

The Remembrance of God: An invocation technique  
in Sufism and the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah\*

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It is one thing to believe in a reality beyond the senses and another to have experience of it also; it is one thing to have ideas of 'the holy' and another to become consciously aware of it as an operative reality intervening actively in the phenomenal world. 1

Mysticism is only one part of religion, but it is unquestionably the heart of religion; it is what makes religion religious. The above words from Rudolf Otto's classic work The Idea of the Holy highlight a dominant theme found in the mystical traditions of all religions, East and West, namely, the mystic's quest for cultivating a peculiar type of consciousness in which an overwhelming presence is experienced--a presence experienced as an objective fact coming from outside or beyond the subjective psyche and transcending the limitations of the natural order. In the Islamic, Babi and Baha'i traditions this is referred to as attaining the "presence of God" (liqā' allāh), wherein the overflowing light of God so pervades human consciousness that "all images fade away"--including the self-image of particular souls--and only the "Face of God" (waḥḥu 'llāh) remains.<sup>2</sup>

The soul's search for God is the true calling for human beings because it is, according to Qur'anic and Baha'i teaching, the one act that gives all the other acts of our lives meaning and relation. We have been created, says Baha'u'llah, in order to know and love God even as moths love the flame: first hand and with such ecstasy that the soul is transformed into a perfect reflection of the light of God in the act of knowing and loving.

Sufism, the most developed expression of the Muslim approach to mystic experience, is a major source for Babi and Baha'i writings that have as their subject the quest for presence. Sufism provided an important frame of reference for the central figures of the Baha'i faith, as they responded to numerous inquiries from both their followers and from Muslims (including a number of Sufis) on traditional Muslim concerns with spiritual experience. In responding to these questions, the Bab and Baha'u'llah naturally drew from many of the literary images and technical terms that had been developed by Arabic and Persian-speaking mystics.

Dhikru 'llāh, the invocation or remembrance of God, is a fundamental Sufi technique referred to by the Bab and Baha'u'llah. In

Islam generally, but particularly in Sufism, the practice of dhikr is a prominent discipline for attaining heightened states of consciousness. Dhikr is the repetitive recitation of divine Names or short, sacred formulae, often derived from scripture. It is a distinct devotional practice from obligatory prayers (ṣalāt) and meditation or reflection (fikr), yet it is generally used by most Sufis in concert with ṣalāt and fikr in a comprehensive spiritual regime.

The Bab and Baha'u'llah affirm the efficacy of these acts of personal spiritual endeavor. However, the ritual and devotional features of Babi and Baha'i scripture have not generally been examined or emphasized in the West, and many questions yet persist as to the nature and scope of specific exhortations found in these texts.<sup>3</sup> For example, David Goodman has commented that "while the Baha'i writings are rich in references to meditation, the apparent lack of a particular tradition frees Baha'is to incorporate the knowledge of other techniques into their lives without difficulty or conflict."<sup>4</sup> On the surface, this statement appears quite catholic and in harmony with the Baha'i teaching of religious unity. On closer examination, however, Goodman's observation must be modified to some degree, for the Babi and Baha'i writings do have recommendations on specific devotional and meditation practices which stem from a particular tradition, namely, the mystical tradition of Islam.

This brief essay is primarily concerned with examining the practice of dhikru 'llāh, the remembrance or invocation of God, as depicted in Sufism and the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. As noted above, dhikr is but one aspect of Muslim and Baha'i personal piety along with prayer and meditation.<sup>5</sup> By focusing on the practice of dhikr I do not mean to ignore the importance of prayer and meditation nor the complementary function of these activities for the sources of this study. The choice is guided, nevertheless, by recognition of the centrality of dhikr with regards to ṣalāt and fikr in the mystic's search for the divine Beloved. As the Qur'an instructs us, "prayer (ṣalāt) prevents passionate transgressions and grave sins, but invocation of God is greater (dhikru 'llāh akbar)" (29:45). Each activity has its special virtue. Dhikr is the act of kindling the heart's passion for God, thereby igniting the flame latent within the soul. For individuals not satisfied with theoretical knowledge of God, the act of invoking and "breathing" God's presence through His names and attributes has been a traditional means for inculcating intuitive perception of God.<sup>6</sup>

In discussing Sufi-Babi-Baha'i relations regarding dhikr, the problem of sources and influences looms large. It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to trace the possible Sufi and esoteric Shi<sup>C</sup>i sources which may have played a part in the formation of the Bab's or Baha'u'llah's ideas on the topic. For most of its Islamic past, Iran was a predominately Sunni territory with widespread acceptance of Sufi orders and teachers. Under the Safavids and Qajars, Sufism was usually suppressed by the Shi<sup>C</sup>i rulers and ʿulamā', though there was a revival of Sufism in Iran during the 18th and 19th centuries which played a role in rekindling messianic expectations within the Shi<sup>C</sup>i world.<sup>7</sup>

The Bab does not appear to have had personal contact with Sufi rituals or to have read Sufi manuals. His pronounced esoteric teachings are more closely related to aspects of popular Shi<sup>C</sup>ism, the Ahl al-haqq, Hurufi cabalism, Isma<sup>C</sup>ili and Shaykhi esoterism, and the ishraqiyyun, including Mulla Sadra. Most of these movements had adopted some form of dhikr invocation. Thus at this time the most we can say is that the Sufi and Babi dhikr rituals share a common Islamic background through the lasting influence of Sufism in post-Safavid Iran.

In contrast, the relations between Sufism and Baha'u'llah are clear. Baha'u'llah was familiar with many of the classical works of Sufism and frequently quotes such literature in his mystical poems and treatises. He spent some time in the Naqshbandi takiyyah (seminary) in Sulaymaniyyah, Kurdistan, where he is reported to have given a commentary on Ibn al-<sup>C</sup>Arabi's al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyah, one of the most important and influential sources for Sufism, as well as composing a qasīdah, or ode, following the meter and rhyme of Ibn al-Farid's Nazmu's-Sulūk.<sup>8</sup> During the Edirne period (1864-67), Baha'u'llah visited the Mewlawi's takiyyah and he is known to have been a great lover of this Sufi order's founder, the celebrated Sufi poet Jalal ad-Din Rumi. And, as we shall see below, many of his followers were converted Sufis and the practice of individual and group dhikr took place during Baha'u'llah's captivity and was encouraged by him. Nevertheless, at this time research calls for a cautious acknowledgement that the Baha'i writings exhibit traditional Sufi dhikr aspects and that further studies on Sufi-Baha'i contacts will likely generate a clearer picture of the nature of the relationship between Sufi and Baha'i dhikr.

Dhikr in Sufism

The ritual of dhikr is the principle spiritual discipline of Sufism. Its goal is the realization of God's presence within the inmost being of individuals. Dhikr is a verbal noun derived from the Arabic trilateral verb dhakara, to remember. For the Sufis, the Qur'anic basis for practicing dhikr rests on verses such as the above cited Surah 29:45, Surah 33:41: "O ye who believe! Remember (udhkuru) God with much remembrance (dhikran kathīran)", and Surah 13:28: "remembrance of God (dhikru 'llāh) makes the heart calm".

Dhikr is distinguished from the Sufi understanding of fikr, discursive reflection or meditation. The difference between these two activities appears to be the content of intellectual abstraction involved in each. Fikr generally refers to the act of perceiving a new idea or datum of knowledge by combining two known ideas in reflection. Dhikr, on the other hand, is an effort to unveil the spiritual nature of the soul to human consciousness. Fikr is an act of self-educating through discursive thought whereas dhikr is an act of self-discovery through a technique of abstraction which reveals the "self of God standing within".<sup>9</sup> Louis Gardet comments that in the performance of fikr the Sufi, "concentrating upon a religious subject, meditates according to a certain progression of ideas or series of evocations which he assimilates and experiences; in dhikr, concentrating on the object recollected--generally a Divine Name--, he allows his field of consciousness to lose itself in this object; hence the importance granted to the technique of repetition at first verbal, later unspoken".<sup>10</sup>

The Sufis were fond of discussing the respective merits of dhikr and fikr, with different authorities claiming superiority for one or the other activity. Surah 3:190-191 indicates that both are to be used to contemplate the signs of God:

Surely in the creation of the heaven and earth and in the alteration of night and day there are signs for men possessed of minds who remember God (yadhkurūna 'llāh) standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect (yatafakkarūna) upon the creation of the heavens and the earth.

In an early Sufi manual by Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 C.E.), there is quoted a saying of an early Sufi that appears to be a commentary on Surah 3:190-191 in praise of the complementary use of dhikr and fikr:

One of the great Sufis said: Gnosis (al-ma<sup>c</sup>rifa) is the summoning of the heart (as-sirr) through various kinds of meditation (al-fikr)

to observe the ecstasies induced by recollection (adh-dhikr) according to the signs of revelation.<sup>11</sup>

It was dhikr, however, which came to be the most important form of Sufi discipline. Many Sufis went so far as to assert that even the obligatory ṣalāt could be disregarded if one was intensely occupied with dhikr. Did not the Qur'an itself, they reasoned, testify to the superiority of dhikr to ṣalāt? And the ḥadīth qudsī, God's speech reported on the authority of Muhammad but not contained in the Qur'an, confirms that "If a man is so occupied with recollecting Me that he forgets to pray to Me, I grant him a nobler gift than that which I accord to those who petition Me".<sup>12</sup> This attitude towards ṣalāt, dhikr and fikr shows how the Sufi path is the Muslim path of love and ecstasy, and that dhikr has been the principle means for bringing adepts into ecstatic encounters with the holy, as the following verses of an-Nuri testify:

So passionate my love is, I do yearn  
To keep His memory constantly in mind;  
But O, the ecstasy with which I burn,  
Sears out my thoughts, and strikes my memory blind!  
And, marvel upon marvel, ecstasy  
Itself is swept away: now far, now near  
My lover stands, and all the faculty  
Of memory is swept up in hope and fear.<sup>13</sup>

Dhikr, then, is a form of concentrative or ideational meditation in which the dhākir (one who remembers) repeats over and over--either aloud (dhikr jalī) or in silence (dhikr khafī, galbī)--a divine name or short phrase, often to a specific breathing rhythm and while sitting in a prescribed posture. The observation of one's breathing is an essential feature of Sufi dhikr. The cycle of exhaling and inhaling is designated as nafy wa ithbat: negation and affirmation. Beginning with closed eyes and lips, the dhākir repeats the first part of the shahāda, the Muslim profession of faith, lā ilāha illā 'llāh (there is no god but God), in two movements.<sup>14</sup> The first movement is the recitation of the "verse of negation" while exhaling: lā ilāha (there is no God), with the intention of expelling all distracting thoughts and stimuli. This is followed by reciting the "verse of affirmation" while inhaling: illā 'llāh (but God), affirming that God is the sole Reality worthy of devotion and worship. Dhikr may thus be compared to other forms of concentrative meditation such as hesychasm in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, mantra yoga in Indian religion and nembutsu in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism.<sup>15</sup>

In the history of Sufism, the merits of dhikr were elaborated on by the Sufis and variations in technique were developed within the different orders. However, there generally came to be recognized three stages or levels of dhikr which are related hierarchically to one another: 1) dhikr al-lisān, remembrance of the tongue; 2) dhikr al-qalb, remembrance of the heart; and 3) dhikr as-sirr, remembrance of the inmost being.<sup>16</sup>

Dhikr al-lisān is the first stage of discipline and consists of two phases. The novice begins his or her practice of dhikr with voluntary recitation of a formula, usually the shahāda. The goal of this initial phase of verbal dhikr is control of wandering thoughts so that only the madhkūr (the One who is remembered, i.e. God) is consciously present in the mind. Initially, the duration of the invocation is usually of a limited time, perhaps one hour, or restricted to a specific number of repetitions. The second phase emerges from the first when the subject continues the invocation ceaselessly without effort. According to traditional Sufi accounts, even when this unceasing remembrance without effort is attained, the three elements of the ritual remain distinctly present, namely, the subject (dhākir) conscious of his or her state; the act of remembrance (dhikr); and the One mentioned (madhkūr).

The second stage of invocation, dhikr al-qalb, appears to be the full expression and perfection of the effortless recollection attained in dhikr al-lisān. Gardet has described it as being "expressed in a sort of hammering of the formula by the beating of the physical heart and by the pulsation of the blood in the veins and arteries, with no utterance, even mental, of the words, but where the words nevertheless remain. This is a mode of 'necessary presence', where the 'state of consciousness' dissolves into an acquired passivity".<sup>17</sup> This growing presence of the divine in the heart is expressed in a story of Sahl at-Tustari (d. 806 C.E.), one of the greatest figures of the early period of Sufism:

Sahl said to one of his disciples: Strive to say continuously for one day: "O Allah! O Allah! O Allah!" and do the same the next day and the day after that--until he [the disciple] became habituated to saying these words. Then he bade him to repeat at night also, until they became so familiar that he uttered them even during his sleep. Then he said: "Do not repeat them any more, but let all your faculties be engrossed in remembering God". The disciple did this, until he became absorbed in the thought of God. One day, when he was in his house, a piece of wood fell on his head and broke it. The drops of blood which trickled to the ground bore the legend "Allah! Allah! Allah!".<sup>18</sup>

Should the dhākir reach perfection in dhikr al-qalb, he or she may then attain the third and highest stage of dhikr as-sirr, remembrance of the inmost being. This stage of dhikr is, for the Sufi, the station of realized or ontological tawhīd (unity) where the inmost being becomes the living, inner (bātin) expression of the outward profession of God's unity, lā ilāha illa 'llāh. In this exalted experience of human awareness, the dhākir has, in the words of Ibn 'Ata' Allah (d. 1300 C.E.), "disappeared from both the dhikr and the very object of dhikr".<sup>19</sup> That is to say, there is a transcending of the duality of subject/object awareness, which leads to the profound experience of union (wuṣūl) between the inmost being of the person and God.<sup>20</sup>

The three stages of dhikr therefore correspond to progressive levels of consciousness beginning with the novices attempt to refocus his or her orientation from self to God (dhikr al-lisān), leading to a blurring of identities in a state of ecstasy through continuous, silent absorption on the object of contemplation (dhikr al-qalb) and finally into a purified vision of a new Self, the Self of God standing within, (dhikr as-sirr). The penetration into the mysteries of divine unity in dhikr as-sirr is beyond formal conceptualization. The contemplative goes beyond the apparent rational simplicity of God into a realm of infinite complexity which only intuitive insight (al-ʿilm adh-dhawqī) can grasp. Reflection on the paradoxes experienced in the unitive state, e.g. gathering and separation, presence and absence, takes thought "to its very furthest limits and intelligence will in this way be opened to a synthesis lying beyond all formal conception".<sup>21</sup>

In moderate forms of Sufism, the annihilation of self in God (fana' fi 'llāh) does not usually signify an extermination of the unique individuality of the mystic, rather it is a transformation of consciousness; a transfiguration of the illusory I, the animal soul, into the True Self, or tranquil soul. The more the True Self is reflected in our inmost beings, the more the inferior self of common consciousness is occulted and effaced. This annihilation of self and perpetuation of identity is called fana' wa baqā' (annihilation and subsistence).

Rumi describes fana' as being "Like the flame of a candle in the presence of the sun; he is (really) non-existent, (though he is) existent in formal calculation".<sup>22</sup> At this point the transcendent Object so dominates consciousness that the mystic completely renounces the delusion (or idolatry!) of selfhood. Rudolf Otto has emphasized that the starting point from whence this type of speculation begins "is not a consciousness of absolute dependence of myself as a result and effect of

a divine cause--for that would...lead to insistence upon the reality of self; it starts from a consciousness of the absolute superiority or supremacy of a power other than myself".<sup>23</sup> Most Sufis did not stop with fanā' nor assert that the soul becomes the Absolute Godhead once it has attained Deity. Rather, from fanā' springs baqā':

If then thou hast freedom from thyself,

Then thy selflessness is Godness.

When one has vanished, that is cessation of being.

When there has been cessation of being, behold,  
from it springs survival.<sup>24</sup>

This is the station referred to in the hadīth that "He who knows himself knows his Lord (man ʿarafa nafsahu faqad ʿarafa rabbahu) as well as the hadīth an-nawāfil (the tradition of proximity caused by supererogative acts of worship): "My servant ceases not to draw nigh unto Me by works of devotion, until I love him, and when I love him I am the eye by which he sees and the ear by which he hears. And when he approaches a span I approach cubit, and when he comes walking I come running".<sup>25</sup> The connection between dhikr and the experience of fanā' and baqā' is perfectly expressed in these lines quoted by al-Kalabadhi:

So we remembered--yet oblivion

Was not our habit; but a radiance shone,

A magical breeze breathed, and God was near.

Then vanished selfhood utterly, and I

Remained His only, Who with tidings clear

Attests His Being, and is known thereby.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, we may say that the aim of dhikr is to bring about an unveiling of our spiritual self. It is the act of polishing the heart in order to make it a perfect mirror reflecting the light of God. It is not a mere mechanical process, as the great Sufi masters teach that one must approach the practice of dhikr with right intention (niyya) and absolute sincerity (ikhlas). The special formulae are used to center the mind on certain Images inherent in the words until the self and the Image become one Image of God.

#### Dhikr in the writings of the Bab

The term dhikr means different things in different contexts for the Bab and Baha'u'llah. The Bab, for example, often refers to himself as the 'Remembrance of God' or the 'Primal Remembrance',<sup>27</sup> while in other passages of Babi and Baha'i scriptures remembrance means simply to have God in mind generally or to praise God without indicating the recitation



of a sacred formula. Thus in his Kitāb al-aqdas, Baha'u'llah writes in regards to his laws on obligatory prayer: "Remember God (udhkuru 'llāh) for this mercy which preceded the denizens of the two worlds".<sup>28</sup> The recitation of dhikr formulae along traditional Sufi lines is also referred to by the Bab and Baha'u'llah. Both make the practice of a minimum daily invocation an obligatory ritual act, give formulae to be recited and describe postures in which to recite verses.

The writings of the Bab contain a number of exhortations for the practice of dhikr along with formulae to be recited. These recommendations are too numerous to examine comprehensively in this study. Here we will briefly discuss the Bab's preference for silent recitation of the phrases "in the heart" (dhikr fi'l-qalb), describe a selection of Babi dhikr phrases, and note some general similarities between Sufi and Babi teachings.

The writings of the Bab are often difficult to fathom. His interest in letter symbolism and the creation of talismanic symbols in the shikasta script often result in writings that are extremely dense and almost impossible to comprehend.<sup>29</sup> His commentaries on the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet and Imams are more in the genre of ta'wīl, interpretation which aims at revealing the inner (bātin) significance of scripture--a style of writing popular with Sufi and Shi'ī gnostics. Denis MacEoin has observed that the writings of the Bab, like the rhyming prose of the Qur'an, creates a predilection for chanting the sacred verses. In some of his later works, e.g. the Kitāb al-asma' and Kitāb-i panj sha'n, the Bab revealed verses "consisting largely of invocations of God by an infinitude of names..., in which content is entirely secondary to the all-important incantatory style".<sup>30</sup> These infinitude of names form the basic content of Babi dhikr practice.

In Sufism both verbal (jalī) and silent (khafī or qalbī) invocation is practiced. The Bab appears to have preferred silent over vocal recitation. It may be that he was displeased by superficial, public demonstrations of piety by Muslims--Sufis and others--and he therefore placed greater emphasis on silent dhikr as a guard against ostentatious behaviour. The Bab goes so far as to make the practice of silent dhikr an obligatory act. The fourth bāb of the ninth vahid of the Persian Bayān is concerned solely with recitation of "dhikr in the heart". This chapter begins, as do all chapters of the Persian Bayān, with a statement that is followed by an explanation. The Bab begins by stating: "God has made it obligatory for people to make mention of God (dhikru 'llāh) in their heart. Say, all will be questioned on that" (i.e. on the day of resurrection).<sup>31</sup>

The Bab's exposition of this statement begins by praising the virtues of patience and humility under all conditions. He then continues by discussing the efficacy of silent dhikr in the heart:

The reason why privacy (sirr) hath been enjoined in moments of devotion is this, that thou mayest give thy best attention to the remembrance of God (dhikru 'llāh), that thy heart may at all times be animated by His Spirit, and not shut out as by a veil from thy Best Beloved. Let not thy tongue pay lip service in praise of God while thy heart be not attuned to the exalted Summit of Glory, and the Focal Point of Communion.<sup>32</sup>

This passage contains several of the themes discussed above in connection with dhikr al-lisān and qalb. For example, the word translated as 'privacy' in this pericope is sirr in Arabic, which also contains the sense of an esoteric secrecy and mystery as well as inner quality of consciousness. Taken in the context of this chapter on 'dhikr in the heart', it seems clear that the privacy intended by the Bab is not simply to say prayers in solitude. Rather the desired privacy is found within the contemplative setting of silent invocation, it is the shutting out of all things from conscious thought in absorption on the object of meditation, the "Focal Point of Communion," which for the Bab is the spirit of the Primal Remembrance, the Manifestation of God. The Bab also warns that mere repetition of verses is insufficient, that the seeker's heart must be centered on the Lord of Revelation. For both the Bab and for many Sufi authorities, the internal recitation of dhikr invocations is done in order to create within the heart a perpetual state of divine animation.

The dhikr phrases found in the Bab's writings are both traditional ones used in Islam and invocations which exhibit particular Babi theological concerns.<sup>33</sup> The Bab calls for a daily regime of invocation, and the new Badī<sup>c</sup> calendar is incorporated into the believer's daily devotions. Each day mention of God should be done by reciting ninety-five times a name of God.<sup>34</sup> Believers are to recite allāhu abhā (God is most Glorious) on the first day of the month, allāhu a<sup>c</sup>zam (God is most Great) on the second day, and allāhu aqdam (God is most Ancient) on the nineteenth and final day of the month. The choice of invocations for the remaining days are left up to the individual. In the Arabic Bayān, the Bab gives a beautiful explanation for the practice of dhikr each day: "Each day recalls my Name. And each day my thought penetrates into your heart, then you are among those who are always in God's thought".<sup>35</sup>

Another daily invocation practice mentioned in the Bab's writings is ta<sup>c</sup>zīm, or glorification, i.e. reciting of allāhu a<sup>c</sup>zam nineteen times every day.<sup>36</sup> Other formulae mentioned by him are allāhumma (O God!), to be repeated 700 times; allāhu aẓhar (God is most Manifest), to be repeated ninety-five times; and yā 'llāh (O God!), to be repeated 4,000 times.<sup>37</sup> Nabil-i-A<sup>c</sup>zam reports that the Bab instructed his followers to repeat the following five invocations nineteen times in the evening: allāh akbar (God is most Great), allāhu a<sup>c</sup>zam, allāhu aẓwal (God is most Beautiful), allāhu abhā, and allāhu aṭhar (God is most Pure).<sup>38</sup> This last series of invocations was used by the Babis of Zanjan while besieged in a quarter of the city to instil courage and fortitude as they battled their foes. Nabil remarks that the Babis, "though worn and exhausted..., continued to observe their vigils and chant such anthems as the Bab had instructed them to repeat".<sup>39</sup> The chanting of special verses while encircling a sacred object or person--a practice related to dhikr invocation and referred to as samā<sup>c</sup> (listening)--also took place among the Babis. A dramatic account of the Babis' use of a special invocation while they circled their charismatic leader Quddus--regarded as equal to, or even greater, than the Bab by some--is given by Nabil. In December of 1848, Quddus, the foremost disciple of the Bab, was able to join his fellow Babis at Tabarsi, who were led by Mulla Husayn, the Bab's first disciple and second in rank only to Quddus. When word reached Mulla Husayn that Quddus was approaching, he placed two candles in each Babis hands and they then walked out into the forest of Mazindaran to meet their hero and spiritual guide. They met Quddus as he rode his steed. "Still holding the lighted candles in their hands, they followed him on foot towards their destination...As the company slowly wended its way towards the fort, there broke forth the hymn of glorification and praise intoned by...his enthusiastic admirers: 'Holy, holy, the Lord our God, the Lord of angels and the spirit' (subbūhun quddūsun rabbunā wa rabbu 'l-malā'ikati wa 'r-rūḥ) rang their jubliant voices around him. Mulla Husayn raised the glad refrain, to which the entire company responded".<sup>40</sup> Such instances of the Babis' use of special sacred invocations indicates that this form of popular Sufi and Shi'ī piety was also prevalent in Babism.

Another Babi dhikr phrase that has become popular with Iranian Baha'is is: Allāhumma yā subbūhun yā quddūsun yā hanānūn yā manān. farrij lanā bi 'l-fadli wa 'l-ihsān innaka 'r-rahmānu 'l-manān (O God! O Sanctified One, O Holy One, O Tender One, O Gracious One. Assist us by Thy excellence and virtue. Verily, Thou art the Merciful, the Gracious).<sup>41</sup>

Two final Babi dhikr invocations of interest are ones to be recited to the sun and moon respectively. In the Persian Bayān (bāb 14, vahid 7), the Bab writes that on the Friday of each week--the day of rest in the Ba dī<sup>c</sup> calendar--believers are to chant the following invocation while facing the rising sun: innamā 'l-bahā' min 'indallāhi 'alā tal'atiki yā ayyatuḥā 'sh-shamsa 't-tal'ati fa 'shhadī 'alā mā qad shahida 'llāhu 'alā nafsihī. innahu lā ilāha illā hūwa 'l-azīzu 'l-mahbūb (Glory from God be upon your [appearance] , O dawning sun. Bear witness then, O sun, unto that which God hath born witness in Himself. Verily, there is no god but Him, the Mighty, the Best Beloved).<sup>42</sup> And in the Chahār sha'n, it is recommended that one face the moon each month and recite 142 times, i.e. to the number of the name of God al-Qā'im, the Existent: innamā 'l-bahā' mina 'llāhi 'alayka yā ayyuḥā 'l-gamara 'l-munira fī kullī ḥin(in) wa qabla ḥin(in) wa ba'ada ḥin(in) (The glory from God be upon you, O moon shining at all times, and before all times, and after all times).<sup>43</sup>

The sun and the moon have long been important symbols in the literature of mysticism. In Sufism, and especially among Persian writers, the spiritual relationship between these two heavenly bodies was developed at length. A major theme of Islamic spirituality in its Iranian milieu is the expression of the lunar quality of the human-divine relationship. For Suhrawardi al-Maqtul, the moon, which is masculine in Arabic, is referred to as the lover of the sun, Queen of the Stars. Suhrawardi tells us how the moon never lingers but always presses on in its quest for full enlightenment. At the point of complete enlightenment, the moon has reached the summit of its lunar potential by perfectly reflecting the rays of the Sun Queen. The lover-moon looks into itself and no longer discerns anything other than the light of the Sun. At this point the moon cries out: Anā 'sh-shams!, I am the Sun!<sup>44</sup> Henry Corbin explains that the moon typifies the soul of persons revolving in the heaven of tawḥīd, the unity of God, while the phases of the moon typify the phases and repetitions of the human-divine encounter that carries the soul of the mystic into the state of incandescence (fana').<sup>45</sup> We may similarly interpret the words of the Bab in regards to the moon-soul that becomes shining with the glory from the Sun, or Manifestation of God, "at all times, and before all times, and after all times".

In summary, we may positively note that the Bab's teaching on dhikr has many similarities with moderate Sufi doctrines. His attitude towards dhikr corresponds to many Sufi authorities who were wary of the

elaborate rituals for invocation that had developed in the Sufi orders. Stress is consequently placed on the fact that it is not the amount of repetitions or elaborate postures which make dhikr effective, but that purity of heart (niyya) and sincerity (ikhlas) are the basis of true invocation. The Bab warns in the Persian Bayan (bāb 4, vāhid 9) that excessive dhikr--either aloud or silent--is not, in itself, pleasing to God. The most important criteria, he continues, is that dhikr be done with "joy and happiness", and he concludes that "everyone knows in himself how many mentions he should make".<sup>46</sup> Echoing the Qur'an that "Each being knows his prayer and his form of glorification" (Surah 24:41).

### Dhikr in the writings of Baha'u'llah

The writings of Baha'u'llah on the performance of dhikr are similar to his predecessor's. Like the Bab, Baha'u'llah makes the practice of dhikr an obligatory devotional act along with obligatory prayers and fasting. In the Kitāb al-aqdas, his book of laws, Baha'u'llah enjoins the believer in God to each day perform ablutions, sit facing God (now considered the Baha'i qibla of Bahji) and utter ninety-five times in remembrance of God (yadhkuru) the invocation allāhu abhā, the Baha'i form of the greatest name (al-isṣmū 'l-aḥḍaḍ).<sup>47</sup> This utilization of the greatest name appears to be a modification of the Bab's more detailed laws on daily invocation.

Baha'u'llah does not place the same emphasis on dhikr as the Bab, but invocation remains a definite prescription. It seems that each Baha'i is asked for at least a minimum daily requirement of invocation of the greatest name. Indeed, use of the greatest name as the Baha'i dhikr formula par excellence in a fashion comparable to Sufism was advocated by 'Abdu 'l-Baha, eldest son and successor of Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu 'l-Baha notes that the constant repetition of the greatest name leads to union with God, illumination and spiritual rebirth. Though not a binding law, continual repetitive invocation is strongly endorsed as a spiritual discipline for Baha'is:

'Abdu 'l-Baha exhorted the friends to "recite the Greatest Name at every morn, and (to) turn...unto the Kingdom of Abha, until thou mayest apprehend the mysteries"....Again, through the use of the Greatest Name, 'Abdu 'l-Baha urges that "the doors of the Kingdom of God open, illumination is vouchsafed and divine union results... The use of the Greatest Name, and dependence upon it, causes the soul to strip itself of the husks of mortality and to step forth freed, reborn, a new creature..."

"The Greatest Name should be found upon the lips in the first awakening moment of early dawn. It should be fed upon by constant use in daily invocation, in trouble, under opposition, and should be the last word breathed when the head rests upon the pillow at night. It is the name of comfort, protection, happiness, illumination, love and unity".<sup>48</sup>

As in Sufism, Baha'i dhikr invocation should be seen as a form of concentrative or ideational meditation whereby one temporarily turns away from the world and turns solely "inward" via a linguistic image. This focussing on one object enables the meditator to reach a calm, tranquil or receptive state of consciousness which is open to direct, intuitive knowledge of spiritual powers. In his Asl-i kullu 'l-khayr (Words of Wisdom), Baha'u'llah states that "True remembrance (aslu 'dh-dhikr) is to make mention of the Lord, the All-Praised, and to forget aught else besides Him".<sup>49</sup> Such statements on the concentrative approach to meditation place Baha'i dhikr within a noble tradition of contemplative exercise, sharing similarities not only with Sufism but with Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist meditation techniques as well.

The inclination towards practicing dhikr invocations is given further impetus by Baha'u'llah in several of his poems, prayers and meditations. Indeed, the entire Islamic-Babi-Baha'i emphasis on the revealed Word of God as the vehicle of human salvation naturally lends impetus to the individual believer's quest for enlightenment by means of the sacred texts, whose very incantatory style is conducive to invocation. The poems of Baha'u'llah, e.g. Rashh-i 'amā, al-Qasīdah al-warqā' iyyah and Mathnavī-y-i mubārak, draw on Sufi technical terms and their rhyming patterns are conducive to chanting in ways traditionally practiced in Sufism.<sup>50</sup> The Lawh mallāhi 'l-quds (Tablet of the Holy Mariner) and the Lawh an-nāqūs (Tablet of the Bell) contain refrains which are repeated between each verse of the respective works, infusing them with dhikr-like qualities.<sup>51</sup> The Lawh an-nāqūs, revealed by Baha'u'llah in Istanbul on the anniversary of the declaration of the Bab, is a beautiful work containing verses filled with exhortations for the mystic's quest interspersed by the captivating refrain: subhānaka yā hū. yā man hūwa hū. yā man laysa 'ahad(un) illā hū (Praise be Thou, O He, O He who is He, O He who is none other than He).<sup>52</sup>

Traditional Islamic invocations are also prominent in Baha'u'llah's writings, e.g. al-hamdu lillāh (Praise be to God!), subhāna 'llāh (Praise be God) and hūwa 'llāh. Baha'u'llah also uses

the popular Sufi petition to God: labbayka, labbayka (Here am I! Here am I!). This is the traditional cry of prophets, saints and mystics to the mysterious Godhead in hope that the grace of God will descend into the heart of the invoker. Baha'u'llah refers to labbayka in this fashion in his Salāt al-kubra (Long Obligatory Prayer):

I entreat Thee by Thy footsteps in this wilderness, and by the words, "Here am I. Here am I", which Thy chosen ones have uttered in this immensity....<sup>53</sup>

Other dhikr phrases and short invocations can be gleaned from Baha'u'llah's writings. For instance, an interesting passage in his Kitāb al-<sup>c</sup>Ahdī (Book of the Covenant) reads:

We fain would hope that the people of Bahā may be guided by these sacred words: 'Say: all things are of God' (qul kullun min <sup>c</sup>inda 'llāhī). This exalted utterance is like unto water for quenching the fire of hate and enmity which smolder within the hearts and breasts of men. By this single utterance contending peoples and kindreds will attain the light of true unity. Verily He speaketh the truth and leadeth the way. He is the All-Mighty, the Gracious.<sup>54</sup>

And as noted above, Baha'u'llah has incorporated the Bab's dhikr to the sun into Baha'i teachings by symbolically identifying himself with the rising phenomenal sun.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the effects of practicing the remembrance of God are mentioned by Baha'u'llah in the compilation Prayers and Meditations. The remembrance of God opens the mind's eye to the inner meanings of scripture and instills a divine sweetness which helps one to abandon attachment to the world; it assists individuals to accept adversities and trials and enables minds to become firmly fixed and grounded in God:

Cause me to taste, O my Lord, the divine sweetness of Thy remembrance and praise. I swear by Thy might! Whosoever tasteth of its sweetness will rid himself of attachment to the world...and will set his face towards Thee, cleansed from the remembrance of any one except Thee.

Inspire then my soul, O my God, with Thy wondrous remembrance, that I may glorify Thy name. Number me not with them who read Thy words and fail to find Thy hidden gift which...is contained therein.<sup>56</sup>

The Sufi orders developed special forms of group dhikr chanting known as ḥadra (session) or ḥalqa (circle). Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu 'l-Baha encouraged special gatherings for chanting Baha'i prayers and tablets, however, these general prayer meetings must be regarded as very different from the ḥadra or ḥalqa. Still, there are a few occasions where Baha'u'llah himself initiated a more specific type of group dhikr session. The first two examples given here are ambiguous as to Baha'u'llah's intention, being created to meet specific moments of crisis prior to his assumption of prophetic office. Nevertheless, these two instances have held continuing significance for Baha'is as prototypes for group dhikr.

The first instance originates from Baha'u'llah's captivity in the Siyāh-Chal (Black Pit) in 1852. He recounts how he was confined in this dreaded prison of the Shah with many of his Babi comrades:

We were placed in two rows, each facing the other. We had taught them to repeat certain verses which, every night, they chanted with extreme fervor. 'God is sufficient unto me; He verily is the All-Sufficing (qul allāhu yakafā min kullin shay 'in) one row would intone, while the other would reply: 'In Him let the trusting trust' ('alā allāhi falyatawwakili al-mutawwakuni). The chorus of these gladsome voices would continue to peal out until the early hours of the morning.<sup>57</sup>

The second example comes from the 'Baghdad period' of Baha'u'llah's ministry (1853-1863). He is reported to have instructed the Babis:

Bid them recite: "Is there any remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praise be to God, He is God. All are His servants and all abide by His bidding" (hal min mufarrajin ghayru 'llāh. qul sūbhanu 'llāh huwa 'llāh. kullun 'ibādun lahū wa kullun bi amrihi qā'imun). Tell them to repeat it five hundred times, nay, a thousand times, by day and night, sleeping and waking, that haply the Countenance of Glory may be unveiled to their eyes, and tiers of light descend upon them.<sup>58</sup>

Here the act of internally reciting this popular invocation of the Bab's while sleeping or awake recalls the effortless invocation described above as dhikr al-qalb in Sufism.

The third example originates from the period of Baha'u'llah's confinement within the walls of 'Akka (1868-79); and is the most specific endorsement of a ḥadra or ḥalqa gathering. 'Abdu 'l-Baha refers to this in Memorials of the Faithful when he recalls that it was Baha'u'llah's



wish to see an annual gathering where the true dervishes of this world would meet to do dhikr together. This night is to be dedicated to Darvish Sidq-<sup>c</sup>Ali, a companion of Baha'u'llah's and a Sufi:

While in the barracks, Baha'u'llah set apart a special night and He dedicated it to Darvish Sidq-<sup>c</sup>Ali. He wrote that every year on that night the dervishes should bedeck a meeting place, which should be in a flower garden, and gather to make mention of God.<sup>59</sup>

Fadil-i-Mazandarani has given the date of this special night of dhikr as the second of Rajab.<sup>60</sup> The practice was carried on, at least by the Baha'is of <sup>c</sup>Akka, for sometime, but it is not certain when or why its observance was discontinued. Possibly it was discontinued to keep the local inhabitants from regarding Baha'u'llah as the shaykh of a heretical band of dervish riff-raff, since the Baha'is were often mistaken for Sufis during his lifetime.<sup>61</sup> As there appears to be no statement in Baha'u'llah's later writings calling for the discontinuance of this dhikr session, perhaps it will be revived by contemporary Baha'is.

Besides these many dhikr invocations, Baha'u'llah also speaks of specific postures in which the recital of verses is recommended. If the obligatory prayer is missed, for example, the believer is to prostrate and repeat either: subhāna 'llāhi dhi 'l-<sup>c</sup>āzanati wa 'l-ijlālī wa 'l-mawhibatī wa 'l-afdāl (Praised be God, the Lord of Might and Majesty, of Grace and Bounty) or simply subhāna 'llāh. After this both men and women are to sit cross-legged in the posture which he refers to as the 'Temple of Unity' (haykal at-tawhīd) and repeat eighteen times: subhāna 'llāh dhi 'l-mulki wa 'l-malakūt (Praised be God, the Lord of the kingdoms of earth and heaven).<sup>62</sup> The posture of haykal at-tawhīd is a simple cross-legged sitting position popular in Sufi practice. Another traditional posture of Islam referred to in the Baha'i writings is qu<sup>c</sup>ūd (literally, sitting), which is identical to the 'sitting on one's heels' posture of Zen Buddhism. The qu<sup>c</sup>ūd posture is most commonly used when reciting those sections of the Baha'i long obligatory prayer that call for the sitting position.

As in Sufism, invocation for Baha'u'llah aims at the elimination of the subject/object dichotomy of normal consciousness. This intimate identification of self and God is often referred to in the Baha'i writings as "seeing with His eyes " (a<sup>c</sup>rifa<sup>c</sup>ka bi <sup>c</sup>aynika) or "recognizing God through His Own Self" (bishināsīm bi-nafs-i-ū). Thus Baha'u'llah writes:

It behooveth us, therefore to make the utmost endeavour, that, by God's invisible assistance these dark veils...may not hinder us

from beholding the beauty of His shining Countenance and that we may recognize Him only by His own Self.<sup>63</sup>

And:

Open Thou, O my Lord, mine eyes and the eyes of all them that have sought Thee, that we may recognize Thee with Thine own eyes.<sup>64</sup>

The use of dhikr to reach the unitive state is implied by Baha'u'llah in the fourth of his Seven Valleys (Haft Vadi), where he refers to the hadith an-nawafil, the tradition considered by Sufis as God's announcement of His promise to become the eye and ear through which the servant exists, "as well as the experience in dhikr in which every limb is engaged in its own recollection".<sup>65</sup>

Whensoever the light of the Manifestation of the King of Oneness setteth upon the throne of the heart and soul, His shining becometh visible in every limb and member. At that time the mystery of the famed tradition gleameth out of the darkness: "A servant is drawn unto Me in prayer (an-nawafil) until I answer him; and when I have answered him, I become the ear wherewith he heareth..." For thus the Master of the house hath appeared within His home, and all the pillars of the dwelling are ashine with His light. And the action and effect of the light are from the Light-Giver.<sup>66</sup>

There can be little doubt that in this most Sufic of his works, the founder of the Baha'i faith can be seen as endorsing the utilization of the traditional technique of dhikr in the mystic's quest for union with God. At least we must admit that any person from the Islamic mystical tradition would immediately understand Baha'u'llah's correlation of tawhid and the hadith an-nawafil to the practice of dhikr.

In the last of the Seven Valleys, Baha'u'llah refers to the highest station in the way of God by the traditional Sufi terms of annihilation and subsistence in God (fanā' az nafs va baqā' bi 'llāh).<sup>67</sup> Both Baha'i and moderate Sufi teachings maintain that the unknowable essence, the sacrosanct Godhead (adh-dhat al-ahdiyya, uluhiyya) is beyond human comprehension, and that there is consequently a tragic dimension to the mystic's quest for God: it is in a sense unattainable. Sufis who believed in the transcendence of God's essence often tried to express the difficulties involved in truly knowing and loving an unknowable Being. Ibn al-<sup>C</sup>Arabi poignantly observes how all attempts to penetrate the Absolute Deity ends on the shores of His names and attributes:

A diver who was endeavoring to bring to the shore the red jacinth of deity hidden in its resplendent shell, emerged from that ocean empty-handed with broken arms, blind, dumb and dazed... [He was

asked] "What has disturbed thee and what has happened?... [He replied] "Far is that which you seek....None ever attained to God and neither spirit nor body conceived the knowledge of him".<sup>68</sup>

In a passage that echoes this type of perception, Baha'u'llah speaks of the inherent limitations of human faculties in regards to knowing Deus absconditus:

Praise be to Thee, to Whom the tongues of all created things have, from eternity, called, yet failed to attain the heaven of Thine eternal holiness and grandeur. The eyes of all beings have been opened to behold the beauty of Thy radiant countenance, yet none hath succeeded in gazing on the brightness of the light of Thy face. The hands of them that are nigh unto Thee have, ever since the foundation of Thy glorious sovereignty and the establishment of Thy holy dominion, been raised suppliantly towards Thee, yet no one hath been able to touch the hem of the robe that clotheth Thy divine and sovereign Essence. And yet none can deny that Thou hast ever been, through the wonders of Thy generosity and bounty, supreme over all things, art powerful to do all things, and art nearer unto all things than they are unto themselves.<sup>69</sup>

Here, Baha'u'llah clearly reveals the mystic's dilemma: God has created souls out of the essence of His light with spiritual faculties analogous to Him, yet we are incapable of taking the step into complete identification with the unknowable Essence. As Otto has observed, the dilemma occurs because what is absolute may be thought but not thought out.<sup>70</sup>

However, the mystic's despair is soon transcended through experiencing God's Love, Mercy and Beauty. This then leads to the realization that these attributes of God are most clearly displayed as the very soul itself once it becomes sanctified from all human limitations, cleansed of all things to the point that "the Divine Face riseth out of the darkness" of the self and all things "pass away, but the Face of God". At this point the soul can claim to have professed the unity of God in both its outer (ẓāhir) and inner (bāṭin) senses:

O Lord! The tongue of my tongue and the heart of my heart and the spirit of my spirit and my outward and inmost beings (ẓāhirī wa bāṭinī) bear witness to Thy unity and Thy oneness, Thy power and Thine omnipotence, Thy grandeur and Thy sovereignty, and attest Thy glory, loftiness and authority. I testify that Thou art God and that there is no other God besides Thee (innaka inta 'llāh lā ilāha illā inta).<sup>72</sup>

Baha'u'llah maintains, however, that the soul's realization of ontological tawhīd is in some manner different from both Sufi concepts of wahdatu 'l-wujūd or shuhūd (unity of being or contemplation). In the Seven Valleys he does not deny that these two stages occur along the mystic path, but that the wayfarer will eventually pass beyond these stages and reach a "oneness that is sanctified above these two stations".<sup>73</sup> It is difficult to determine exactly what Baha'u'llah intends by this. It may be that he is reluctant to dogmatically label the nature of mystic perception in its highest stages, as this tends to shock persons who have no comprehension of such matters but who hold attachments to conventional religious doctrines regarding the human-divine encounter. And furthermore, Baha'u'llah observes, one can only point to these experiences in allusive, symbolic ways. He thus warns that the language of dogma and doctrine is not the means for arriving at mystical definitions. Ink leaves only blots on the page, for "ecstasy alone can encompass this theme, not utterance nor argument".<sup>74</sup>

### Conclusion

The practice of concentrative techniques of meditation occurs in most religious traditions. For the Islamic, Babi and Baha'i religions, the discipline of dhikr invocation is the recommended form of practice. Dhikr has been widespread in Islamic practice generally, but it was in Sufism that the most active and detailed development has occurred. The impact of Sufi teachings on dhikr and its theories of spiritual growth came to influence all Muslims, Sunni and Shi'i alike, and the Bab and Baha'u'llah clearly drew selectively from this wealth of Islamic material in developing their own unique religious systems. This can be seen in the respective traditions attitudes towards silent invocation, annihilation and subsistence, sincerity and purity of motive over mere technique, the use of group dhikr sessions, attainment of union with God, and the recognition of the limits of human aspiration. All three traditions assert that the practice of dhikr is an integral aspect of spiritual growth along with prayer, fasting and reflection. And each confirms that the practice of dhikr can lead to a profound alteration of consciousness, described as the revelation of God's presence within the inmost being or heart of the human soul.

\*I wish to thank the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice for providing me with the Arabic texts of passages from Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah and with information on Darvish Sidq<sup>c</sup> Ali. The clarity of this study has been sharpened by the comments of Denis MacEoin, Juan Cole, Christopher Buck and Todd Lawson.

1) Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. John W. Henry (London: Oxford University Press, rev. ed. 1976), p. 143.

2) See Qur'an 29:23; 18:111; 13:2; 2:46, 249; the Bab's Persian Bayan II, 7; III, 7; VI, 13; VIII, 6; IX, 9; and Baha'u'llah's Kitāb-1-Īqān: Book of Certitude (Hofheim-Langensheim: Baha'i Verlag, 1980, reprinted from the original edition, Egypt, 1934), pp. 107-111; English trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 3rd ed., 1970), pp. 138-143. (Hereafter cited as "Īqān", with English page numbers first).

3) An important exception to this is Denis MacEoin's study "Ritual and semi-ritual observances in Babism and Baha'ism", (unpublished paper presented at the fourth Baha'i Studies Seminar, University of Lancaster, April, 1980).

4) David Goodman, "The Importance of Meditation to Faith", World Order, vo. 13, no. 2 (1979), p. 46.

5) Both the Islamic and Baha'i traditions maintain a distinction between the concentrative meditation technique of invocation (dhikr) and the act of reflection or meditation (fikr). See below p.76 on dhikr and fikr in Sufism. The same distinction is made in Baha'i writings where 'meditation' is used to translate derivatives of the triliteral verb fakara. Cf. Īqān, p. 238/185, where Baha'u'llah writes of achieving the conditions of renunciation and detachment, and then refers to the ḥadīth: "One hours reflection (tafakkura) is preferable to seventy years of pious worship".

6) The use of concentrative meditation techniques is found in most religious traditions. For a general discussion of these techniques and their psycho-physical effects see Claudio Naranjo and Robert Ornstein, On the Psychology of Meditation (New York: Viking Press, 1971).

7) See Abbas Amanat, "The Early Years of the Babi Movement: Background and Development" (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1981), ch. 3, "Sufism and Popular Religion" and Said Amir Arjomand, "Religious Extremism (Ghuluww), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722", Journal of Asian History, vol. 16, no. 1 (1982), pp. 1-35.

8) See Juan Cole, "Babism and Naqshbandi Sufism in Iraq 1854-1856: A qasīdah by Mirza Husayn 'Alī Baha'u'llah", in Studies in Babi' and Baha'i History (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, forthcoming).

9) From an hadīth attributed to Muhammad and quoted by Baha'u'llah in Four Valleys (Qahār Vādī). English trans. Ali Kuli Khan and Marzieh Gail, The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys (Wilmette, Ill: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. ed., 1968), p. 47.

10) Louis Gardet, "Dhikr", Encyclopaedia of Islām, rev. ed. (London: Luzac and Co., 1971-) (Hereafter, EI<sup>2</sup>).

11) Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Kalabadhi, At-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl at-tasawwuf, ed. A.J. Arberry (Cairo: Librarie El-Khandgi, 1934), p. 101. English trans. A.J. Arberry, The Doctrine of the Sufis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, rev. ed., 1980), p. 133 (Hereafter "Doctrine" with English page numbers first).

12) ibid., p. 96/74-75.

13) ibid., p. 96/75.

14) The complete shahāda formula is lā ilāha illā 'llāh wa muhammadun rasūlu 'llāh, there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

15) See Philokalia, Writings from Philokalia, on the Prayer of the Heart, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1951) on hesychasm; Rammamurti Mishra, Fundamentals of Yoga (New York: Julian Press, 1959) on mantra-yoga; and Kojiro Nakamuro, "A Structural Analysis of dhikr and nembutsu", Orient, vol. 7 (1971), pp. 75-96 for a comparative study of dhikr and nembutsu.

16) For a more complete discussion of dhikr in Sufism, see G.C. Anawati and Louis Gardet, Mystique Musulmane: Aspect et tendances-Experiences et Techniques (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1961), pp. 187-234.

17) Gardet, "Dhikr".

18) Quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, The Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), p. 169.

19) Gardet, "Dhikr".

20) Muslim mystics were careful not to assert that there could ever be substantial union (ittiḥād) between persons and God in which their respective essences merge into each other. Thus Islam's mistrust of the Christian concept of ḥulūl, or incarnation. Rather than convey the idea of union with the offensive terms of ittiḥād or ḥulūl, Muslim mystics preferred to use the terms wuṣūl or wisāl, attaining to and reunion, from the verb wasala, to connect or join. Cf. Baha'u'llah: "O Son of Man! Ascend unto My heaven, that thou mayest obtain the joy of reunion (wisālī), and from the chalice of imperishable glory quaff the peerless wine".

al-Kalimat al-maknūnah (Beirut: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 28. English trans. Shoghi Effendi, The Hidden Words (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. ed., 1975), p. 18 (Hereafter "Hidden Words", with English page numbers first).

21) Titus Burckhardt, An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine, trans. D.M. Matheson (Wellingborough: Thorsons Publishers, Ltd, 1976), p. 26

22) Jalal ad-Din Rumi, The Mathnavi, ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, 8 vols., Gibb Memorial Series (London: 1925-1940), Book 3: 3669-73.

23) Otto, Idea of the Holy, p. 89.

24) Farid ad-Din <sup>C</sup>Attar, quoted in Fritz Meir, "The Spiritual Man in the Persian Poet <sup>C</sup>Attar", Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks 4, ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 300.

25) Quoted in Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, p. 133. See below, p. 90 on the ḥadīth an-nawāfil in the writings of Baha'u'llah.

26) Al-Kalabadhi, Doctrine, p. 125/75-76.

27) See the Bab, Selections from the Writings of the Bab, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et. al. (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1976), *passim*. For the Arabic and Persian texts of this compilation see, Muntakhabāt az āthār-i ḥadrat-i nuqtīy-i-ūlā (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1979). (Hereafter "Selections" with English page numbers first).

28) Baha'u'llah, Kitāb al-aqdas (Bombay: Nisari Press, 1896), p. 6.

29) Letter symbolism (<sup>C</sup>ilm al-ḥurūf) has been a popular form of expression for Muslim esoterics. See Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, Appendix 1. See MacEoin, "Ritual", pp. 14-16; 41-44; 84-88 on Babi and Baha'i talismanic texts.

30) MacEoin, "Ritual", p. 28.

31) Seyyed Ali Mohammad dit le Bab, Le Beyan Persan, 4 vols., trad. A.L.M. Nicolas (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1911-14), vol. 4, p. 150.

32) The Bab, Selections, pp. 93-94/56-57; Le Beyan Persan, vol. 4, pp. 148-49.

33) For example, the Bab states that one of the important goals of Babi dhikr is to lead to the recognition of "He whom God shall make manifest" (man yuziruhu 'llāh), *ibid.*, p. 151.

34) See *ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 48-50.

35) Quoted in Alessandro Bausani, "Bāb", EI<sup>2</sup>.

36) See MacEoin, "Ritual", pp. 11-12.

37) *Ibid.*

38) Nabil-i-A<sup>C</sup>zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandi), The Dawnbreakers, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 552. Persian edition Matali<sup>C</sup>u 'l-anwār, trans. into Persian from the English by

<sup>c</sup>Abdu 'l-Hamid Ishraq Khavari (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 117 B.E./1960), pp. 591-92 (Hereafter "Dawnbreakers", with English page numbers first).

39)Ibid., p. 553/592.

40)Ibid., p. 352/360. This remains a popular chant among Persian Baha'is.

41)From the compilation of Baha'i writings Abvāb-i malakūt (Beirut: Baha'i Publishing Trust), p. 8.

42)Quoted in MacEoin, "Ritual", p. 11. This invocation also appears in a recent compilation by Fadil-i-Yazdi, Manāhij al-ahkām (Tehran: n.p., 1980), vol. 1, p. 107. Here there is a tablet of Baha'u'llah's commenting on the Bab's invocation to the sun, which states that by the sun the Bab intended no one else but Baha'u'llah, hidden behind clouds during the Bab's ministry.

43)Quoted in MacEoin, "Ritual", p. 12.

44)Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul, Three Treatises on Mysticism, ed and trans. Otto Spies and S.K. Khatak (1935), pp 25-26. On the sun and moon in pre-Islamic and Islamic Iranian esoterism, see Henry Corbin, The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism, trans. Nancy Pearson (Boulder: Shambhala, 1978), *passim*.

45)See Corbin, En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimards, 1971-72), vol. 2, pp. 227-28.

46)Seyyed Ali Mohammad, Beyan Persan, vol. IV, p. 152.

47)Baha'u'llah, Kitāb al-aqdas, p. 7.

48)"The Greatest Name, Symbol of the Cause", Baha'i News (Oct. 1964), p. 2.

49)Baha'u'llah, Asl-i kullu 'l-khar in Majmū'ih-yi az alvāh-i jamāl-i aqdas-i abhā (Hofheim-Langenheim: Baha'i Verlag, 1980), p. 92. English trans. Words of Wisdom in Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et. al. (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978), p. 155 (Hereafter "Tablets", with English page numbers first).

50)See Cole, "Babism and Naqshbandi Sufism" for a discussion of Baha'u'llah's Rashh-i 'Cama and al-Qasidah al-warqa'iyyah.

51)Baha'u'llah, Lawh mallāhi 'l-quds in Mā'idīy-i-āsmānī, 9 vols., ed. <sup>c</sup>Abdu 'l-Hamid Ishraq Khavari (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 129 B.E./1972-73), vol. 4, pp. 507-511. English trans. Shoghi Effendi, Tablet of the Holy Mariner in Baha'i Prayers (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. ed., 1975), pp. 51-57. The two refrains in this tablet are: subhāna 'r-rabbī 'l-abhā (Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious) and subhāna 'r-rabbīnā 'l-'aliyi 'l-a'la (Glorified be our Lord, the Most High).



52) Baha'u'llah, Lawh an-nāqūs in Ayyām-i-tis<sup>c</sup>ih, ed. <sup>c</sup>Abdu 'l-Hamid Ishraq Khavari (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1981), pp. 100-106.

53) Baha'u'llah, Lawh as-salāt in Adi<sup>c</sup>iyih hadrāt-i mahbūb (Cairo: 1339 A.H./1920-1921), pp. 70-80. English trans. Shoghi Effendi, Long Obligatory Prayer in Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 317-23.

54) Baha'u'llah, Tablets, pp. 222/136-37.

55) See fn. 42.

56) Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, pp. 82-83. The verse, "Inspire then my soul, O my God, with Thy wondrous remembrance, that I may glorify Thy name", reads in the original Arabic: yā ilāhī fa 'lhimnī min badāyi<sup>c</sup>i dhikrika li-adhkuraka bihā, literally: O my God, inspire me with Thy wondrous remembrance, that I may invoke Thee by it.

57) Nabil-i-A<sup>c</sup>zam, Dawnbreakers, p. 632/664.

58) Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 119.

59) <sup>c</sup>Abdu 'l-Baha, Memorials of the Faithful, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 38.

60) Mirza Asadu 'llah Fadli-i-Mazandarani, Asrāru 'l-āthār 5 vols. (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 124-126 B.E./1967-1972), vol. 4, p. 491.

61) For example, on the journey from Baghdad to Istanbul, Baha'u'llah advised his companions to grow their hair long and to wear the garb of one of the Sufi orders. See Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977), pp. 27-28. Also, Haji Mirza Haydar-<sup>c</sup>Ali, Stories from the Delight of Hearts, trans. A.Q. Faizi (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1980), pp. 43, 46, recounts how the guards of a group of Baha'i prisoners in Egypt thought that they were Sufis on hearing the Baha'is chanting the Lawh an-nāqūs, and that the governor general of the Sudan mistook them for being people of "the path" (as-sirāt), a term designating Sufis and not "people of a true religion" as stated in fn. 25 of Delight of Hearts.

62) Baha'u'llah, Kitāb al-aqdas, p. 5; cf. A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitāb-i-Aqdas the Most Holy Book of Baha'u'llah (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1973), p. 58.

63) Baha'u'llah, Īqān, p. 75/58.

64) Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 80; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 88, 206, 222-223, 256, 297; and the Bab, Selections, pp. 175-175/123-124.

65) Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, p. 277.

66) Baha'u'llah, Haft Vādī in Āthār-i qalam-i a<sup>c</sup>lā, vol. 3 (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 129 B.E./1972-1973), p. 114. English trans.

The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, p. 22 (Hereafter "Seven Valleys", with English page numbers first).

67)Ibid., p. 36/129.

68)Quoted in Abdol-Hossein Zarrinkoob, "Persian Sufism in Its Historical Perspective", Iranian Studies, vol. 3 (1970), p. 205.

69)Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, pp. 87-88.

70)Otto, Idea of the Holy, p. 141.

71)Baha'u'llah, Seven Valleys, p. 37/128.

72)Baha'u'llah, Tablets, p. 114/65.

73)Baha'u'llah, Seven Valleys, p. 39/133. Cf. Juan Cole, "The Concept of Manifestation in the Baha'i Writings", Baha'i Studies, vol 9 (1982), pp. 7-8, 25-29 for a discussion of wahdatu 'l-wujūd in Islamic and Baha'i doctrine. Cole's depiction of Ibn al-<sup>C</sup>Arabi's teachings on wahdatu 'l-wujūd appear too severe, especially since the Andalusian mystic does not use the term in his writings. See Hermann Landolt, "Simnani on wahdat al-wujūd", Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism, ed. M. Mohaghegh and H. Landolt, vol. IV of Wisdom of Persia (Tehran: The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Tehran Branch, 1971), p. 100.

74)Baha'u'llah, Seven Valleys, p. 39/133.

The Borwick Seminar on Baha'i Mysticism and a report of the  
Discussion on Steven Scholl's paper: The Remembrance of God

Steven Scholl's paper, "The Remembrance of God", was read at the Seminar on Baha'i Mysticism which was held at the Smith residence in Borwick, Carnforth, Lancashire on 11-12 June 1983. Since it appears unlikely that any other report of this seminar will appear in the pages of this Bulletin, I will briefly describe the proceedings before going on to give a summary of the discussion at this seminar related to the above paper by Steven Scholl.

On Saturday, Peter Smith presented two papers, one on the Psychology of Mysticism and the other on the Sociology of Mysticism. These were intended principally as reviews of the current state of academic opinion on these two subjects and were not specifically related to the Baha'i Faith. There was much discussion following these presentations as to whether the mystical experiences in the Eastern and Western mystical traditions should be regarded as being essentially the same experience merely expressed differently because of the difference in metaphysical systems or whether they should be regarded as being entirely different. Peter Smith has the intention of eventually publishing at least the second of these two papers.

On Saturday evening, Juan R. Cole gave a presentation of some of the results of his research in India on Shi'ism in Oudh. Oudh came under the influence of Shi'ism chiefly through contacts with Safavid Iran. Initially most spiritual authority lay with Hakims and Sufi Shaykhs. Then in the mid-18th Century, the Nawabs of Oudh began to encourage Shi'i 'ulama to settle in Oudh. In the last two decades of the 18th Century, the Usuli 'ulama, under the leadership of Sayyid Dildar-'Ali Nasirabadi, succeeded in suppressing and ousting the Sufi Orders.

On Sunday morning, Moojan Momen presented a resume of a lengthy paper on which he had been working but which was not yet finished. This presentation began with an outline of Baha'u'llah's ontology in relation to the Western Neoplatonic tradition and then went on to look at mysticism in the Baha'i writings. Baha'u'llah's writings seem to place mysticism at the core of the life of the individual. Indeed the whole Baha'i community could be seen as a mystical community with the social

structure of most other mystical systems (the master-student relationship, etc.) being replaced by the workings of Baha'i community life (consultation, Baha'i administration, etc.). The Baha'i Faith thus possesses both an individual and a social mysticism.

On Sunday afternoon, Steven Scholl's paper on Dhikr was presented in his absence. The following is, insofar as I can remember them, the comments of the participants in the discussion which followed. Those attending the Seminar and participating in this discussion were: Peter Smith, Steven Lambden, Juan Cole, and Moojan Momen.

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Firstly it was felt that Steven Scholl was to be commended for drawing to our attention an area of the study of the Baha'i Faith which had previously been neglected both in the East, as Scholl points out in the paper and in the West. Mysticism is the core of religious experience and to ignore this aspect does undoubtedly lead to an unbalanced view of the Baha'i Faith.

It was, however, felt by all the participants that in trying to redress the balance, Scholl had perhaps gone too far in the opposite direction. Many of the textual and historical examples cited in the paper cannot necessarily be considered to be referring to Dhikr in the Sufi usage of that word.

As Scholl points out, the root dh k r has diverse usage in the Babi and Baha'i writings (as indeed it also has in Islam). Sometimes the term Dhikru'llah refers to the Manifestation of God and, in particular, the Bab. Sometimes it refers to a general state of being mindful of God without necessarily involving the recitation of any formula. Even where the term does involve the recitation of a formula, this does not necessarily equate with the Sufi practice of Dhikr. Obviously, the Sufi tradition is extremely broad but, in general, the dhikr is used in most Sufi orders and is described in most Sufi manuals as a technique for achieving an ecstatic trance state through repetitive chanting of a formula. The fact that Baha'u'llah has ordained that the Greatest Name be recited 95 times, makes it difficult to equate this with Sufi Dhikr since the very act of consciously counting would prevent one from entering a trance state.

Most uses of the root dh k r in the Baha'i context seem

to refer to being mindful of God. This should become a state of being, starting at the beginning of the day, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, and should continue in all daily activities whether this be work (which should be undertaken as an expression of worship and therefore of mindfulness of God) or meeting people (who should be seen in the context of the manifestation of God within them) or enjoying the arts (which are a means for connecting with the spiritual world and thus becoming mindful of God), etc. In this connection, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the Baha'i building which is called the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, despite the appearance of the root dh k r in the name, is not the equivalent of the takiyya where Sufi Dhikr is performed but rather is a place where God is remembered. All this may be equated with the second and third stages of Dhikr (Dhikr al-qalb and Dhikr as-Sirr) as described by Scholl in the paper but there seems little justification for identifying it with the usual Sufi usage of the term Dhikr (which corresponds to Scholl's definition of Dhikr al-lisan).

Some of the historical examples cited by Scholl were also considered to be somewhat dubious. The chanting of the Babis as they accompanied Quddus to Shaykh Tabarsi, the chanting of the Babis at Zanjan and in the Siyah-Chal may well be equated with the Sufi tradition of Sama' but are not examples of Dhikr. Indeed the only historical instance in which Baha'u'llah seems to have clearly given approval to a Sufi type of Dhikr is in the ordaining of a special night in remembrance of Darvish Sidq-'Ali. The participants in the discussion were unsure whether this represented an encouragement of this practice by Baha'u'llah or the imposition of a limitation upon it.

In general then, the participants in the discussion felt that Scholl had opened up an important area for discussion and that his general description of the mysticism of Baha'u'llah was a valuable starting point. However they felt unconvinced by the evidence presented in the paper that Baha'u'llah was ordaining or even commending the Dhikr techniques as used by Sufis for general use by the Baha'is. Such Sufi techniques are certainly not forbidden (as the night for Darvish Sidq-'Ali shows) but neither are they expressly ordained as the only or even the recommended techniques. Baha'u'llah's mystical writings seem to concentrate on the more practical aspects of living one's life as a mystic and creating a mystic community rather than on questions of specific techniques such as Sufi Dhikr.

Response to the Borwick Seminar's Discussion on The Remembrance of God

I wish to thank the participants of the Borwick Seminar for their comments on my study of dhikr in Babi and Baha'i scriptures. The paper published in this issue of the BSB is a revision of the version read at Borwick as I am in agreement with some of the criticisms of the draft read at the seminar and have made changes accordingly. Here, I would like to briefly respond to the observation that I have "perhaps gone too far" in claiming that Baha'u'llah ordained or even recommended Sufi dhikr techniques.

To be honest, I am surprised by the seminar participants' resistance to what seems rather clear. I have not stated that Baha'u'llah ordains an elaborate dhikr ritual of any particular Sufi ṭarīqa, but that he does clearly speak of doing repetitive invocation of sacred formulae, that he refers to a special posture for invocation, that he led a dhikr ceremony in the Siyah-Chal (contrary to the seminar remarks, the Siyah-Chal chanting is standard dhikr practice not samāʿ), and that he inaugurated a special yearly ḥadra in memory of one of his fellow exiles. The Borwick participants note that Baha'u'llah's law of invoking the greatest name ninety-five times does not actually equate with Sufi dhikr since the act of consciously counting prevents the entering of a "trance" state. As I point out in the paper, this law of invocation appears to be sort of a minimum requirement for all Baha'is, while those with the aptitude and inclination are encouraged by ʿAbdu'l-Baha to ceaselessly utter the greatest name in order to achieve altered states of consciousness. I have now also included in the paper Baha'u'llah's appropriation of the famous ḥadīth an-nawāfil for the Baha'i faith. All this may be regarded as further verification of Baha'u'llah's positive recommendation of dhikr invocation as a method for cultivating heightened states of consciousness that is undoubtedly related, historically and phenomenologically, to Sufi thought and practice.

Finally, I feel uncomfortable with the suggestions that Baha'u'llah merely advocates some vague sense of religiousness in normal daily activities and that his mystical writings "seem to concentrate on the more practical aspects of living one's life as a mystic and creating a mystic community rather than the questions of specific techniques such as Sufi dhikr". Firstly, mysticism is not a vague feeling nor is it achieved without effort and attention to detail. I believe that I have pointed out that Baha'u'llah does indeed have something to say in regards to specific techniques which may be the seed for individual

Baha'is to cultivate a particular style of Baha'i mysticism distinct from Sufi, Buddhist, Christian and other spiritual paths though, hopefully, informed by inter-faith dialogue. Strangely though, Baha'is seem to try valiantly to protect Baha'u'llah from such insinuations. Undoubtedly more research is needed in this area. But in the final analysis, the study of Baha'u'llah's mysticism will have merely limited "historic interest" unless there occurs among contemporary Baha'is an existential involvement with mysticism. In order to bring out the meanings of Baha'u'llah's mystical writings, Baha'is will need to overcome what Jacques Chouleur has called their "reticence...in exhibiting the mystic aspect of their religion and its Founder" (WQ, 13 (Fall 19 ), p. 18).

Secondly, I think we should try to get past the image of mysticism as an activity of impractical ascetics. No doubt not all persons, not even all those interested in matters of faith, have the inclination for serious exploration of mystical experience. Those who do, however, are not generally recluses or impractical. As the story goes, a Zen master was once asked what he did before experiencing enlightenment. He replied that he chopped wood. "And now?", asked the seeker. At this the master returned to his ax to chop some more wood. In short, I do not see what the contrast is between practical aspects of living and engagement in a specific method of spiritual discipline.

Thirdly, I think we are going about matters backwards as Baha'is if we believe that we are trying to create a "mystic community" yet one that does not actually take much interest in developing, either alone or in group settings, a tangible Baha'i approach to the numinous. Relation to the holy is essentially an encounter between the individual and God, and then it is spiritual individuals who are capable of developing and nurturing a 'mystic' community. I often get the feeling that many Baha'is expect to find mysticism in the administration, that involvement in Baha'i institutions is "real mysticism" and that techniques of meditation are not really what the Baha'i faith is about. Shoghi Effendi nicely points out how we must begin with individuals who cultivate spiritual energies via meditation and prayer in order that as a group Baha'is might struggle to keep their faith and institutions vibrant and not mere lifeless organization.

...the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Baha'u'llah has so much stressed the importance of worship....The Baha'i Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus

fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man which has first to be fed....Laws and institutions, as viewed by Baha'u'llah, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and becomes a dead thing.

(Spiritual Foundations, p. 14)

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