

A Stylistic Analysis of the Báb's Writings

Abridged Annotated Translation of Vahid Behmardi's "Muqaddamih-yi dar bárih-yi sabk va siyáq-i áthár-i mubárah-yi haqrat-i rabb a' lá"

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Abstract

The following is an abridgement of Vahid Behmardi's outstanding article on the style of the Bab's Writings.¹ I have decided to do this for several reasons.

First, there is a striking lack of communication between Baha'i scholars who write in Persian and those who write in English. Of course, much of the Persian writing on the history and teachings of the Faith is, like English writing, highly derivative. There are, however, a few notable exceptions, like the work of Vahid Behmardi and Vahid Rafati, who are engaged in laying the critical foundational work for future studies (by foundational work, I mean sound and detailed philological studies of the Baha'i Scriptures). By making this article accessible to a wider audience, I hope it will advance dialogue between the two scholarly communities while also further the development of Baha'i studies itself.

Second, although the enemies of the Faith and the believers are divided in their assessment of the Bab's style of writing, they do agree on one point: their appraisal of His writings never moves beyond a superficial evaluation – "it's gibberish" or "it's unique." While Dr. Behmardi's article does contain the standard rebuttal of the former charge, his treatment of the Bab's writings is laudable due to his detailed explanation of the reasoning behind the latter assertion. He touches on most of the major stylistic features of the Bab's writings and provides numerous examples from His writings to support his conclusions.

As for the format of the article itself, each new thought is preceded by a number that corresponds with the page number of the article for ease of reference. All footnotes reflect my own commentary unless otherwise specified.

A Stylistic Analysis of the Báb's Writings by Vahid Behmardi

Part 1 - Introduction

The style of the Báb's writings is new and can't be compared with the standards of style of the people in the past. Therefore, the author will use an inductive method to talk about the writings of the Báb. *Sabk* ("style, mode") is a term that is applied to ways and means of speaking and writing with regard to statements and expressions with various phrasings. The Báb uses

¹ "Muqaddamih-yi dar bárih-yi sabk va siyáq-i áthár-i mubárah-yi haqrat-i rabb a' lá," *Khushih-há*, vol. 6, p. 47-67)

the terms *sha'n* or *nahj* for *sabk* in His writings. In the Writings of the Báb, meaning and mode of expression are intimately connected. [Meaning of the term *bayán*] *Bayán* as a technical term of the Báb which He started to use in Mákú. Its meaning is indicated in the following passage by the Báb in tenth *báb* of the second *wáhid* of the *Kitáb al-Asmá'*:

أَتَى قَدْ نَظَّمْتُ الْبَيَانَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ أَنْ حِينَ مَا يَسْمَعُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مِنْ عِنْدِهِ فَادَّاءُ كُلِّ يَسْجُدُونَ وَ لَا
يَتَحَاجُّونَ بِهِ وَ لَا يَجَادِلُونَ وَ لَا يَخْطَرُونَ بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ دُونَ أَمْرِهِ وَ كُلٌّ مِنْ أَعْلَى الْبَيَانِ وَ ادْنَاهُ
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ لِيَحْضُرُونَ ثُمَّ لِيَسْجُدُونَ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مَا وَعَدَنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَاتِ حُرُوفِ السَّبْعِ فِي الْبَيَانِ
لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ تَنْزِيلٍ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“I arranged the *Bayán* in such wise that when they heard the verses of God from His Presence, they all immediately prostrated and did not dispute with it [the *Bayán*] and did not argue and did not think within themselves [lá yakhtiru bi-anfusihim] save by its/his command. All who propagated the *Bayán* and held it close will attain [yahdurún]. Moreover, they will prostrate while saying, ‘This is that which God and the essence of the seven letters hath promised us in the *Bayán*, ‘of which there is no doubt,’ [Qur’an 2:2] which hath been sent down from the Lord of the Worlds.’”

Behmardi identifies Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest (*man yuzhiruhu'llah*) as that which is attained and the Báb as the “essence of the seven letters” (since the name `Alí Muhammad is made up of seven letters). Based on this passage, Behmardi identifies three different meanings of the word *bayán*. First, when the Báb says “I arranged the *Bayán*,” it means the Blessed Cause [i.e. the Bábi religion] in general. Second, “all who propagated the *Bayán* and held it close” are the people of the *Bayán* [i.e. the Bábis]. Third, “This is that which God hath promised in the *Bayán*” means the writings of the Báb. It does not only mean the Arabic and Persian *Bayán* of the Báb, because in other Writings the promise of the manifestation of Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest also appears. It has a general meaning. Of course, the term *Bayán* is used in other places to specifically indicate the *Kitáb-i Bayán*

In the Qur’an, the word *bayán* occurs in 3 places. In Sura Al `Imrán and Sura Rah.mán, it means word and speech. In Sura Qiyáma, the word *bayán* is connected with the unveiling and clarification of the meanings of the Qur’an:

Verily, it is incumbent upon Us [God] to collect it and recite it [qur`ánahu]. If we recite it [qara`náhu], follow thou its recital [qur`ánahu]. Then it is incumbent upon us to explain it [`alayná bayánahu].” (Q 75:17-19)

The meaning of the three verses is clear. God sent down the Qur'an to Muhammad and after that He will clarify its truths. *Bayán* in Arabic means clarification. The word "then" [which is an *`atf* (conjunction)] in verse 19 indicates that first the Qur'an is sent down, and then the *bayán*. So, according to the verse, God has sent down the Qur'an and promises to send down the clarification (*bayán*). In the context of the Sura, this clarification is to be sent down on the Day of Resurrection. It will be among the signs of that Day. Behmardi asserts that until the time of the Báb, no one had claimed to have the *bayán* of the Qur'an. Further, it couldn't have come to pass in the lifetime of Muhammad since the Qur'an was still being sent down, and the verse says that the *bayán* comes when the Qur'an has finished being sent down.

Although the Báb wrote commentaries on the Qur'an, He did not call His writings "*Bayán*" until signs that are more eloquent than speech came to pass indicating that it is the Day of Resurrection. Then the *Bayán* promised by God in the Sura of Qiyáma was sent down. Because of this, most of the Writings of the Báb have one main difference from the Qur'an with regard to the mode of writing. Unlike the Qur'an, the *Bayán* is in the mode of explication and giving of details, not absolute brevity. For example, the divine Names are mentioned in the Qur'an. However, there is no explanation of the meaning of these names. Because of this, exegetes gave several different possible meanings to these names. The writings of the Báb clarified these names in two ways. First, He compiled the names of the God from the Qur'an and added to them. Second, He explained these names in many of His books and letters. This is one part of the clarification (*bayán*) on the Day of Resurrection made manifest by the Báb, as He says in the *Seven Proofs*:

و نظر کن در فرقان که يك بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم زياده نازل نشده، و در بيان به يك نوع بيان كه بيان شده و نازل شده سيصد و شصت و يك بيان آن شده كه قدری از آن در بيان نازل شده و زياده بر اين هم ممكن بوده ولی اظهار آن نشده

Notice that in the Qur'an, one more 'Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim' was not sent down [i.e. there is a perfect number – 114 or 19x6], and in the *Bayán*, by means of one type of clarification [*bayán*], it has been clarified and three hundred and sixty [Basmallahs] were sent down [361 or 19x19]. One clarification [*bayán*] is that a certain amount hath been revealed in the *Bayán*. Increasing upon this is also possible, but did not come to pass.²

² *Dalá'il-i Sab'ih*, Tehran, n.d.: 63. In Behmardi's assessment of the term *bayán*, he relates a standard Baha'i explanation of the term as indicating a fulfillment of Qur'anic prophecy. I would certainly agree that the Báb saw his writings as a fulfillment of an eschatological prophecy. However, I disagree with Behmardi's

Part 2 – The Báb’s Eloquence

In several of His Tablets, the Báb characterizes His Writings as eloquent [examples given from *Dalá'il-i Sab'ih*]. Behmardi asks, “What is the meaning of eloquence with regard to the Writings of the Báb?” In order to answer the question, he will look at the standards of those learned in rhetoric, then compare them to the Writings of the Báb.

In the eighth century AH, the orator Qazvíní [666-739/1268-1338] summarized what had been said about eloquence up until that point in his book *al-Idáh. fí 'ulúm al-balágha*. According to him, eloquence of word (*kalima*) lies in the absence of incongruous letters, peculiar words, and abnormal derivation (of words) (*qiyás*). Eloquence of composition (*kalám*) is devoid of weak writing, incongruous words, complex expression and meaning, repetition, and consecutive genitive (*idáfa*) constructions.

The Báb’s writings do not measure up to any of the standards listed by Qazvini. For example, there are many expressions in the Writings of the Báb that are known only as Bábí technical terminology, like “zilál al-mukfahirrát al-afriidús” (“the shade of the dark clouds of Paradise”) in the *Ziyarát-i 'Abd al-'Azím*, or “‘abd ath-thá” in the epistles of the Letters of the Living, and so forth.

With regard to abnormal derivation of words, the Báb does this a great deal, particularly in the formation of adjectives, like *qaydúr* and *qadúr* from the adjective *qadír* and *mu'aylím* and *'alúm* from the adjective *'alím*, or *'azúz* from *'azíz*, and *'azúm* from *'azím*, and *qaydús* from *quddús*, and *muqtadím* and *qadúm* from *qadím*, and so forth³

In verb conjugation, the Báb’s style is also unusual. For example, he derives the verb *dhawwata* from the noun *dhát* (“essence”), as in the verse:

انا النقطة التي نُوت بها من دُوت

“I am the Point which He who hath been made an essence [man dhuwwita] hath been made an essence by it (the Point) [dhuwwita bihá].”⁴

In the preamble of the Persian Bayan, the Báb derives the verb *shayya'a* from the noun *shay'*, as in the following:

assertion that no one claimed to have a bayán of the Qur'an until the time of the Báb. Innumerable authors have described their commentaries on the Qur'an as bayán (or tibyán). Further, Shi'is probably believed that their Imams were the sources of the bayán promised in the Qur'an. Indeed, in one of the earliest Shi'i commentaries on the Qur'an, 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi clearly states that the phrases “incumbent upon us” ('alayná) refers to the “family of the Prophet” (*Tafsír al-Qummi*, vol. 2, p. 397).

³ These examples are taken from a letter revealed for Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest. See *Muntakhabat Ayat az Athar Hadrat-i-Nuqtih-i-'Ula*, Tehran, 134 BE, 1-2.

⁴ Ibid p.14

و كل شيء بما قد قدر فيه او يُقدَّر قد شئى بشيئته

“Everything [kull shay’] that He hath ordained and will ordain hath been brought into being [shuyyi’a] by His being [bi-shay’iyyatihi, lit. His quality of being a thing].”

As for repetition, which is frowned upon by the learned, the Báb’s writings are replete with it, especially in the mode of prayers (*du`wát*) and supplications (*munaját*). In most instances, repetition is connected with peculiar words and abnormal derivations.

So, if we accept the standard of eloquence of the literati of the past, then the Báb’s writings clearly do not match this standard. Why then, does He maintain that His Writings are eloquent? The answer lies in the uniqueness of His Writings. Since they are unique, they do not measure up to the standards of the past. Rather, His writings will become the measure of eloquence in the future. The Qur’an itself was unique and did not conform to the standards of the past. The literati took it as a standard, and its style became the standard, which all strived for but fell short because of its inimitability. Further, at the time of its revelation, the Arabs rejected its style because it was not familiar to them and accused Muhammad of working magic.

Part 3 - Modes of Revelation and a Discussion of the Mode of Verses

The Báb says that His revelation is written in several modes (*sha`n* or *nahj*). Behmardi says that each of these modes has special qualities, which are sometimes mixed. In the first *báb* of the sixth *wáhid* and the second *báb* of the ninth *wáhid*, He stated that the Persian Bayán is revealed in five modes: verses (*áyát*), supplications (*munaját*), interpretations (*tafásír*), scientific treatises (*ṣuwar`ilmiyya*), and writings in Persian (*kalimát-i fársiyyih*). In the *Sahífih-yi`Adliyyih*⁵ and the *Dalá`il-i Sab`ih*⁶, the Báb also says that orisons (*khuṭbat*) are one of the modes of revelation.⁷ Further, in the Seven Proofs, the Báb also mentions tablets of visitation (*ziyárát*), prayers (*du`wát*), writings in Arabic (*kalimát-i arabiyya*) and also cryptic esoterica (*ghawámiḍ-i asrár*).

⁵ Tehran: n.d.: 9-10

⁶ p.27

⁷ People generally translate “*khuṭba*” as “sermon,” but this doesn’t make much sense in the Writings of the Báb, since the *khuṭba* usually comes in the form of a preamble to a Tablet and begins with some variation of “Praise be to God” (*taḥmíd*), like in the first sura of the Qur’an (Behmardi will discuss this later on). One might be tempted, therefore, to translate the term as “preamble” or “opening address.” However, the Báb also describes whole Tablets as a *khuṭba*. I have tentatively settled on the term “orison,” since it combines both notion of address as well as prayer.

Verses (*áyat*) have a preeminent position among the different modes. Rather, all the modes are under its shadow, as the Báb says in the first *báb* of the sixth *wáhid* of the Persian Bayán:

و اسم بیان به حقیقت اولیّه اطلاق بر آیات وحده می گردد زیرا که اوست حجت عظمی و
بینه کبری که دلالت نمی کند الا علی الله وحده و در حقیقت ثابویه اطلاق به مناجات و
در ثالث به تفسیر و در رابع به کلمات علمیّه و در خامس به کلمات فارسیّه می گردد
ولی کلّ در ظل آیات ذکر می گردد.

Primarily, the name “bayán” is only applied to verses [*áyat*] because they a mighty proof and great testimony that indicate nothing but God alone. Secondly, it is applied to supplications, thirdly to interpretations, fourthly to scientific treatises [*kalimát-i`ilmiyya*], and fifthly to writings in Persian. However, all of these are under the shadow of verses.

However, the Báb is not saying that His writings are only in one mode [i.e. verses], since there are five modes used in the *Panj Sha`n*, four in the *Kitáb al-Asmá*, and three in the *Şahífihi-yi bayn al-Haramayn*.

Behmardi now proceeds to talk about the special qualities of the different modes of revelation, beginning with verses (*áyat*). The term “verses” is generally applied to all divine words, whether Arabic or Persian. This is because the original meaning of the word is “signs.” Therefore, the words from the Messengers are “signs” from God and guide humanity to the Manifestation of His Cause.

Verses are also words which have a special style and, in the Writings of the Báb and Baha`u`llah, are all in Arabic. One of the special characteristics of verses are that they are the words of God Himself flowing through the tongue of His Manifestation to His servants. Sometimes the speaker, who is God, addresses the servants as the sole speaker (first person singular – “I”), sometimes as if he is absent (third person singular – “He”), and sometimes as if there are several speakers (first person plural – “We”). This is probably the meaning of the Bab's statement that verses "indicate nothing but God alone."

Moreover, verses have end rhymes (*fawásil*). The end rhyme of one verse is connected with the end rhyme of another. In the Writings of Baha`u`llah and the Báb, this is usually of three types:

1. The letters preceding the final letter (*harf rawíy*) are related to each other. These letters are usually a wáw, an alif or a yá'. For example,

- mubín, `alím and munír all have the letter yá' in them [i.e. the long "I"].
2. The final letters are the same. In literature, this is known as *saj`* [rhymed prose]. For example, `ibád, bilád, and shidád, or muqtadir and muntasi.r. [also the same verb patterns are used]
 3. A rhyme ending in the accusative alif. For example, all of the verses of the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* end in this rhyme, like wahhájá, mustaqímá, ħakímá and mastúrá.

Sometimes, the books or epistles have a mixture of different types of rhymes, as in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* and some of the Writings of the Báb. Some of the suras of the Qur'an also have several types of rhyme.

Part 4 - The Mode of Supplications

Supplications (*munaját*) are speech from the Manifestation to the One Who Makes Manifest [i.e. God]. They are in the mode of address (*khiṭáb*) and have sections composed of glorification and exaltation (*tasbīḥ wa tahlíl*), testimony (*tashahhud*), and praise (*tahmíd*), like those that begin with "subhánaká" ("praise be to Thee") [example of glorification and exaltation], "lá iláha illá anta" ("there is no God but Thee") [example of testimony], "ashhadu annaka allahu" ("I bear witness that Thou art God") [example of testimony], and "naḥmaduka allahumma" ("We offer praise to Thee, O Lord") [example of praise]. With few exceptions, the supplications of the Báb are all in Arabic.

One of the few exceptions is recorded in the *Saḥífih-yi `Adliyyih* (p. 3):

خداوندا چگونه ثنا گویم مظاهر قدرت حبيب تو را و حال آنکه به يد قدرت خود بر الواح
افنده موجودات مسطور فرموده ای لا احصى نثاء عليهم كما انت انتھيت عليهم

"O Lord! How can we praise the manifestations of the power of Thy Beloved when, with Thy Hand of divine power, Thou didst inscribe upon the tablets of the hearts of all existent things: "I do not consider (my) praise of them to be as Thou dost praise them."

One of the distinctive features of the Writings of the Báb is that in addition to the praise and glorification of God, He also mentions His personal condition and historical issues. For example, in one prayer He alludes to His imprisonment: "Praise be to Thee, O my God! Thou seest my state in the heart of this Mountain."

The Báb decreed that supplications were among the proofs of the theophany. Behmardi cites passage from the *Dalá'íl Sab`ih*⁸ and the *Sharh.-i Súrat al-*

⁸ Bab, *Dalá'íl-i Sab`ih*, 26-27

Kawthar. The latter example is a reference to a statement by Majlisí in the *Haqq al-Yaqín*, where he asserts that the *Ṣaḥífiḥ-yi Sajádiyyih*, which contains the prayers the supplications of Imam Zayn al-`Abidín `Alí b. al-Husayn, is a proof of the Imam's divine authority (*wiláyat*). The Báb alludes to this in the following passage:

كيف تثبت الولاية بصحيفة ولا تثبت بصحائف معدودة التي ملأت شرق الارض وغربها
فأى حجة اكبر من هذه النعمة و اى عطية اعظم من هذه القدرة.

“How can the divine authority (of the Imam) be established by a single volume [*ṣaḥífa*] and that which hath filled the East and the West not be established by unnumbered volumes? Which proof is greater than this divine blessing and which gift is mightier than this (evidence of) divine power?”

Prayers (*du`wát*), tablets of visitation (*ziyárát*), and orisons (*khutab*) are slightly different from supplications. However, since all of them set forth the powerlessness and need of the supplicant, they can be included in the mode of supplication. One of the differences between supplications and prayers is that supplications are generally in praise and glorification of the Creator, while setting forth the servitude, powerlessness and error of the believer in contrast to the object of worship. However, a prayer is for one object or occasion, or specific time, but it is revealed in the form of a supplication. Shi`i prayers from the Imams that found in collections of prayers and tablets of visitation have the characteristic of being written for some specific object, time or occasion. For example, there is the prayer for granting a request (*tawassul*), or for the removal of difficulties (*faraj*) and a prayer on the day of `arāfah [the day before the Feast of Sacrifices], and a morning prayer and prayers for the days of the week, etc.

The Báb has multiplied these types of prayers, like prayers for each one of the days of the week, and prayers of protection, and for granting a request, etc. Therefore, we can say that prayer is for something specific and supplications are general, because supplications only include glorification of God, but do not have a specific occasion on which they are to be said. This rule also applies to the supplications and prayers of Baha'u'llah. For instance, there are prayers for fasting and healing, etc.

Tablets of visitation are also prevalent in the Shi`i world. There are tablets of visitation for the Fourteen Infallible Ones [Muhammad, Fatima, and the 12 Imams] and saints and notables. Most of them are attributed to the Imams, although it is possible that some of them were composed by the `ulama in the time of the Safavids. Those that we can attribute to the Imams

with certainty are found in the *Ziyárat-i Jámi`a* that Shaykh Ahmad commented upon. In these tablets of visitation, the object of the tablets is described with attributes and statements that are similar to statements in the Qur`an, the Hadith, and the traditions of the Imams. In other words, no other Islamic technical terminology is added. However, this is not the case in the Báb's tablets of visitation, where one can find the technical terminology of the Illuminationists and divine philosophy [*hikma muta`alliyya*, ie. Mulla Sadra's school], as in Tablet of Visitation for `Abd al-`Azím:

كيف احصى ثنائك يا ابن الشجرة الالهية والورقة المباركة الازلجى والثمره الجنية اللاهوتي
و الطلعة الشعشعانية الجبروتية والقمص المشرقة الملكوتية ثم كيف اذكر انتسابك الى
كينونية ذكر الاول من الازل الذى ركن منه يدل على كينونية المشية بجوهريتها و ركن منه
على ذاتية الارادة بتجرديتها و ركن منه على نفسانية القدر وسعته و ركن منه على انية
القضاء و ظهوره

How can I praise Thee, O son of the divine Tree [*ibn ash-shajara al-iláhiyya*], and the blessed, eternal Leaf [*al-warqa al-mubáraka al-azaliyya*], and the celestial Fruit of paradise [*ath-thamara al-janniyya al-láhútiyya*], and the divine, radiant countenance [*aṭ-ṭal`a ash-sha`sha`ániyya al-jabarútiyya*] and the heavenly, luminous raiments [*al-qumus al-mushriqa al-malakútiyya*]? How, then, can I make mention of Thy relationship to the Essence of the First Remembrance [*kaynúniyyat dhikr al-awwal*] from everlasting, from which a pillar leads to the essence of the Will [*kaynúniyyat al-mashiyya*] through its quality of being an essence [*bi-jawhariyyatihá*], and a pillar from it leads to the essence of Purpose [*dhátiyyat al-iráda*] by its purity (from matter) [*bi-tajarrudiyyatihá*], and a pillar from it leads to the essence of the existential decree [*nafsániyyat al-qadar*] and its power [*sa`a*], and from it a pillar leads to the essence of predetermination [*anniyyat al-qad.á`*] and its manifestation [*zuhúr*]...

In addition to the Illuminationist terminology, the arrangement of this tablet of visitation reflects the Illuminationist philosophy called *`ilm al-mizán* (The Science of Balance). They are statements that compare the physical world (*mulk*) to the spiritual world (*malakút*) and show the parallel between the two. For example, the Ka`ba is an earthly symbol for heavenly realities and a divine throne which is composed of four pillars and a circle of being is placed in the middle. There are Writings of the Báb in His handwriting that are in the shape of a square in the middle of which are several circles, and in

⁹ Behmardi's note: In the second section, there are four pillars:

First Pillar	kaynúniyya	mashiyya	jawhar
Second Pillar	dhátiyya	iráda	tajarrud
Third Pillar	nafsániyya	qadar	sa`a
Fourth Pillar	anniyya	qad.á`	zuhúr

some the shapes the names of the four angels (Gabriel, Isráfíl, Michael, and `Izrá`íl) are written in the four corners of a square. These tetrads (tarbî) are clearly evident in the Tablet of visitation for `Abd al-`Azím and in other Writings of the Báb and Baha`u`llah.

As in the other writings of the Báb, sometimes the vocabulary of the Tablets of Visitation is exclusive to the Báb. Another quality of the Tablets of Visitation is that those that are for the great Bábis, like Quddús and Mullá Husayn, are full of very lofty praise and characterization of them. In other places, this praise and characterization would be used by the Báb with reference to Himself. For example, Quddús is described with attributes of God found in the Qur`an and Mullá Husayn is characterized as the creator of the worlds of the seen and the unseen.¹⁰

Orisons are phrases from verses which introduce epistles and speak of God in the third person [ie. God is not addressed directly]. This is the only difference between supplications and orisons. An orison begins with praise (*tahmíd*) of God in the form of “al-Hamdu li-llah.” Behmardi gives several examples from the Writings of the Báb and points out that there are also orisons in the Writings of Baha`u`llah. In *Ishráqát*, for example, there are two at the beginning, which Baha`u`llah says He has revealed twice, like the orison of the Qur`an was revealed twice (once in Mecca and once in Medina).¹¹

Part 5 – The Modes of Commentaries and Scientific Treatises

Commentaries (*tafásir*) – Regarding His commentaries, the Báb stated in the *Dalá`il-i Sab`ih* that some of His tafsirs on the Qur`an are in the style of verses (*áyát*) and some are in the “technical style of the perfect `ulama [kalimát-i mustalihih bayn `ulamá-yi kammalín]”¹². An example of the former would be the Báb’s commentary on the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*. A good example of the latter is the Báb’s commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*, which was revealed before the Báb received His call. It is full of technical terminology and Shaykhí expressions and replete with citations of hadith and traditions from the Imams. In some of the Báb’s commentaries, both styles are used, as in the commentary on *Surat al-Kawthar*, where both styles are used in different sections.

¹⁰ Fádíl Mázandarání, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, v. 3: 425, 141.

¹¹ Behmardi’s comments on the Bab’s style in the Tablets of Visitation closely mirror my own conclusions on Baha`u`llah’s style in the same genre, see ‘The Wronged One: Shi`i Narrative Structure in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn’, *Lights of Irfán*, (Wilmette: Irfan Colloquia, 2002, 3.), particularly with regard to the use of quaternaries and hyperbole. I also noted that Baha`u`llah’s style in this genre closely mirrors that of Shi`i Tablets of Visitation in structure and topoi, something Behmardi does not mention. Those familiar with the technical vocabulary of the Illuminationist and Mulla Sadra schools of philosophy will instantly recognize that I have glossed over this terminology in the translation of the passage of the Ziyaratnama of `Abd al-`Azím. Much could be written to explain the relationship between the different levels of this tetrad composed of triads.

¹² *Dalá`il-i Sab`ih*, 27

Here two issues arise. First, the commentaries that are in the style of verses do not conform to the rules of the people. However, the commentaries in the style of the perfect `ulama do conform to the rules, as is clear in the Báb's commentary on Surat wa'l-`Aşr. Second, all commentaries in both styles begin with an orison.

Scientific modes (*shu'ún `ilmiyya*). This type of revelation is also called *şuwar `ilmiyya* and *kalimát ilmiyya*. The meaning of these phrases is that the work does not have the characteristics of verses and supplications and deals with a scientific, philosophical or jurisprudential issue, or kindred subjects. This type of revelation sometimes seeks to clarify an issue and sometimes seeks to reject or accept various opinions or beliefs. These scientific modes are sent down in the form of isolated treatises, like the "*Risála fí Bayán Masá'il ath-Thalátha*" ("A Treatise Explicating Three Questions") or "*Şahífa Dhahabiyya*" or in the midst of commentaries in the style of the perfect `ulama. The style and content of this type of revelation is direct, scientific, and in no need of interpretation. For example, in his commentary on the Surat al-Qadr, the Báb succinctly clarifies the meaning of three scientific terms: "*as-sarmad* is that which has no beginning and no end, and *ad-dahr* has a beginning but no end, and *az-zaman* is that which is ascertained from the motion of the celestial bodies by means of the rising of the sun and the moon and the appearance of day and night." Behmardi also cites the Báb's response to the proponents of *wahdat al-wujúd* in His *Şahífa Dhahabiyya* as an example of this mode [the passage concerns God's unity and His disassociation from all things]:

إن أكثر الحكماء الأشراقية والمشائين والصدرائيين والالهيين قد زلت أقدامهم في بيان ذلك المقام وقد اشتبهت عليهم آيات تجليات الإبداع بطلعة الذات و لذا ذهبوا بالقول الباطل في اعيان الثابتة في الذات لاثبات علمه سبحانه و بذكر البسيط الحقيقي في اثبات علي الذات و بذكر الربط بين الذات والأفعال والصفات و بذكر وحدة الوجود بين الموجد والمفقود و أن كل ذلك شرك محض عند آل الله أئمة العدل لأن الله لم يزل كان عالماً بلا وجود شيء يمثل ما أنه كان حياً و كما أنه لا يحتاج في حياته بوجود غيره فلا يحتاج في علمه بوجود معلوم...

Most of the Illuminationists [al-ishraqiyyin], the peripatetic philosophers, the followers of Mulla Sadrá (*as-Sadrá'iyyin*), and the Theosophical philosophers (*al-iláhiyyin*) have erred in their explanations of this station. The signs of the effulgences (*tajalliyát*) of creation were mistaken by them for the countenance of the Essence [of God]. Thus they went along with erroneous statements concerning the Eternal Archetypes (*a`yan thábita*) being in the Essence [of God] in order to establish His knowledge (praised be He); and with mention of the Uncompounded Reality in order to

establish causality (*'illiyya*) in the Essence [of God]; and with mention of the connection between the Essence [of God] and [His] actions and attributes; and with the mention of the oneness of Being (*wah.dat al-wujúd*) between the Creator (*mújid*) and the non-existent (*al-mafqúd*). All of this is absolute heresy (*shirk mahd.*) in the estimation of the family of God, the Imáms of justice, for God has always been the All-Knowing without the existence of anything in the same manner that He is Living (*bi-lá wujúd shay'in bi-mithli má anna-hu kana hayyan*). Just as He does not need for His being alive the existence of anything other than Him, He also does not need for His knowledge the existence of objects of knowledge.¹³

Part 6 – The Mode of the Bab's Writings in Persian

Persian writings (*kalimát fársiyya*) – The style of the Báb's writings in Persian is completely without precedent, whether from the standpoint of vocabulary or phrasing. In the Persian *Bayán*, the nouns and adjectives are Arabic and the verbs, pronouns and particles are Persian. In Persian, the foundation of expression is the verb and a sentence without a verb is incomplete. Nouns and adjectives are in the position of details of the verb in the sentence. Therefore, the Persian *Bayán* is a book in the Persian language because its sentences are constructed on the basis of Persian verbs. However, the rest of the characteristics of these Persian sentences are Arabic, whether from the standpoint of words and vocabulary or from the stand point of phrasing or arrangement of the vocabulary. Furthermore, the arrangement of the words is according to Arabic sentence structure, not Persian. To demonstrate this, Behmardi proposes an experiment. First, he will take a verse from the first part of the Persian *Bayán* and separates it into its component parts:

خلق نفرموده / آية / عرفان / خود را / در / هیچ / ش یئی / الا / به عجز / كل شی / از /
 عرفان او / و تجلی نفرموده / به شیبئی / الا / به نفس او / از / لم یزل / متعالی بوده / از /
 اقتران / به ش بییی / و خلق فرموده / كل شی / را / به شانی / که / كل / به کینونیت /
 فطرت / اقرار کنند / نزد او / در / یوم / قیامت / به
 اینکه / نیست / از برای او / عدلی / و نه / کفوی /

¹³ I have used Moojan Momen's translation of this excerpt from the introduction to his translation of [Baha'u'llah's Tablet on the Uncompounded Reality](#) Accessed April 8 2007. However, Behmardi's manuscript seems to be more accurate and I have adjusted Momen's translation accordingly: "Illuminationists" for "Islamic," and "non-existent" for "the one who has gone astray" [I think this better describes the relationship between the absolute and the contingent implied in the word *mafqúd*]. Further, Momen incorrectly translates one portion as, "without the existence of anything having form and shape" (*shay'un bi-mithl ma inna-hu kana shayyár*), although he notes that this is a tenuous translation. Behmardi's version of the text makes the connection between this sentence and the following sentence clearer: *bi-lá wujúdi shay'in bi-mithli má anna-hu kana h.ayyan* ("without the existence of anything in the same manner that He is Living.")

khalq nafarmúdiḥ / áyat-i / `irfán-i / khud-rá / dar / hích / shay'í / illá / biḥ `ajz-i / kull-i shay' / az / `irfán-i uu / va tajallí nafarmúdiḥ / biḥ shay'í / illá / biḥ nafs-i uu / idh / lam yazal / muta`álí búdiḥ / az / iqtirán / biḥ shay'í / va khalq fārmúdiḥ / kull shay'-rá / biḥ sha'ní / kih / kull / biḥ / kaynúniyyat / fit.rat / iqrár kunand / nazd-i uu / dar / yawm-i / qiyámat / biḥ iinkih / níst / az bará-yi uu / `adlí / va nah / kufuwí¹⁴

“He hath not created a sign of the knowledge of Himself in anything except by the inability of all things to know Him and He hath not manifested (Himself) to anything except to Himself, since He hath always been exalted above association with things and He hath created all things in such a manner that all (of creation) in their essential nature acknowledge in His presence on the Day of Resurrection that He hath no peer or likeness.”

Then Behmardi changes each word into the Arabic equivalent but does not change the syntax of the sentence.

لم يخلق / آية / عرفان / نفسه / فى / اى / شئ / الا / يعجز / كل شئ / عن / عرفانه / ولم
يتجل / بشئ / الا / بنفسه / اذ / لم يزل / كان متعالياً / عن / الاقتران / بشئ / و خلق / كل
شئ / بشأن / ان / الكل / بكنونية / الفطرة /

يقرون / لديه / فى / يوم / القيامة / بان / ليس / له / عدل / ولا / كفو

lam yakhlūq / áyata / `irfáni / nafsīhi / fī / ayy / shay'in / illá / bi-`ajzi / kulli
shay'in / `an / `irfānihi / wa lam yatajalli / bi-shay'in / illá bi-nafsīhi / idh /
lam yazal / kána muta`áliyan / `an / al-iqtiráni / bi-shay'in / wa khalaqa /
kulla shay'in / bi-sha'ni / anna / al-kulla / bi-kaynúniyyati / al-fit.rati /
yuqirrána / ladayhi / fī / yawmi / al-qiyámati / bi-anna / laysa / lahu / `adlun
/ wa lá / kufuwun¹⁵

The result is that the syntax of the “Persian” of the Báb is actually Arabic syntax. [!] This is the reason Persians cannot understand the Báb’s Persian writings.

¹⁴ *Muntakhibát-i áyat az áthár-i H.ad.rat-i Nuqtih-yi Ulá*, 79.

¹⁵ Behmardi’s note: “khalq nafarmúdiḥ,” “tajallí nafarmúdiḥ,” and “muta`áli búdiḥ” are in lieu of a single, complete Persian verb which are formed from Arabic words with a Persian verb suffix. This is one type of focus on the Arabic language in the Bayán, where Persian verbs are generally one Arabic word with the suffix: “fārmúd – kard – namúd – gardíd – gasht – búd – mi-báshad – hast – shud.” [in other words, one looks to the Persian suffix for tense and person, but looks at the Arabic word for meaning.]

If a person knowledgeable of Arabic, but unfamiliar with the Writings, reads an Arabic translation of the Persian of the Báb (without altering the syntax), he would deem it eloquent. However, a Persian unfamiliar with the Writings would not be able to understand the Persian Writings of the Báb. Therefore, we can conclude that the Persian writings of the Báb are outwardly Persian but inwardly Arabic. This is not farfetched, as the Báb seems to allude to it in the *Ṣahífa `Adliyya* (p. 4), where He says that “Arabic truths” (*ḥaqíqat `arabiyyat*) have flowed from His “Persian verses” (*áyát-i `ajamiyyih*). Behmardi also remarks that the Báb’s penchant for Arabic nouns and adjectives in His Persian writings is also evident in the Guardian’s *Lawh-i Qarn*.¹⁶

Part 7 – The Mode of Cryptic Esoterica

Cryptic esoterica (*ghawámiq-i asrár*) – Some of the writings of the Báb are sent down on the basis of the science of letters and numbers and circles and amulets (*hayákil*) and squares because He says in the Seven Proofs, regarding the *Kitáb al-Hayákil*:

از جملهء ادلاء متقنه علم كل شریء است در نفس واحد كه به حدّ اعجاز است اختراع آن، كه در كتاب ه ياكل واحد بيان اين علم مكنون مخزون شده و احدی قبل از اين مطلع نشده.

“Among the conclusive proofs is the knowledge of all things in a single individual, the elaboration of which is on the level of miraculous inimitability (*i`jáz*). This hidden and concealed knowledge has been explained in the *Kitáb-i Hayákil-i Wáhid*, nor was anyone aware of it before this.”¹⁷

Of course, just because some of the Writings of the Báb are in an obscure style is no proof that this has general applicability [i.e. that everything is cryptic esoterica]. It is only in subjects that don’t concern the general public and are revealed for the Báb’s inner circle [*kháṣṣán*]. Those that are for the general public have an accessible style that clarifies issues. Otherwise, they could not be held accountable for rejecting the Báb’s Message.

If this restriction of cryptic esoterica to things revealed to the inner circle is correct, then we can say that this type of revelation was written in different modes. For example, three different styles are used in one of the Báb’s Tablets for Baha’u’llah in the form of an amulet. First, there are verses

¹⁶ In translating the example Behmardi gives, I have tried to adhere to the syntax of the Persian passage as much as possible in order to give a sense of what is going on in the original. Since it is actually Arabic syntax, it is possible to transfer this word order into English, although it sounds terribly clunky. If the passage were of more Persian syntax, this would be much more difficult since the verb would come at the end of the sentence.

¹⁷ *Dalá’íl-i Sab`ih*, 45-6. Translation from Denis MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Baha’ism* (London: British Academic Press, 1994, 17). MacEoin argues elsewhere that the *Kitáb-i Hayákil-i Wáhid* is actually the last five sections of the *Kitáb-i Panj Sha`n*. See MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bábí Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 1992, 89-90).

(*áyat*) in which the speaker is God and there is an end rhyme in the form of an accusative alif. The second portion is in the form of a prayer (*ad`iya*). The third portion of the Tablet is in the form of an orison (*khuṭab*). Therefore, writings that are considered to be cryptic esoterica, which are different in tone from other writings, do not have a special style. In other words, this type of writing has a specialized content, but not a specialized form. This specialized content is found both in scientific modes (*shu`ún`ilmiyya*) of writing and cryptic esoterica.

Part 8 – Alteration of Verses

The alteration of verses (*taṣrif-i áyat*) is found in the Qur`an and the Writings of the Báb and Baha`u`llah. Indeed, it can be said that the alteration of verses is one of the characteristics of divine revelation. In Arabic, the word *taṣrif* means changing something from one form (*ṣura*) or mood (*hála*) or arrangement (*tarkíb*) to another form or mood or arrangement without changing the essence. For example, the definition of morphology (*`ilm aṣ-ṣarf*) is “a science which investigates the change of a word into different forms in accordance with the intended meaning.”¹⁸ For example, a person who exchanges money is called a money changer (*ṣarráf*). It is not only the exchange of one form of money [ie. dollars] for another form [quarters], but it is also the exchange of one type of money for another [pounds for dollars]. Therefore, the meaning of altering the verses of God is changing words from one style or arrangement to another style or arrangement, like changing from supplications to verses, or vice versa, without changing the content. For example, we see that in the writings of the Báb He mentions a subject in which there are numerous instances of alteration, while preserving the original statement, but with a change in the arrangement of the sentences. One well-known example of this is the alteration of the statements in the Dawn Prayer (*du`á-yi saḥar*).¹⁹ In the Tablets of Visitation which the Báb revealed for the night of the halfway point (*laylat an-niṣf*) of the month of fasting,²⁰ He makes reference to the Dawn Prayer in three places but with three different alterations. The first alteration of the Dawn Prayer is when He says:

¹⁸ Rashíd ash-Shartúní [1864/5-1906/7] *Mabádi` al-`Arabíyah fi al-sarf wa-al-nahw* (Beirut: Dár al-Mashriq, 1979), 8.

¹⁹ Behmardi’s note: The Dawn Prayer is one of the well-known Shi`i prayers that begins with the expression, “O God! I beseech Thee by all of Thy most-glorious lights [as`aluka min kulli bahá`ika bi-abháhi]...” The names of the month for the Badí` calendar are taken from the text of this prayer. The text itself is located in `Abbás Qummí [d. 1941], *Mafáṭh. al-jinán* (Tehran: Cháp-i `ilmí, 1316 AH, 183-85).

²⁰ Behmardi’s note: This Tablet of Visitation is to be recited on the tenth night of the fast. In this Tablet of Visitation, He says that it was revealed for “the Primal Tree and its Branches and whomsoever seeks shade beneath its canopy. Moreover, it is a remembrance for Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest.” This Tablet of Visitation is still unpublished.

فانزل اللهم على تلك الشجرة في تلك الساعة في هذه الليلة كل بهاء قد احصيتها علمك و كل جلال قد احطت به علمك وكل جمال قد جملته في كتابك و كل عظمة قد احصيتها بعلمك الخ.

“O God! Send down every light [kull bahá] which Thou hast reckoned in Thy knowledge upon that Tree at this hour and on this night, and every glory [jalál] which Thy knowledge embraceth, and every beauty [jamál] with which Thou hast adorned Thy Book, and every majesty [‘azama] which Thou hast reckoned in Thy knowledge.”

A second alteration is when He says:

سبحانك اللهم يا الهى لاسئلك من آياتك باعظمتها و من بهائك بلبهاه و من جلالك باجله و من جمالك باجمله و من نورك بانوره الخ

“Praise be to Thee, O Lord, my God! Verily, I beseech Thee by Thy majestic verses [la-as’alunnaka min áyátika bi-‘azamihá] and by Thy most glorious light [min bahá’ika bi-abháhi] and by Thy sublime glory [min jaláluka bi-ajallihi] and by Thy most exquisite beauty [min jamáluka bi-ajmalihí] and by Thy most radiant light [min núrúka bi-anwarihi]...”

And in a third alteration:

ان من بهاء الله ابهاه و من جلال الله اجله و من جمال الله اجمله و من عظمة الله اعظمتها و من نور الله انوره... عليك وعلى من لجت بك الخ.

“Verily, upon you and upon him who is in thy presence be the most glorious light of God [min bahá’i allahi abháhi] and the sublime majesty of God and the most exquisite beauty of god and the most radiant light God.”

The alteration of the Dawn Prayer is also found in other Tablets of the Báb, such as the following:

و ان بهاء من يظهره الله فوق كل بهاء و ان جلاله فوق كل جلال و ان جماله فوق كل جمال و ان عظمته فوق كل عظمة الخ

“Verily, the light [bahá’á] of Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest is above every (other) light. Verily, His glory [jalálahu] is above every (other) glory. Verily, His beauty is above every (other) beauty. Verily, His majesty [‘azamatahu] is above every other majesty²¹”

There is another kind of alteration that occurs in the Writings of the Báb, which is the translation of Arabic into Persian or Persian into Arabic. This is also found in the Writings of Baha’u’llah, as in the two sections revealed in the *Ziyáratnámih-yi Hurúfát ‘áliyyát*. One example of this type of alteration are given from Báb’s commentary on the Surat Kawthar:

و انّ العلم اء لو ينشئوا ورقة ليتفكروا، و بعد ذلك لما انت تذكر كلماتهم بم قول صبی
يقول بالفارسی پیپه

“Verily, if the ‘ulamá’ compose a page (of writing), they (must) ponder. After that, when you mention their words, its is like the speech of a child saying “pah pah” [bravo!] in Persian.”

The Báb then translates this passage in His *Şahífh-yi ‘Adliyyih*:

كلّ علما بعد از ملاحظهء كتب و تفكرها به چه مشقت ها يك خطبه انشاء می کنند و آخر
الامر بعد از آنكه در مقابل این خطبات عظیمه می گذاری بمثل صبیان په په می گوید

“All of the ‘ulamá’, after perusing books and pondering them, with what difficulty they compose a single orison [khuṭbih]. Afterwards, in contradistinction to these grand orisons [those of the Báb], you proceed to say, like children: pah pah.”²²

Behmardi then quotes a different Arabic passage from the Báb’s commentary on the Surat Kawthar and its Persian translation in His *Şahífh-yi ‘Adliyyih*.

Another type of alteration in the Writings of the Báb is the different modes of expression used to explain historical questions and the Báb’s state without changing the content. However, when a change in style occurs in a single text without interruption and before the point of transition in the subject matter, it is called *iltifát* (“sudden transition”) in literature. This is occurs frequently in the Writings of Baha’u’llah and the Báb. For example, there is a sudden transition from the mode of the orison (*khuṭba*) to the mode of prayer (*du‘á*) in the *Şahífh-yi Makhzúnih*:

²¹ *Muntakhabát-i áyát az áthár-i h.ad.rat-i nuqṭih-yi ulá*: 110-111.

²² *Şahífh-yi ‘Adliyyih*: 11

الحمد لله الذي ألهم الخلق توحيدَهُ و لو لا الهامه لكانوا من المنس بين - انت يا الهى تبتدع
بخلق المشيئة لا من شئء ابتداءً و تخرع الاشياء بفاضل مشيئتك اختراعاً.

“Praise be to God who hath inspired [alhamah] all created things (with knowledge of) His divine Unity. If He had not inspired them [ilhámuhu], then they would be of those who forget – O my God! Thou dost create by the creative power of the Will [bi-khalqi'l-mashiyya] and from no other thing and fashion things by virtue of Thy Will.”

In the commentary on Surat Kawthar, the Báb changes from the mode of verses to the mode of prayer with no point of transition:

ان الله قد خلقكم بما قبلتم بقدر و كل صغير و كبير فى كتاب مستطر، وان اليوم كل المتقين
فى جنات و نهر، ثم كل الكافرين فى ضلال و سحر - اللهم انك لتعلم ان الان قد نزل على
كتاب مسطر، ممن اراد ان يوزن قسطاس العدل بلعجاز نخل منقعر

“Verily, God hath created you, inasmuch as you have obeyed the (divine) decree [qadar], and all things large and small are recorded in the Book. Verily, all those who have attained certainty are in Paradise and the river (of Paradise), and all those who have disbelieved are in error and the flames of hell – O God! Verily, thou knowest that at this moment it hath been sent down upon the recorded Book, from Him who hath desired to balance the scales of justice with ‘uprooted stumps of palm trees’ [Q 54:20].”²³

Part 9 – Concision, Disquisition, and Repetition

Both conciseness (*ijáz*) and elaborateness (*tafsíl*) characterize the writings of the Báb. In some places, the Báb explains a subject very succinctly. The *Ṣaḥífiḥ-yi `Adliyya* is a good example of this. However, the Persian *Bayán* is among the most detailed of Báb’s writings. Among the succinct statements in the *Ṣaḥífiḥ-yi `Adliyya* is the following:

²³ With regard to alteration by translation, I have translated the two examples as literally as possible to show how the Báb uses Persian to flesh out the meaning of the Arabic. This also occurs in the Writings of Baha’u’llah, such as the *Lawh-i Bahá’*, where Baha’u’llah first reveals the Tablet in Arabic and then fully translates it in Persian. As to the abrupt change from one mode of writing to another without a point of transition (some phrase signaling a shift in style or content), this can be bewildering even for those fluent in the languages and can lead to an erroneous reading of the text.

ممکن نیست وصف ذات مقدّس او لاجل عدم وجود شریعتی با او

“It is not possible to describe His sanctified essence due to the non-existence of something in relation to Him.”²⁴

هر شریعتی که اسم شییئت به آن اطلاق شود سوای ذات الله خلق اوست

Also: “Everything that is called a ‘thing’, other than the essence of God, is His creation.”²⁵

In some of the Báb’s writings, like the Persian *Bayán* and the *Kitáb al-Asmá*, divine wisdom dictates that subjects be explained with prolixity, perhaps so that someone’s doubts may be dispelled. In other words, the essence of the thought is given in great deal and not just alluded to. For example, the phrase given in the *Şahífih-yi `Adliyya*, “Everything that is called a ‘thing’,” is explained in detail in the Persian *Bayán*:

خداوند نازل فرموده در بیان کلمه ای که جامع کلّ علم است و اون این است، انّنی انا الله لا اله الا انا و انّ ما دونی خلقی ان یا خلقی ایّای فاتقون، و هر شریعتی که اطلاق شییئت بر او می شود ما دون الله خلق اوست در حدّ ابداع و اختراع و انشاء و احداث الخ

“God revealed words in the *Bayán* that are the condensation (jámí) of all knowledge. The words are as follows: Verily, I am God, no God is there but me. Verily, that which is other than Me is My creation. O My creation! Fear God! Everything that is called a ‘thing’, other than God, is His creation at the point of (ḥadd) of origination, and fashioning, and construction, and bringing into existence.” (Sixth *báb*, third *wáhid*)

As explained before, one of the reasons for the revelation of a *bayán* is to clarify and explain in detail. In comparison with the Persian *Bayán*, the Arabic *Bayán* is succinct.

Another interesting aspect in the writings of the Báb is the repetition of words and phrases. In literature, repetition is usually employed for two reasons. First, to place emphasis on the subject. Second, to remind the reader or listener of something, because repetition of a subject or word or phrase several times fixes it in the mind and prevents people from forgetting it.

²⁴ *Şahífih-yi `Adliyyih*, 1

²⁵ *Ibid*, 15.

Since one of the most important things in the writings of the Báb is divine Unity and Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest, there is a lot of repetition when these subjects appear. For example, in order to emphasize absolute divine unity, there is repetition of the names and attributes of God and praise and glorification of His essence, as in the Surat al-Mulk in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* and in a letter to Mullá Báqir, a Letter of the Living²⁶

In the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, words like *haqq* (Truth), *akbar* (most great), *kitáb* (book), and *nár* (fire) are frequently repeated. Moreover, *haqq* is repeated in most of the verses of the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*. For example, the word *haqq* is repeated in the first Sura (al-Mulk) 47 times, in the second Sura (al-'Ulamá') 41 times, in the third Sura (al-Imán) 25 times, in the fourth Sura (al-Madína) 33 times, and so forth until the last Sura (al-Mu'minín) where it is repeated 50 times, which is more than the number of its verses. Since it has been elsewhere claimed [by Behmardi] that repetition indicates something secret, what is the purpose of repeating *haqq* so frequently?

Of course, the word does not have a single interpretation, but if one looks at other writings, it can illuminate the meaning. In this respect, if we look at Baha'u'llah's *Tafsír Hurúf Muqatta'a* and the *Lawh al-Haqq*, it becomes clear that the Báb is referring to Baha'u'llah when He uses the word "truth" in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, as Baha'u'llah states in the *Tafsír Hurúf Muqatta'a*:

... حينئذ يظهر نداء الاولى عن شجرة القصى عند اشراق الشمس مرة اخرى و هذا ما
 عنّت الورقاء في قطب النواء في هذه الليلة الاحديج التي توقد فيها نار الاحديّة من سدرة
 السينا في ظل اسم الاقدمية والسرّ الارضية الذي سمى بالحقّ القديم في قيوم الاسماء ليشهدن
 كلّ الظهورات في سرائر القلب بالخفيات بأنه هو العزيز المقتدر المهيم المرن

"...At this moment the call of the First One is issuing once again from the remote Tree with the rising of the sun. This is that which the dove hath warbled in the midmost heart of eternity on this night of oneness in which the fire of oneness hath been enkindled by the Burning Bush in the shade of the Most Ancient Name and the Eternal Secret, who hath been called "the Ancient Truth" (al-*haqq al-qadím*) in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, in order that all of the manifestations of the secrets hidden within the heart may bear witness that He is the Powerful, the Mighty, the Help in Peril, the Merciful."

From this explanation we understand that the purpose of repeating the word *haqq* in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* is to prepare the Bábis and the people of the world to believe in the new manifestation of Truth and to stress the

²⁶ Mirzá Abú'l-Fadl Gulpáygání and Aqá Sayyid Mihdí Gulpáygání, *Kashf al-Ghitá'* (Beirut): 2, 4-5 [both examples are quoted].

importance of this subject. This is proof that it was mentioned directly and repetitively, not with hints and allusions.

Part 10 – Ciphers & Tropes²⁷

To say that the Báb speaks directly is not to say that His Writings are devoid of allusions and ciphers (*rumúz*). Of course, discerning the meaning of the allusions and ciphers used by the Báb is a task that future Baha'is will undertake. Some of these terms include “He Who has Seven Letters” (*dhát hurúf as-sab`a*, meaning `Alí Muhammad), “the Letter Sín” (*ḥarf as-sín*, meaning Mullá Husayn), and the “Kitáb-i Qáf and the Kitáb-i Alif” (meaning the Qur`an and the Gospel [injíl]), the Letter Mím and the Letter Fá` (*ḥarf-i mím* and *ḥarf-i fá`*, meaning Moses and Pharaoh [fir`awn]), and so forth. Further, sometimes a string of sentences are dense with ciphers and allusions. For example, in the *Ṣahífa bayn al-Ḥaramayn*, the Báb says, “The triple-lettered word (*kalimat at-tathlith*) only refers to His Imam (*walíyihí*, i.e. `Alí), and the quadruple-lettered word (*shakl at-tarbî`*) only refers to His Beloved (*ḥabíbihi*, i.e. Muhammad). Verily, the things united in all of grades (of existence) are separated by the manifestation of the union of these two words (i.e. `Alí Muhammad).”

The use of tropes (*majáz*) are another special characteristic of the writings of the Báb. A trope is not a cipher, since a trope goes beyond the external meaning of one word to indicate another meaning that the literal meaning of the word does not possess. However, ciphers are expressions that do have not the intended meaning in themselves. Forms, numbers, and letters can also be ciphers, like the form of the *haykal* represents the human being, and the number seven is a symbol for `Alí Muhammad or Husayn `Alí [because of the number of Arabic letters in their name], and the numbers five and nine indicate the Báb and Bahá`, and the number fourteen indicates the Fourteen Infallible Ones, which the ciphers “Face” (*wajh*) or “Hand” (*yad*) represent. Therefore, a trope must be an expression whose outer form is understandable, but the speakers intention is something different. However, a cipher is a word or a letter or a number or a form that does not have the intended meaning in itself and the outer meaning is well-known and clear. The hidden, intended meaning can only be known by familiarity with the

²⁷ I imagine some people will object to my translation of *ramz* as “cipher” rather than “symbol” and *majáz* as “trope,” rather than “metaphor.” I think, however, that these translations are more in keeping with Behmardi’s definitions, since he seems to draw on medieval discussions of these terms rather than modern ones, which would define a *ramz* in more Western terms. As for his definition of trope as something that “goes beyond the external meaning of one word to indicate another meaning that the literal meaning of the word does not possess,” I think it could be stated another way: the power of a trope is its multivalent connotations (its cultural and psychological associations), not its denotations (dictionary definitions). To understand the full implication of a trope, therefore, would require thorough knowledge of the writings of the author and the cultural associations of the readership (something Todd has tried to show in his work on the commentaries of the Báb). A cipher, on the other hand, can only be understood through initiation into the code language of the author(s) either through some sort of key or deciphering the code.

technical terminology used in the text, like the example of the “Letter Sín” seen above.

Among the tropes in the Writings of the Báb are words like “fire,” “light,” and “book” in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* and “the Sun of Truth” (*shams-i haqíqat*), and “the Tree of Truth” (*shajarih-yi haqíqat*), and so on in the Persian *Bayán*. For example, in the *Qayyum al-Asmá*, the word “fire” has several meanings. In some places it alludes to the blaze of Mt. Túr [i.e. Mt. Sinai], which is the Manifestation of the Cause of God in each theophany. In other places it alludes to Hell [gives two examples from the Surat as-Sirr and the Surat al-Mulk]. In both cases, the word “fire” has a well-known and clear meaning and can be found in the dictionary. However, that which is intended is something different from that which is in the dictionaries [this is the difference between denotation and connotation].

Sometimes, the Báb clarifies a subject figuratively and allegorically. This way of clarification uses parables, as found in the Persian *Bayán*, where the Báb speaks figuratively and allegorically of the ignorance of the People of the Bayán when Him Who God Shall make Manifest is among them:

و همچنین هر مقعدی محلّ يك نفس سزاوار است كه خالی گذارند زیرا كه دیده می شود
كه در بیت خود من یطهره الله هم این قسم ظاهر است كه از مقعد آن منع می نمایند او را
چونكه نمی شناسند او را لاحترام ملاحظه می نمایند ولی یوم ظهور او از او محتجب می
مانند

“Furthermore, every chair is left empty for one deserving soul, which they have made vacant, since it is seen that in their house, Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest is in the outer section (of the house) because they prevent Him from sitting. They know Him not due to their respect for his name. However, He knows all and He laughs at the believers who, on account of His name, observe this type of flattery and respect, but on the day of the His manifestation they are veiled from Him.”²⁸

In summary, the words of the Báb are understandable to everyone, otherwise they wouldn’t be a proof of His prophethood and a means for obtaining guidance. What stands in the way is the style, context, and technical vocabulary which is unfamiliar to most people. There are two reasons for this. Just as in past dispensations, the technical vocabulary of the Writings is initially unfamiliar [like the Qur’an for the Arabs]. The second reason (and in the author’s opinion, the most important), people become familiar with the abstruse and difficult philosophical, mystical and religious writings,

²⁸ First báb, ninth wáhid

which then become easy to understand. However, if that which they know is a hindrance, then they should turn to the words of God with their inner being so that no obstacles may remain in the way of understanding and recognizing the divine Writings.