

Selections from the Bahá'í Writings and from Shaykh Ahmad on the Seven Stages of Creation

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From *Gate of the Heart*

One of the most notable features of the writings of the Báb is their emphasis on the seven stages of divine Action through which all creation comes into being. As we have seen, the phenomenal world is the mirror of its supreme Origin, but more specifically it is a reflection of divine attributes and of the divine creative Action which unfolds through a sequence of stages comprising Will (*Mashíyyat*), Determination (*Irádih*), Destiny (*Qadar*), Decree (*Qadá*), Permission (*Idhn*), Term (*Ajal*), and Book (*Kitáb*).¹ Elaboration of these seven stages of creation thus is a major component of the Báb's metaphysics. In various writings, the Báb describes the details of the stages of creation in order to emphasize the spiritual orientation which is the goal of His Revelation. Indeed, this purpose forms the primary context of His discussion of these stages, and the all-encompassing perspective of unity differentiates His writing from other philosophical and theological discussions on the topic. Reference to the seven stages of creation can be found in the Traditions attributed to the Imams. The Báb sometimes refers to these Traditions, as in this passage: "Thus, the descent of the divine Command furnisheth seven stages. Hence the Imám said, 'Nothing can exist, whether on earth or in heaven, except through the seven stages of creation: Will, Determination, Destiny, Decree, Permission, Term, and Book. Whoso denieth the necessity of even one of these stages hath repudiated God's truth.'"² The first author who dealt with these stages extensively was Shaykh Ahmad-i-Aḥsá'í, whose work, *Sharḥu'l-Favá'id*, provides a systematic discussion of them.³ The Báb confirms many of the categories Shaykh Ahmad uses in his discussions of the stages, but the Báb addresses the issue within the unique context of His perspective of unity. However, the Báb reinterprets these stages in completely novel ways: the seven stages also represent the stages of the perpetual renewal of divine revelation in new Dispensations. Thus, as we will see, the concept of the stages of divine Action becomes historical as well as metaphysical.

All the seven stages of divine creative Action are diverse manifestations of the Word of God. The various aspects of all beings are reflections of the divine Action, and, in this way, all the different modes of the reality of phenomena refer ultimately to their common Ground, the revelation of God, and the Primal Will. It is not hard to see why reference to the seven stages of creation occurs so frequently in the Báb's sermons. Most of His tablets begin with an introductory sermon that affirms the spiritual nature of reality, reminding people of the unseen realm, connecting the visible phenomena to transcendental spiritual realities, and demonstrating that all beings are manifestations of Divine Unity.⁴

From the Báb

1. Since the Ancient of Days created mankind for the purpose of apprehending the power shining within themselves, and made reward and punishment the instrument for fulfilling this purpose, He created the Will from nothing through the causality of the Will itself, without qualification or explanation. After that He created all things through its causality, and the creation of anything upon which the letter of the Will hath fallen is only possible through seven stages of contingency. Without these stages nothing is possible in the contingent

¹ See Ra'fati, "Marátib-i-Sab'ih".

² The Báb, *Tablet to Mírzá Sa'íd*, INBA 14:438.

³ Aḥsá'í, *Sharḥu'l-Favá'id*, pp. 33–89.

⁴ Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, pp. 201–2.

world. These seven stages are Will (*mashīyyat*), Purpose (*irádih*), predestination (*qadar*), fate (*qaḍá'*), permission (*idhn*), fixed time (*ajal*), and the book (*kitáb*).⁵ The first stage of anything for which the “thingness” of existence is not a condition is the Will. The moment thingness is attached to it, it becometh Purpose, and this moment is accompanied by predestination. The manifestation of these three stages is fate. In this regard,⁶ it is incumbent upon all creatures to acknowledge the spontaneity (*badá'*) of God,⁷ lauded and exalted be He, for His will cannot be altered after the stage of fate; it is fixed.⁸ The decrees of permission, fixed time, and the book are subsequent to execution (*imḍá'*). Indeed, the reality of creation and the secret of the origination of existence are contained in these seven stages in both the hidden and manifest worlds. (*Şahīfīy-i-Uşúl va Furú', Amr va Khalq*, vol. 1, pp. 99–100)

2. I recognize, O my God, that whenever something is related to Thee, the decree of the Will is applicable to it, and whenever it is related to itself, the decree of Purpose is established in it. When this duality is realized the decree of predestination is manifested. After these three have descended, all seven will be generated, inasmuch as it is impossible for anything to be realized save through these seven stages. Six of them belong to the letter Wáw in connection to the limitations of things, and one of them belongeth to their manifestations in the station of the Sign of God.⁹ Nothing is created in the heavens or on the earth except through them. Moreover, it is impossible for something to become clothed in the garment of existence without a fire belonging to its first remembrance, then a water, and then an earth for the preservation of its existence. Thus, hath God, in fairness, made plain His signs in both souls and in the world. (*Amr va Khalq*, vol. 1, p. 100)

⁵ This scheme of seven stages comes from a tradition ascribed to the sixth Shí'ih Imám, Ja'far aş-Şádiq, a number of variants of which can be found in the *Uşúl al-Káfi* (Kulayní, vol. 1, pp. 204–208).

⁶ i.e., in regard to the first three stages prior to their manifestation.

⁷ *Badá'*, translated here as “spontaneity” with reference to God's action, is the doctrine that God is free to change His mind and do whatever He pleases, even to change an earlier divine ruling. For more on the concepts of *badá'*, *qadar*, and *qaḍá'*, see Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullá Şadrá*, pp. 180–182; also entries in *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

⁸ Once something is manifested in the temporal world, it cannot be altered. Events are fixed and can only be succeeded by new events.

⁹ i.e. the Will.

3. God, verily, created the Will from nothing through itself, then He created through it all that to which the name “thing” can be applied. The cause of its existence, in truth, is its own self and naught else. Those who believe that the Essence is the cause of creation have made themselves partners with Him, as He cannot be known. He, verily, abideth in a state accessible only to Himself. Nothing is connected to Him, and in Him not a trace of the existence belonging to created things can be found. It is established in philosophy that cause and effect are alike. Therefore, the Imám hath declared: “The cause of things is His fashioning, but He is not its cause.”

The feet of some of the learned have slipped in their explanation of this station, inasmuch as they have believed in something that God hath not purposed in His Book. Haply God may forgive them through His grace. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful. Those who claim that there is a direct tie between God and creation have followed after their own desires, as others have followed them aforetime. This is an error in the estimation of the people of sanctity, for if we attribute such a connection to the Essence, then nothing in the religion of the Family of God is true. Nay, this is joining partners with Him, as I recited to thee previously. And if the connection resideth in creation, then there is no need for the people of the Bayán to prove it. This is why the Imám (upon him be peace) hath stated: “No third thing existeth between God and creation, and no third thing existeth apart from these two.” This is well known by he whom God hath called to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, and then the creation of himself. God is a sufficient witness unto what I say.

Those who say the fixed archetypes reside in the Essence of God in order to establish His knowledge, as all believe save those whom God hath pleased to preserve, have completely forsaken the religion of the Family of God, for any reference to otherness in their being testifieth to their separation and indicateth their complete rupture from God. God is the eternal Being, Who from time immemorial hath not changed, and it is not possible for divine unity to belong to anyone save Himself. All things are the images of substances whose existence hath no trace in God Verily, God is the eternal Being, Who begetteth not and was not begotten. He hath no likeness in the realm of creation and no sign in the world of contingency, for a sign is a sign of one who is not indicated by himself for himself and an attribution is a description of one who is not described by himself for himself. Far exalted is God above that which they who make comparisons to Him invent concerning the oneness of existence. There is no statement in the estimation of God more absurd than this saying of theirs, for they mean by it that creation is the branch of the one Being. Verily, the Essence hath ever been void of His creation and He was apart from it when it came into being. No aspect of it is in Him.

The philosophers were compelled to propose the doctrine of the fixed archetypes and the uncompounded reality by their desire to establish the former in the knowledge of God. But gracious God! To establish God’s knowledge of His creatures can only lead to falsehood, since from time immemorial God’s knowledge hath been the same as Himself without another object of knowledge within Him. No one can understand the state of His Being except Himself. And whosoever aspireth to encompass the knowledge of his Lord at the same moment disbelieveth in Him, for how is anyone able to encompass the knowledge of his Lord whose very reality existeth through His act of creation¹⁰ and was brought into being from nothing? He hath ever been the All-Knowing, even though nothing was with Him; and He is now the All-Knowing, despite the fact that nothing is with Him in His exalted station. The attributes of power and knowledge, and all the other names and

¹⁰ The term ‘*ibdá’* in philosophy, translated here as “act of creation”, refers to God’s primal origination of the very essences of things without any prior concept or pattern of them.

attributes, are signs belonging to His creation and the musings of the imaginations of His servants that they may not doubt their Creator in anything. (*Ṣaḥīfīy-i-Tafsīr-i-Há, Amr va Khalq*, vol. 1, pp. 100-102)

3. The supporters of the “oneness of existence”¹¹ have joined partners with God through their testimony of existence, because the oneness which they seek to establish is a consequence of the existence of two, and except through the negation of two, how is it possible to have oneness? In like manner, those individuals who assert that the cause of contingent existence is the Essence of God and say there is a connection between them are unbelievers, because a cause is a consequence of conjunction with an effect, and having a connection is a consequence of the existence of duality. Both of these suggestions are sheer error. Nay, rather the true God is the real Essence, while creation is contingent, and anything outside of this contingent creation is impossible to grasp From time immemorial the creation hath been the creation, and conjunction with the Essence is not possible. (*Ṣaḥīfīy-i-Uṣūl va Furú’, Amr va Khalq*, vol. 1, pp. 103–104)
4. Were anyone to consider the substance, he would realize that the origin of all the worlds is in the station of Purpose, which becometh existent through the Will (*Persian Bayán* II:16)
5. There are seven general stages. The first is the stage of the inorganic being. From the mineral kingdom, it ascendeth to the stage of the plant ..., and from the plant kingdom, it ascendeth to the stage of the animal When it reacheth the stage of soul, spirit, and mind, then in accordance with that stage, it hath a death which will certainly destroy all privative aspects. Finally, the command will reach the stage of the inmost heart, which is the gulf of immortality and pure life, in the presence of the Lord of creation. There, for evermore, the servant will gaze towards God. (*Asráru’l-Áthár*, vol. 4, p. 121)
6. That which I set forth in explanation of the letter Há’ was to extol the Tree of Bahá, for the supporters of fate (*qaḏá’*) recognize the decree of spontaneity (*badá’*) in the Crimson Pillar. It, in truth, is the secret of creation, for the element of fire in the realm of origination (*ibdá’*) can only exist through the element of earth. This is because with the exception of God, nothing can subsist through itself. All things are composite. Once the decree of duality is established, the decree of connection (*rabṭ*) is also established, for a thing cannot be a thing except through its existence, which is the aspect of manifestation (*tajallí*) in it, through its essence, which is the aspect of receiving (*qubúl*), and through connection, which is realized after the union [of the first two]. These three stages correspond to the stages of the trinity in the first name which God chose for Himself. For this reason Christians adopted the shape of the cross and incarnated the divinity in mortal form. Immensely exalted is God above that which moral minds are able to apprehend from the sweet melodies uttered by the Birds of Heaven upon the boughs of the Tree of Divinity! ... The names of these three at the beginning of the creative act are Will, Purpose, and predestination (*qadar*), which

¹¹ I am becoming inclined to translate *wahdat* as “oneness” instead of “unity” because of the additional meaning the latter has, which is a whole of unified parts.

the people of eloquence (*ahlu'l-bayán*)¹² express as calling-into-being (*inshá'*), origination (*ibdá'*), invention (*ikhtirá'*), creation (*ihdáth*), and being made (*inji'ál*). It is not possible for anything to exist without the elements described, even were God's command offered to a willing soul, for the contingent world cannot come into existence save through two complementary principles. Once the remembrance of duality is established, the remembrance of states (*shu'ún*) continueth without end, for these states have no end. The element of earth, which was mentioned in reference to the stage of the Will, belongeth to the genera of that world, which is the same as receiving the fire of giving-existence, followed by the air of becoming-existent and the water of extension. In accord with this similitude, hath God created all things and ordained the origin of every world.

Reflect upon the stage of Purpose, which is the Eve of the Primal Adam and the Throne whereon the Will is seated in the station of the All-Merciful, and consider how God hath created it with four pillars. One pillar is the stage of fate (*qaḍá'*), which is the element of fire and the manifestation of the efficient cause; its color is white due to its pure simplicity in relation to the conditions of multiplicity, dimension, and distinction. Through it the pure water of the fountains of Paradise in the heaven of divine transcendence is turned white and the word of glorification (*tasbīḥ*) appeareth in the world of dominion. In accord with it, all whiteness ascendeth from and descendeth unto whatsoever is in the dominion, the kingdom, and the mortal world. The knowledge of no one hath encompassed the wonders of this pillar. Among them is the sacred House of God, the holy month of God,¹³ the anthems of praise upraised in the land of pilgrimage, and the injunction to recite the words of the pillar of unity "No God is there but God", for whosoever declareth not "Yea, verily" at the primordial spot of witnessing will not be called into existence. Thou, who art discerning, apprehendest the wonders of this pillar, inasmuch as God guideth unto its knowledge whom He pleaseth. No God is there but Him, the Lord of Grandeur.

Another pillar is the stage of permission (*idhn*), which is the element of air and the manifestation of the material cause; its color is yellow in relation to that which is determined. Through it the yellow of each thing is obtained, and by its light God provideth the sustenance of all things, for the first pillar, which is the active cause, is the cause of life. As God saith, exalted be His praise: "It is God Who created you, and then provided sustenance for you. Next, He will cause you to die, and then He will give you life."¹⁴ The bearer of this pillar is 'Alí, peace be upon him. Thus the color yellow appeared in his face at the time of his death, which is a sign for the day of his beginning, since the end is the same as the beginning in the view of the people of eloquence. He who curseth the Sun and the Moon shall suffer a severe chastisement. This is the station of praise (*tahmíd*) and the pillar facing the pillar of prophecy. It hath various states in restricted images, existent patterns, limited determinations, and evanescent objects of knowledge. He who turneth towards the Countenance of Glory will attain certain knowledge of the attributes of this pillar, as God desireth. He, verily, is the Ancient of Days.

Another pillar is the stage of fixed time (*ajal*), which is the element of water and the manifestation of the formal cause, the eternal first Pen, and the third leaf of the divine Tree, whose essence is from the East and not the West. Its color is green, and through it the green of each thing is obtained. God causeth all things to die by virtue of this pillar in the third place of witnessing. It is the lowest and the highest pillar of the Throne, the manifestation of His remembrance in the stage

¹² Probably a reference to those philosophers and theologians who were concerned with defining and refining the types and stages of God's creation of things, and who proposed different terms for each stage. See, for example, Mír Dámád's *al-Qabasát*, chapter 1, on the types of creation (*hudúth*).

¹³ Rajab.

¹⁴ Qur'án 30:40.

of creation, and the word of testimony (*tahlil*).¹⁵ Thus are multiplicities made manifest in this stage, for the letters are multiplied in the declaration of “No God is there but God”. This pillar hath infinite states, for there is no end to them, and he who turneth his gaze towards God testifieth to whatsoever the All-Merciful hath willed concerning this pillar. Should one who possesseth intuitive knowledge desire to unravel the truth of what the Imams have appointed in the letters of “No God is there but God”, he is able to do so. This is something within Our power, should God desire it and grant His permission, though I am nothing but a repentant servant.

Another pillar is the stage of the Book (*kitáb*), which is the element of earth and the manifestation of the final cause in the world of names and attributes. Its color is red, and through it the red in each thing is obtained, the scheme of each thing produced, and the measure of each thing determined. Through it the earth is quickened after its demise, and the land illumined with the light of its Lord. On that day, the people will relate their traditions which thy Lord hath revealed unto them. Though it God will revive in the assembly of the fourth preexistence changed and afflicted hearts, dead souls, and decrepit bodies, and will make them all alive like unto those with steadfast hearts, blessed souls, and sanctified bodies. In this day, God hath desired this Cause for the people, for the Final Pillar, which is the fruit of origination, the secret of invention, and the manifestation of the three causes in creation, hath appeared, even as some of the states of the three pillars, with great scientific proofs and exalted holy attributes (INBA 14:268 ff; 67:38 ff; 86:137 ff.)

7. Praise be to God, the God of all who are in heaven and on earth, Who hath decreed that no one should be veiled from the effulgence of the light of His countenance which He hath deposited in the stations of the Command and the degrees of creation. Each thing beholdeth Him manifest and present, for there is no God except Him, the Almighty, the Most Exalted.

Praise be to God, Who created the Will before all other beings through itself and by virtue of itself for the sake of the appearance of the signs of His oneness in the stations of divine unity that all might know in their inmost essences and realities that which God hath revealed unto them through these signs, for He is the Single, the One, the Self-Subsisting, Who hath ever existed without requiring the existence of anything in the world of contingency and Who always will exist as He hath been without any aspect of Himself in the archetypes of things. For His Essence is absolutely pure. All names and attributes are cut off from even drawing near the court His exalted being and all intimations are denied access to the station of the knowledge of His hallowed self- subsistence. All who know Him through the knowledge of something besides Himself have associated Him with that thing and taken as God other than God. But He, in truth, is as He is in His own essence and the transcendence of His oneness. He hath no attributes apart from His being and no qualities separate from His essence. There is no likeness of Him among things and no aspect of Him in the realm of creation. All that is known about His origination of things (*ibdá'*) is limited by virtue of itself, and whatever describeth His invention (*ikhtirá'*) is the consequence of a manifestation whose station God hath decreed. Glorified be God and exalted be He! None knoweth the state of His being nor how He calleth into existence that which He desireth save Him. Glorified be God and exalted be He above that which His creatures affirm of Him.

Now, as his honor the governor hath asked, God will enable him to attain the goal of his desire, from the command of his origin until the Day of Return, with respect to the meaning of the tradition ascribed to 'Alí, peace be upon him, where he said: “My brother, the Apostle of God, taught me the knowledge of what hath been, and I taught Him the knowledge of what is to be.” I

¹⁵ i.e. saying the words: No God is there but God.

have not seen this tradition in the well-known books, but since its meaning is in accord with reality, there is no doubt that it is the truth from God. As I promised to respond, without delay I beseech God's help to explain that which He desireth

God in truth created the Will before all other things and made it the cause of their existence. It is the First Remembrance, whereof the Imám asked while addressing Jonah: "Dost thou know what the Will is?" He replied: "No." Then he explained: "It is the First Remembrance." Through the gift of His wisdom and the excellence of His craftsmanship, God placed within it a sign of the manifestation of His self-subsistence, that it might indicate His oneness under all conditions. This Will hath seven modes without which it is impossible for anything to be clothed in the vesture of existence. The stage of the Will is designated in the verse, according to its attestation, as the First Remembrance, which testifieth that He hath no equal and indicateth naught except its Maker, Who revealed Himself through it and by virtue of it and made it a sign for the manifestation of His self- subsistence, a mirror for the reflection of His everlasting countenance, and a means for the appearance of His sovereignty. It is the sign which God hath made the source of the manifestation of His eternal grace. It hath no end save through itself. In every stage of the invisible and the visible worlds, it never ceaseth to draw support from God through and by virtue of itself, and it is never depleted. It is the sign which indicateth the unity of the Essence. Verily, God hath made its outer the same as its inner, its first the same as its last, and its concealment the same as its manifestation. There is nothing like unto it, for all else cometh into existence from nothing by the manifestation of its creative action through the appearance of the power of its Agent.

Glorified and exalted be God! How great is His power and how wondrous His providence! None knoweth His word concerning the First Remembrance except Himself. All the Names are tokens that belong to the theophany of this stage, and in truth nothing else is mentioned therein save them, for were something else to be mentioned before them or in their stage, it wouldn't belong to the nature of that mode.¹⁶ Whatever men say in description of that mode is only possible through the appearance of the Names in the rank of that thing. This is evident unto anyone who recognizeth the Repositories of the Command, who is aware of the intentions of the end, and who beholdeth the secret of eternity in the stage of the servant. There is no stage higher than this in the realm of contingency and no thing precedeth it. God alone knoweth its nature. Glorified and exalted be He above that which is affirmed of Him.

As the highest mode of the Will is established, let us turn towards the mode of its being that is called Purpose (*iráda*). This is the station of the Second Remembrance wherein the condition of the remembrance of creation is made manifest through the limitation of the creative outpouring. In this mode the soul of the first stage giveth praise. This is the station of 'Alí in the world of manifestation, as alluded to in the verse of Mubáhala (mutual cursing): "our souls and your souls," which was decided by agreement between the two groups.¹⁷ The intent of the "soul" here is 'Alí and no other. Through this station the mode of relationships (*rabt*) known as predestination (*qadar*) appeareth, which is the beginning of multiplicity and infinitude. Whatever is going to exist in the contingent world cometh into existence through the existence of Purpose. God alluded to this through His supreme grace in His statement about the teachings of the Apostle of God, may the blessings of God be upon Him: "The knowledge of what hath been is known through the revelation of the Will, which hath always existed. Nothing cometh to be but through it." In this case, wisdom dictateth that 'Alí is the knower insofar as the Will imparted to him the knowledge of

¹⁶ i.e., the highest of the seven modes, which is the Will itself.

¹⁷ Qur'án 3:61. For the circumstances of the episode of Mubáhala, see Momen, *Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, pp. 13-14.

what will be, for that which he stated aforetime cannot come to pass unless he knew it [through the Will].

Once the remembrance of Purpose is established, the remembrance of the contingency of all existents can be realized. Wherefore, the Apostle of God encompasseth the knowledge of what will be through 'Alí in the stage of things, in accordance with the stages which God hath ordained for each thing in His hidden knowledge, for knowledge in truth, according to the doctrine of God, is the same as the object of knowledge, as attested by Šádiq in the tradition of Mufađdil: "Knowledge is the whole of the object of knowledge, and power and might are the whole of action. As long as the universals of philosophy are not perfect both outwardly and inwardly, philosophy will be imperfect in the hands of the philosopher, even if he is capable This is the secret at the basis of existence and the center of being which no one is able to explain." ...

After the mode of Purpose, God hath ordained five additional modes. Among them is the stage of predestination, whose object is the design (*handasa*) of substances, matters, existences, natures, essences, accidents,¹⁸ and forms after the first causes at the root of the creative act. Multiplicities and the distinction of images from realities¹⁹ and essences from attributes emerge in this stage. The miserable are miserable in this stage by the acceptance of their choice, and the happy are happy in this stage by the choice with which God hath favored them. This is the womb of the contingent world²⁰ and the most great depth whereof the Imám alluded: "The miserable are miserable in their mother's womb, while the happy are happy therein." The cause of this manifestation is in the stage of predestination. This stage existeth for the purpose of the appearance of choice, for nothing can exist in any world except by its own choice. Although the first stage also existeth voluntarily, none can reckon this save the Subtile, the All-informed. The same applieth to the second stage. The condition of choosing good or evil ariseth in the third stage, which is made manifest after the conjunction of the two Commands. This is by virtue of the essence of things. The secret of the possible is only revealed in the station of predestination and the triangular figure. Thus Christians say "the third of three", and use the shape of the cross in the ritual of the trinity. The divinity, which is the world of the manifestation of the Will, descended into the mortal realm, which is the station of multiplicity. Far exalted is God above that which the transgressors assert regarding the attributes of the Manifestations of His transcendent power!

That which I have set forth in the darkness of these allusions is an exposition on the reality of the secret of the possible in the kingdom of names and attributes. Outwardly this tradition hath universal meanings. Any servant that comprehendeth these meanings will be able to remove the veils that surround him and attain the summit of knowledge and grace. For honor, in the sight of God, is not in the knowledge of customs and formalities nor in a mere code of laws. Nay, that which is the honor of man is the secret of lordship and the radiance of the light everlasting, which encompasseth all aspects of the servant and through which he will attain the summit of justice. As stated by 'Alí in a sermon: "The learned contend with each other over the knowledge of things which are neither open nor secret." But the knowledge of what was and will be is an attribute of this station. Upon him who hath tasted the delight of nearness to the hallowed court of the Essence and attained the universal evidences of the signs of the Attributes resteth the duty of dispelling the clouds and veils from the glory which indicateth the divine Essence. After comprehending these stations men will realize that Muḥammad and His family possess a knowledge of the contingent

¹⁸ The meaning may be "essential accidents", such as existence in relation to quiddity.

¹⁹ Need to study more how to translate *sabaḥát* and *shabaḥiyát*, if these are the right terms.

²⁰ Or "the womb of the possible", given that everything that exists in this stage, according to the Báb, exists by its own choice. In choosing good or evil, things choose the options of what is possible.

world that none among the learned have encompassed, save he whom God hath desired. He, verily, is the Benefactor in both the beginning and the end.

Whatever God, exalted be He, hath created in the past or will create in the future is present before the Apostle of God by reason of His presence before God, for God knoweth each thing, at all times, as itself, although there is no object of knowledge with Him in the stage of His eternity. Rather, He knoweth each thing, whether universal or particular, before its existence in the same way that He knoweth it after its existence, and no one knoweth how this is possible except God. The doctrine of the distinction between the concepts of life and knowledge is invalid in the station of the Essence, for just as He is alive by virtue of His existence and requireth not the existence of another through which to receive life, in the same way He knoweth each thing and every atom without needing an object of knowledge in the stage of His Essence. All the multiplicities are present in His kingdom, and the knowledge of Muḥammad hath encompassed them all, inasmuch as God hath taught Him through His grace. He, verily, is the Ancient of Days, the Most Exalted.

God hath indeed made Muḥammad and His successors, may the blessings of God rest upon them, the wellsprings of His knowledge, and hath related them unto Himself. The greatness of their station and the excellence of their rank is like that of the Kaaba in the Holy Mosque in Mecca. Nothing God hath willed in the kingdom of names and attributes escapeth their knowledge. That which He revealed in the Book: “Had I knowledge of the Unseen, I would have acquired much good”,²¹ and that which was sent down in the traditions concerning the various stages of the perception of mysteries, is nothing but a manifestation of their servitude and their powerlessness before all created things, or it is due to asserting the loftiness of their majesty through negation in the station of union. But in truth, knowledge of multiplicities is not esteemed in the station of the Essence, nay, it is blasphemy in the sight of the people of praise, for in the station of the knowledge of the Essence all mention of anything else is obliterated. Indeed, it leadeth towards polytheism and imperfection. Honor, among the men of utterance, and glory, in the station of beings and archetypes, is pure simplicity in the station of the effulgence of the Essence. Assuredly, attachment to multiplicities and knowing them is an imperfection to one who hath perceived the manifestations of the Essence in the kingdom of names and attributes. Therefore, should the Imám deny knowing something, although he is perceptive, he knoweth their reality and understandeth its purpose, and he giveth thanks to God, his Lord, for having inspired him in the path of His good pleasure. And if he doth not apprehend, then he hath not exceeded beyond his knowledge of that state in their reality, notwithstanding that excess is never possible in their reality, for God hath created them in a station which no one else can attain. It may be that they desire in certain circumstances to deny knowledge for the purpose of demonstrating their grace to the sinful so that they will not feel ashamed when they enter their presence. He who apprehendeth their reality will know the meaning of their utterances and their allusions under all conditions.

In sum, We have made known unto thee through Our reply the divine and incorruptible principles for opening the gate to understanding their knowledge and attaining unto them. Verily, if I desired to expound a single letter of that tradition by using all the seas of heaven and earth as ink, the seas would run dry before a single letter of its meanings could be unfolded. But I have condensed this utterance for the sake of him who desired the knowledge of the beginning and the end. I ask forgiveness under all conditions. He, in truth, is the Lord of those who acknowledge His unity in the worlds of names and attributes. His decree sufficeth His servants in both the beginning and the end. Exalted be God, the Lord of the Throne on high, above that which they affirm of Him. Peace be upon the Messengers, and praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds. (*Lawḥ-i-Váliy-i-Shúsh̄tar*, INBA 14:417 ff., 40:137 ff., 53:34 ff., 67:195 ff.)

²¹ Qur’án 7:188.

8. The “E” (*nún*) in the stage of utterance is the same as the “B” (*káf*). It is the totality of the possible (*imkán*), and the possible itself in the world of contingency is fully contained in the word “Be!” (*kun*).^{*} The “B” is the stage of the Will and the “E” is the stage of Purpose. The Will is the father of all things, and Purpose is their mother. As He hath stated: “‘Alí and I are the parents of this people.’ Through the “B” God created the matter (*mádda*) of all things ... and through the “E” God created the form (*šúra*) of all things. (From the Bab’s *Tafsír-i-Bismi’lláh*, INBA 60:48–49, also INBA 64:74)

From Bahá’u’lláh

1. A praise sanctified from the mention of all mankind befitteth the sublime and most holy court of the Desired One, Who hath ordained that the completion of every existence be realized through the seven stages of Will, Purpose, predestination, fate, permission, fixed time, and the book, each of which is a bountiful and shoreless sea whose pearls are preserved and concealed within the shells of the inviolability of God, exalted be His glory. In truth, should a man desire to expound upon these stages and stations, each of which is a wellspring of divine knowledge and a dawning-place of heavenly wisdom, he could not exhaust this theme with this pen and paper, and in the realm of true understanding, which is the seat of those who are nigh unto God, the pens and papers of the world would also not suffice him. He is the All-Powerful, Who hath made whatsoever He hath created, whether the atoms, that which is beneath them, or that which is above them, each a sign indicating and proclaiming His grandeur and sovereignty, His power and might, His generosity, bounty, and favor ...

Concerning what thou didst write about good luck and fortune, destiny and fate, whatever is outwardly observed and confirmed is in accord with that which hath been decreed. “Nothing cometh into existence in the heavens or on the earth save through Will, Purpose, predestination, fate, permission, fixed-time, and the book.” Every soul who entereth this world entereth with innumerable means, which although invisible to outward vision are true and fact. Whatever is irrevocably decreed by fate²² cannot be changed, but whatever remaineth potential can be changed through means and actions. The first inclination that is created in man, before the appearance of means, is the stage of the Will; the first conception of means is the stage of Purpose; predestination is the stage of scheme and dimension, that is to say, the appearance of means in proper quantity. Fate is the composition of that which hath been decreed.

Much hath been written about the stage of predestination. For example: “Predestination is a secret from God’s secret, a command from His command, and a treasury from His treasury sealed with the seal of God.” Furthermore, it is described as “a billowing ocean which cannot be exhausted and a pitch dark night which cannot be traversed. Its vastness is that of heaven and earth, its breadth containeth the East and the West, and in its depth a sun is shining.”

Man observeth these seven stages in his own development. After the appearance of fate, execution becometh evident, and it is the same as the stage of permission. For every created thing its fixed-time, in other words, the duration of its existence, is set. After the fixed-time, the book, which is the stage of the completion of a thing, shall be laid bare and made manifest. To God

^{*} Kun (Persian) is the imperative Be! The word kun contains the consonants káf and nún (káf wa nún), which in English, by happy circumstance, Shoghi Effendi was able to represent using the letters ‘B’ and ‘E’. The ‘B’ has been identified with the primal will and the ‘E’ with the divine purpose, which is the subsequent stage of unfoldment. Alternatively, ‘B’ “means the creative Power of God Who through His command causes all things to come into being” and ‘E’ “the power of the Manifestation of God, His great spiritual creative force”.

²² Lit. “whatever of the irrevocable decrees have been carried to account cannot be changed”. But as the Báb explains above that nothing can be changed after the stage of fate, which is the manifestation of what had formerly been potential, a less literal translation conveys better what is intended.

belongeth praise this day! The foundation of all stations is manifest, and it is detachment from all things and submission to His behest. In this case, these stations themselves are unveiled. (BC005-101-00004-C; BC003-149-00003-C; partially published in *Má'idiy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 8, pp. 191–192)

2. The meaning of the Kingdom (*malakút*) in its primary sense and degree is the scene of His transcendent glory.²³ In another sense, it referreth to the world of similitudes (*'álam-i-mithál*), which existeth between the Dominion (*jabarút*) and this mortal realm (*násút*). Whatever is in the heavens or on the earth hath its counterpart in that world. So long as it remaineth hidden and concealed within the potentiality of utterance it is said to be of the Dominion, and this is the first stage of delimitation. When it becometh manifest it is said to be of the Kingdom. It draweth power and strength from the first stage and bestoweth it upon whatever lieth below it. These worlds and the worlds of Will and Purpose, of predestination and fate, of pre- and post-eternity, of perpetuity and time, have repeatedly been set down by the Pen of the Most High in various Tablets. Blessed are those who attain! (BC003-149-00003; also *Má'idiy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 1, p. 18)
3. Thou hast inquired about the tradition “Knowledge is twenty and seven letters. All that the Prophets have revealed are two letters thereof. No man thus far hath known more than these two letters. But when the Qá'im shall arise, He will cause the remaining twenty and five letters to be made manifest.” The object of the remaining letters is the station of the sacred, all-encompassing Word. Every soul who hath attained unto that Word shall find himself independent of the words of all mankind, and every soul who hath quaffed of the living waters hidden therein shall not become parched by the thirst of self and desire. It is that Word which concealeth within itself all arts and sciences; it is the key to the city of steadfastness and the straight path for those who believe; it is the shatterer of the might of idols and vain imaginings. Every soul who hath attained unto it hath attained unto that which is worthy in this Day.

That exalted Word hath shone forth from the world of the Will to the world of Purpose, and from the realm of Purpose to the world of the Heavenly Court, and from the Heavenly Court to the Dominion, and from the Dominion to the Kingdom. The image of that all-encompassing Word was then sent down and made manifest in a Tablet to Jináb-i-Ḥaydar 'Alí and to Ḥusayn, upon them be My Glory and My loving kindness (BC003-117-00002-C)

From Shoghi Effendi

1. It is clear that no one is aware and informed of the secret of fate and predestination, of the wisdom of the All-Wise and the knowledge of the Most Powerful. The Purpose and Will of that supreme Sovereign have never been and will never be barred or restricted. (GC008-003-00456, from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 July 1928, in reference to the passing of an individual)

²³ *Manẓar-i-akbár*, also translated by Shoghi Effendi as “the Most Sublime Vision”.

From Shaykh Ahmad

1. Know that the divine Action,²⁴ with respect to its stages, together with its connection to the outcomes of acting, comprise a number of divisions. The first is the stage of the Will, which is the first remembrance, as the Imám Riḍá related to Jonah. What is meant is that prior to the Will a thing hath no remembrance (*dhikr*) in any degree of the contingent world. The beginning of its remembrance is to be known with respect to its existence. For example, if something comes to you to act upon, it is nothing before you bring it to mind. When you bring it to mind, your very remembrance of it constitutes the first of the degrees of its existence, or its being.

The second is Purpose, which is the determination upon that which has been willed. This is the second stage of its remembrance, and its being known with respect to its archetype (*‘ayn*). It has no existence before this save the first remembrance, which is its being and the emanation of its existence prior to the concomitant of essence. It is through Purpose that essence is entailed for it, while it is through the Will that Purpose comes into being as a result of the latter’s being a consequence of it.

The third is predestination, which is the stage of existentiational topography (*handasa ijádiyya*). Through it the limitations of things are set, including provisions, terms of duration, continuance and mortality, restraint of magnitudes, temporal and atemporal modes, location, quantity, quality, degree, orientation, position, record, permission, accidents, magnitudes of rays, and all boundaries until the end of the degrees of its existence. The beginning of the second creation occurs in this stage, the start of felicity and misery. It is through Purpose that predestination comes into being as a result of the latter’s being a consequence of it. These aforementioned limitations also occur with the first creation, but in a more sublime way. I have only set them forth here, because this is the station of scheme, while that is the station of simplicity.

The fourth is fate, which is the realization of what has been predetermined and its composition in accordance with the natural system. Predestination is like measuring the materials of a bed for length, breadth, and shape. Fate corresponds to composing them into a bed.

The fifth is execution, which is the concomitant of fate. It is the act of making something manifest, revealing the causes, and disclosing the means due to the combination within it of all the stages needed to make one cognizant of the impressions of the divine active attributes. The first four stages, therefore, are the elements of the divine Act, while the fifth is their disclosure. It is through predestination that fate comes to be, and it is through fate that execution comes to be.

These four stages constitute the Morn of Eternity (*ṣubḥ al-azal*), as the light which shines forth from the Morn of Eternity consists of four lights. They are the Throne upon which the All-Merciful is seated in His mercifulness, which is these four stages of action. The light shining from the first stage is the upper right pillar of the Throne; it is the white light. The light shining from the second stage is the lower right pillar of the Throne; it is the yellow light. The light shining from the third stage is the upper left pillar of the Throne; it is the green light. The light shining from the fourth stage is the lower left pillar of the Throne; it is the red light. The white color of the Will is due to its perfect simplicity. The yellow color of Purpose is due to an increase of heat in the whiteness. The green color of predestination is due to the mixture of the blackness of multiplicity, which is a consequence of predestination, with the yellowness that is an effect of Purpose. The red color of fate is due to the combination of the white of the Will with the yellow of Purpose in the heat of the decree of fate through execution.

²⁴ Referring to God’s existentiational motion (*ḥarakat ‘ijádiyya*) through which contingent beings come into existence.

Know that when the expression “He created” is used, all the stages of the divine Act may be intended, since from a linguistic perspective, it is true of all of them. Now if it is said “He created, fashioned, and formed”, then “He created” means “He willed”, in other words, “He called existence into being”; “He fashioned” means “He purposed”, in other words, “He called the archetypes into being”, which means “He called the essences of things into being by means of existence”; and “He formed” means “He predetermined”, in other words, “He called their limitations into being.”

God has said: “Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High, Who created all things, then fashioned them; Who predetermined them, then guided them.”²⁵ This means He created their being, in other words, their existence; then He fashioned their archetypes, meaning He proportioned their essences by means of their existence. This signifies that He placed in them that whereby if they are asked, they will answer. Note that the conjunction “then” is used instead of “and” between the verbs of creating and fashioning because of the inseparable relationship between them, as we explained before. This is the first creation. The verse “Who predetermined them, then guided them” means that He assigned their limitations, as we set forth earlier. This is the second creation. “Then guided them” signifies that He showed them the path of guidance. (The Fourth Observation, *al-Fawá'id al-Ḥikmiyyah* in *The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process*, pp. 434-436)

2. As for the nature of God’s knowledge of universals, that is, knowing in a general respect, or knowing the universals of things. These are universal worlds under which are instances and individuals, or they are abstracted universals, like naturalness, logicalness, and rationality. These are fixed things on the left side of existence. It is this theme that has caused most of the people to perish, and you will find that all are comparers and deniers, save those who adhere to the sayings of Muhammad and His family and who do not let their feet exceed their bounds.

I have written about an epistle by Mullá Muḥsin Fayḍ, which he wrote for his son, called “Guidance on the Meaning of the Sayings of the Imams of Guidance”, and you will not find anything in my discourse that is compatible with what that man has written, for he has imitated the people. Relevant to this is the saying of the Commander of the Faithful: “The journey of one who seeks aught beside us is heading toward polluted springs which empty into one another, while the journey of one who seeks us is going toward crystal springs which flow by the Command of God to the individuals that belong to them.”

The truth of this question is contrary to what the majority of the people understand. But the matter is easy for one who has discovered and recognized that knowledge is the same as the object of knowledge in the Necessary and the contingent, the visible and the invisible. Whoever doesn’t understand this will never attain the truth of this question. An explanation of this will follow, God willing.

According to the people’s understanding of fate (*qaḍá*) and predestination (*qadar*), fate is an eternal decree which cannot be altered (*badá*), and it is prior to predestination But in the view of the people of the House, predestination precedes fate, as stated by Kázim, and the meaning they set forth is not the same as that set forth by the people, which is baseless according to the people of Revelation. Its meaning, in their view, is as he has amply stated: “Is it not set forth in the traditions: ‘Fate refers to an inevitable decree that is subsequent to predestination.’”?

The truth is that when the creative action is related to existence, it is the Will; when it is related to the archetype (*‘ayn*), in other words, the species form, it is Purpose; and when it is related to the limitations of the created, that is to say, their topography (*handasa*)—which includes length

²⁵ Qur’án 87:1-3.

and breadth, continuance and mortality, term of duration, and the like—it is predestination. Through the accomplishment of the act of creation and the thing itself, it is fate; and through its manifestation, the revealing of causes, and the disclosure of means, it is execution.

In regard to the Pen, it is that which draws from the Inkwell and produces the Tablet. The Pen is the Universal Mind, and the Tablet is the Universal Soul. The transcendent Platonic Models exist through the joining of the Mím and the Thá', and they are the forms of things. Some have charged that Plato established the forms of things, which are their causes and their realities, in the Essence of the Emanating Source, by which is meant their establishment in the Essence of God, exalted and glorified be He. The statements of the people²⁶ correspond with this meaning. They established all things in His Essence in a mode nobler than they are in themselves. Mullá Muḥsin Fayḍ said in his epistle that all things have an existence in the Essence essentially posterior to the stage of His knowledge of Himself. So the stage without the concomitance of multiplicity in His Essence, by reason of their multiplicity, is applicable to the order which joins multiplicity to oneness. This is what he has stated in the *Kalimát al-Maknúnah* (Hidden Words) describing the existence of the world:

Existence was a latent state in Him free of any archetype, but the archetype is disposed for that existence by the Command. When God commanded, the Purpose of the Creator became attached to it, and His Command was united with the notion of the archetype. Through it the existence latent in Him passed from potentiality into actuality. Therefore, the locus of manifestation for its being is the Real, and the existent itself is the receiver of that existence. Were it not for its receptivity and disposition to receive existence, it could not exist. Moreover, God would not have generated it unless it had a fixed archetype in the divine Knowledge corresponding to its essential, uncreated disposition, its receptivity for existence, its worthiness to hearken to the word "Be!" and its fitness to receive the same. He would not have called it into being unless it was in Him. Or we say, the essence of the inner name is the same as the essence of the outer name. The recipient is the same as the agent, and the uncreated archetype is the same as God, so His action and receptivity are His two hands. He is the agent by one of the hands and the recipient by the other. The Essence is one, and the multiple are impressions [in Him]. Thus it is true that He has created nothing except Himself, and what He has created are His manifestations.

al-Fárábí has set forth similar arguments. In one instance, he said: "The whole is one in relation to His Essence, so He is the whole with respect to oneness." Similar statements can be found in their writings.

But those who know the intent of Plato recognize that he means by that which contains the Platonic Forms (*al-muthul*) the original foundation (*al-'unṣur al-aṣli*) from which all things were created, for he follows the meaning of his predecessors, who derived most of philosophy from the Prophets. Sometimes they speak of "the Essence of God", but they intend the essence of the universal Vicegerent of God, in the sense that it is an essence from God that He has related to Himself as a position of honor. As He says: "I breathed into him a measure of My spirit."²⁷ 'Alí has also described the honored position of their souls: "Its root is the Intellect. From it, it began; through it, it is heedful; to it, it points and signifies; and unto it, it returns when it is perfect and resembles it. From it, all existents began, and unto it they return in perfection. It is the Essence of

²⁶ i.e. the philosophers and mystics who believed in the doctrine of the oneness of existence.

²⁷ Qur'án 15:29.

God, the Most High, the Blessed Tree, the Sadratu'l-Muntahá, and the Paradise of the Water. Whosoever recognizes it shall never be wretched, and whosoever fails to recognize it shall fall into error and go astray.”

The traditions differ outwardly on the meaning of this root. The learned also differ in regard to it. Thus, it is said to be the water “from which He made every living thing,”²⁸ or it is said to be existence, or the Intellect, or the Throne, or the Tablet. It is possible, however, to harmonize these various statements. If it is said to be existence, what is meant is matter, as we have established. If it is said to be water, the exponents of the outer meaning and the exponents of the inner meaning agree that it is existence, which the latter interpret as matter on account of its receptivity to a never ending succession of forms. Those who say it is the Intellect intend by what it contains the ideas of things free of temporal extension, elemental matter, and melancholic, psychic, and imaginal form. Those who say it is the Throne mean that upon it is a likeness of each thing, as they recount from Šádiq about the wonders of creation: “Each believer has a likeness upon the Throne, such that when he performs an obligatory prayer his likeness does the same, whereupon the angels bless him and ask for his forgiveness. And when a servant is disobedient, God causes a curtain of night to descend around his likeness, of which the angels are aware.” This is the explanation of his words: “O Thou Who displayest what is beautiful and concealest what is ugly.” In the *Khuṭbatu'l-Bayán*, he says: “The possessor of the Throne has exalted stations, and upon that Throne are likenesses of whatever God has created on land and sea.” This is the meaning of His utterance: “Nothing exists whose treasury is not with Us.”²⁹ Those who say it is the Tablet intend the Universal Soul, which is the locus of the second creation and the first congelation.

The notion of the unity of the thinker with the object of thought is based upon what was put forward by the author of the doctrine of the oneness of existence (*waḥdat al-wujúd*). He was obliged, for the sake of the correctness of this principle, to forget what it implied in corruption of belief and to cross over into unworthy speculations. God willing, we will explain the falsity of everything he depends upon and the repugnance of what he implies, such as the oneness of the agent and the patient, cause and effect, and so on

He [Šadrá] intends by his words “what is beyond the Intellect” the supreme Object of worship, exalted and glorified be He But it is evident from the teachings of the people of the House, as their traditions make clear without any contradiction and the Book of God affirms (and the mind is illumined by their lights), that beyond the Intellect is the dead earth, or the barren earth, which is the earth of potentialities, or the oil “which is nearly luminous though no fire toucheth it.”³⁰ Beyond this is the water from which God “made every living thing”,³¹ and it is the existence that flows forth through the action of God without an intermediary. From one perspective, this is the foundation which Plato intended contains the models of all things. But from another perspective, the foundation which contains the models is the barren earth. The origin, therefore, of these models is either (1) the shares of primary matter, or active matter, which is the water and existence, or (2) the shares of forms and differentia, which is the oil and the barren earth.

In short, what is meant by the foundation (*unṣur*) is the Inkwell, which is both the receiver and what is received. The Pen, which more properly speaking is the Intellect, draws from the Inkwell and produces the Tablet by means of spiritual elements which then act as seeds for the composition of the body of man. So prior to it [the Pen] is the Will of God, which is His action;

²⁸ Qur'án 21:30.

²⁹ Qur'án 15:21.

³⁰ Qur'án 24:35.

³¹ Qur'án 21:30.

eternity (*sarmad*), which is His time; and the possible, which is His place and the most great chasm. These three things are what tip the scales in favor of existence. It is allowable to say that the water and the barren earth derive from these three, and that they belong to delimited existence.³² So the things beyond the Intellect are five, and God is the encompasser beyond them. All of them are created by God through His action.

The meaning of the author [Ṣadrá] is that the Intellect is uncompounded, and that which is beyond it is uncompounded, namely, God, and since all is an uncompounded reality (*basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa*), then He is all the existents. But this view is false, for the Intellect is not uncompounded, except in relation to what is below it in the temporal world. They have only conceived it to be uncompounded based upon the words of the ancient philosophers, who obtained wisdom from the Prophets. It may be that a philosopher deduced it from their sayings, so the error is in the deduction. They wrote their books in Syriac, and when they were translated into Arabic some errors in interpreting and understanding the words of the masters may have occurred. For instance, when they said this Intellect is pure (*mujarrad*), they meant that it is free of elemental matter, temporal extension, and melancholic, psychic, and imaginal form. He [Ṣadrá] has asserted that the Intellect is utterly uncompounded, as is applicable to the Creator, exalted be He. But whatever is created, without a doubt, is composed of two aspects, and aspect from its Lord, which is existence, or matter; and an aspect from itself, which is the quiddity, or form. This is because every contingent thing is a composite pair, and nothing other than God has an uncompounded nature. How then can it be said to be uncompounded? (*Sharḥ al-Mashá'ir*, pp. 15–18)

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³² In his writings, Shaykh Aḥmad divides existence (*wujúd*) into three categories: (1) real existence (*al-wujud al-ḥaqq*), which belongs only to God, (2) absolute existence (*al-wujúd al-muṭlaq*), which belongs to the world of Command—this is the existential action [*ibdá'*] which includes the stages of Will and Purpose—and (3) delimited existence (*al-wujúd al-muqayyid*), which belongs to the world of created things (*khalq*). Shaykh Aḥmad explains that this third type of existence is “the things generated, whose beginning is the Universal Mind” (*Rasá'il*, p. 44), “all the outcomes of the acting” (*Fawá'id*, p. 98), and “existence as delimited by individuations, which is the existence of beings composed of substances and accidents in the hidden and manifest worlds” (*Mashá'ir*, p. 136). He clarifies that “absolute existence may be applied to the water and the barren earth, for it is before the state of delimitation” (*ibid.*, p. 138), but sometimes he associates these two with delimited existence, as above.