (*fi 'ayn kawnihá wáḥidatun*).¹²⁸

The first is the place where divine unity appears (*mazḥar at-tawḥíd*) in the *maqám at-ṭábi'iyya*. The second is the place where prophecy appears (*mazḥar an-nubúwa*) in the same *maqám*. And the third is the place where *waláya* appears (*mazḥar al-waláya*) in the same *maqám*. Each one is a *mazḥar at-tawḥíd*, *nubúwa*, and *waláya*, 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 (*amruná*) is but one (*wáḥidatun*) . . . Thou can see no disharmony (*tafáwutin*) 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 (*aḥwál*). But he who recognizes them all in one aspect, and not in three, is a true seer (*baṣīrun kámilun*). . . . 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 (*ilá nafs al-abwáb*), 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 Kázim, quotes the following *ḥadīth* from the tenth Imám, 'Alí ibn Muḥammad al-Hádí al-'Askarí (disappeared 254 A.H./868 C.E.):

When you approach the gate recite the creed (*shaháda*)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-dalíl*) 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 Kázim) 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-rahmánî*).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 az-ḡalám*) . . . 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 (*tahṛíf 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-‘árif*) 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 *ḥijáb*, 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 aṭ-ṭutunjayn, 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 (*ḥijáb al-ḥijáb*).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

Anwár. (Cf. especially the mention of *shí'atuhum al-kummal*, "their perfect *shí'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 Manşúr 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 (*hujja*) 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 (*zuhúr*) 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, *hujja*). 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 muṭ-laq*, Ḍiyá'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 kadhálaka makkanná li-Yúsuf fí'l-arḍ . . . , ya'ní, bi-bulúghihi bi-rutbati'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-ḥijáb 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 *basmala*, 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-Muḥammadí al-'Alawí al-Fáṭimí al-Makkí al-Madaní al-Abṭahí 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-Suyúṭí refers to the 'Abbasid "quasi-Caliph" al-Muttawakkil as: *al-Imámí al-A'zamí al-Háshimí al-'Abbásí al-Mutawakkilí*. (William Y. Bell, ed. & trans., *The Mutawakkilí of as-Suyúṭí* 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-ḥurúfín* (sic) *wa'n-Nuḫṭatu'l-wáḳī-fatu '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, *Sharḥ al-qaṣída al-lámiya*, (hereafter *Qaṣída*). The edition used here is unpaginated. Page numbers supplied are counted from the recto of the title page. The *qaṣída* (ode) was written by one 'Abd al-Báqí Afandí al-Múṣilí (b. 1204 A.H./1789 C.E.-d. 1278 A.H./1861 C.E.). Al-Múṣilí 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 Sultán Maḥmúd 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 Ridá Páshá, then governor of Baghdad. It is possible that the original *qaṣída* (as well as the gift) was motivated by anti-Wahhábí sentiment.

For brief references to Sayyid Kázim's commentary see Rafati, "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-Faḍá'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, *Qaṣída*, 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'án," 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.

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