

The Báb's Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God

by Todd Lawson

Introduction to the translation

The preliminary translation offered here is of the *Risála fi's-sulúk* (Tehran Bahá'í Archives Ms. 6006. C., pages 73-74, 23 lines per page), one of the Báb's earliest extant Writings—perhaps the earliest.¹ The *Risála* begins on the seventh line of page 73. I am grateful to Stephen Lambden who years ago supplied me with a xerox of this privately published “edition.” I have no knowledge of its manuscript base. Denis MacEoin in his *Sources for Early Bábí Doctrine and History*, pp. 44, 196 (n.b. under *Risálat at-tasdíd*) lists five privately published “editions” for the *Risála* (among which this is one) and observes that the original Work “appears to have been written during the later years of Sayyid Kázim Raṣhtí's life (and thus before the commencement of the Báb's own career).” (p. 44) Here MacEoin has chosen to translate *sulúk* as “right behavior,” but the contents and concerns of this brief piece strongly suggest that a more accurate rendering would be “journey,” “spiritual search,” or even “mystic quest.”

The first translation of the text, below, is offered without the encumbrances of copious notes and references, except as indicated by small caps (indicating a quotation from the Qur'án) and quotation marks (indicating a quotation from the hadíth) and other minor punctuation (Arabic has no punctuation system analogous to English usage). Much of this same Qur'anic and hadíth material will continue to figure prominently in later Writings of the Báb. For example, the relatively lengthy quotation from the Hadíth Kumayl in this short work is noteworthy because it shows the importance the Báb attached, from the beginning, to this celebrated and widely-commented-upon short sermon of 'Alí ibn Abí Tálib, the first Imám of the Shí'a and prime bearer of post-prophetic spiritual authority and charisma (*waláya*). The Hadíth Kumayl is also known as the *Hadíth má'l-haqíqa*, viz, the sacred words in answer to the question “What is divine reality?” It should be noted, also, that this very important hadíth is not found in the canonical *Nahj al-balágha*. Reference to it by the Báb is significant because it shows that He was deeply engaged in the long, venerable and exceedingly rich Shí'í mystical—or gnostic—discourse associated with it. Indeed, the Báb also wrote a separate commentary devoted solely to this sermon (*Sources*, p.199). In the Bábí/Bahá'í tradition, interest in the Hadíth did not stop with the Báb; one of His more prominent followers eventually adopted one of its distinctive formulations, *subh-i-azal*, “Dawn of Eternity,” as an honorific title. Bahá'u'lláh Himself also makes repeated reference to this sermon throughout His Writings as when, in referring to another one of the sermon's distinctive ideas, He speaks of the “veils of glory” (*subuhát al-jalál*, “delusions of grandeur”). The literal meaning, “lofty praises of divine glory,” suggests that one must rigourously avoid equating one's understanding of sublime divine qualities with the absolute unknowable essence of God. “Veils of glory” is a symptom of spiritual disease diagnosed originally by 'Alí.

The translation offered here also demonstrates, if such were necessary, how important the Qur'án was for the Báb. It is most important to point out that while many of the Qur'anic quotations or references are very brief, their appearance in this text is also meant to stimulate in the mind of the reader the immediate scriptural context that they represent in addition to the relevant distinctive Shí'í exegetical tradition. Therefore, in the accompanying notes some of the unquoted Qur'anic context is supplied.

Finally, this *Risála* shows quite clearly the interest the Báb had in and His attachment to the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kázim. Apart from the explicit mention of the latter, the basic quaternary structure of the discourse reflects Shaykhí teachings. The understanding of the “next world” (Paradise or Hellfire) as spiritual conditions, rather than places, is also a distinctive Shaykhí teaching and shows how that synthesis combined the languages of Sufism and Shí'ism. I plan to offer a fuller account of these features of the *Risála* in a future article which will contain, in addition to a translation of the *Hadíth Kumayl*, the Báb's separate commentary on it, a study of Shí'í exegesis of the text and a discussion of the Qur'anic and other Hadíth material in addition to a discussion of related writings from the masters of the Shaykhí school.

In some cases, the translation violates strict literalness in the interest of readability. Qur'án translations are based upon those of Yusuf Ali. I should like to record my debt to Dr. Muhamed Afnan who years ago kindly agreed to look over a preliminary edition of the Arabic text and offer several valuable suggestions based upon his precious and intimate knowledge of the Báb's writings and manuscripts of the *Risála* not available to me. All errors in the translation are mine and mine alone.

For those who would like to pursue a more detailed study of the *Risála* I offer a second translation (following the first, below). This one does have a few notes scattered throughout the text and is more technical in general. In this connection, it is important to mention the manner in which the Báb expresses His ideas through the poetic and "musical" use of a few key Arabic roots, the most frequent being *Q-W-M* (straightness, rising, standing), *B-W-B* (gate), *W-H-D* (oneness). Here, again, the Composition would appear to follow the rules of improvisation.

The Spiritual Journey towards God

The Báb's "Journey towards God": the Risálah fi's-Sulúk ilá Alláh*

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL , THE COMPASSIONATE**

Be steadfast, O seeker of piety, in the station of affirming the divine unity. As God, exalted be He, has said:

AS FOR THOSE WHO SAY "OUR LORD IS GOD" THEN CONTINUE STEADFAST, THE ANGELS DESCEND UPON THEM SAYING "FEAR NOT, NOR BE GRIEVED, AND RECEIVE GOOD NEWS OF THE GARDEN WHICH YE WERE PROMISED!"

Know ye that "the paths to God are as numerous as the breaths of the creatures" yet, there is NO SOUL but ONE and there is no religion but the one religion, and it is the CAUSE OF GOD. AND OUR COMMAND IS BUT A SINGLE ACT.

SO SET THOU THY FACE STEADILY TO THE TRUE FAITH—THE NATURE MADE BY GOD—IN WHICH HE HAS MADE MEN. THERE IS NO ALTERING GOD'S CREATION.

Verily, Religion is supported by four pillars:

- 1) Affirming the divine unity
- 2) Prophethood
- 3) Guardianship, and
- 4) The community of true believers

These are four gates, none of which is of any use without the others.

And all of this is the FACE OF GOD WHICH WILL NEVER PERISH. And this is the love of the Family of God which is the same as the love of God. This is the Hidden Treasure to which the Prophet, upon Him and His family be peace, openly alluded when He said: "Above each good is another good until one loves us, and when one loves us there is no good higher."

So love, beloved, lover, and Beloved are four divine signs appearing from the radiant self-manifestation of the family of God in you and in your soul. Whenever these four signs are remembered within you and your heart is illumined, and your soul stirred, and your spirit moved and your body quakes with longing, then you are truly among the people of paradise and the companions of the Commander of the Faithful, upon him be peace.

Indeed, at such a time you are in conformity with the TRUE RELIGION and the TRUE BALANCE and the obvious and clear PATH. Above this station there is no good.

Thus one ascends unto the abode of the permanence of God.

There is no end to the love of God and no finish.

This is the guiding principle of the search.

There can be no question, the Sharí'ah in its entirety is one method in the quest of the servant for his Lord, but it must be according to the guiding principle and goal as I have described.

As for the road to attaining the guiding principle—know that attainment to the station of your own sign is attainment to your Lord. And this is the station of pure piety towards God, exalted be He, as when one of the prophets asked of God, praised be He, "How can we attain to Thee?" God, may He be exalted, said, "Cast away thyself and rise to Me."

And this is why the station of the novices is conditional upon denying the self what it passionately desires and forcing upon it what it detests because there is no veil more base for the servant than his own self.

* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfán Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium.

** Text in SMALL CAPS indicates Qur'anic content

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By God! If you struggle against your self you will by and by send it to the station of nearness and remembrance and intimacy in the shade of your Beloved and adore Him above all else, to the extent that even if you were cut to shreds you would not be negligent of His station. Because, the [true] knower is he whose heart is with God; such a one has no speech, thought, nor act except in, by, with and about God, exalted be He.

Neglect not your personal struggle and thereby forfeit THY PORTION IN THIS WORLD BUT DO THOU GOOD AS GOD HAS BEEN GOOD TO THEE .

And if you are neglectful it will be your great loss on the Day of the Return and you will say: “AH! WOE IS ME!—IN THAT I NEGLECTED MY DUTY TOWARDS GOD!”

So pass on whither we have been ordered and fear not THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO FIND FAULT. THIS IS THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH HE WILL BESTOW ON WHOM HE PLEASETH AND GOD IS THE OWNER OF ALL GRACE AND THE ALL-KNOWING .

Flee from whatever distracts you from God. Indeed such is a deadly poison which will consume you in flames though you be unaware.

NAY, WERE YOU TO KNOW WITH CERTAINTY OF MIND YOU WOULD BE AWARE . YOU SHALL CERTAINLY SEE HELLFIRE . AGAIN YOU SHALL SEE IT WITH CERTAINTY OF SIGHT

It is incumbent upon you to abandon the world and all that is in it. Indeed, it is the chief of all evils. And in your quest do not linger in any one station. Thus a dog of the Jews is better than the people of the marketplace because the people of the marketplace are the people of spiritual torpor. Verily, this lingering is the source of that negligence which bars access to God.

Verily, the world and the hereafter are two spiritual states. If you turn towards God, exalted be He, then you are in paradise and if you are occupied with your self then you are in hell and in the world. Therefore understand these allusions and sever thyself from all unworthy habits and lusts. Endure patiently the alienation of people and the blame of the companion and the *Schadenfreude* of the enemy from among family and offspring.

And when you have begun your quest according to this METHOD of search, then the gate of God will open to your soul and you will request entrance into the realm of the holy one.

For the people of insight these subtle allusions will suffice:

“Rend the veils of glory and allusions and efface the idle fancies and rend the veils and be attracted to the exclusive unity—the quality of affirming the divine unity until the light of dawn shines forth from” the sun of thy reality and YOU ENTER THE CITY OF UNITY WHILE ITS PEOPLE ARE UNAWARE “and extinguish the lamp” of everything that has veiled you from God, exalted be He, so that you will attain to the PRAISED STATION that God, exalted be He, has promised the people who glorify God at night—that is to say the turning towards the absolute divine unity in the midst of intense darkness, as in the verse: IT MAY BE THAT THY LORD WILL RAISE THEE UP TO A PRAISEWOR THY STATION .

And THIS BOOK , on the WAY of search, is kept brief for those possessed of insight and in it is that which will be sufficient for the pure amongst the affirmers of the divine unity. The particulars have been fully written about by my master, my support, my teacher, the pilgrim Sayyid Kázim al-Rashú, may God lengthen his life and bring forth from it good results. So seek the WAY OF YOUR LORD MADE SMOOTH FOR THEE . THERE COMETH FORTH FROM THEIR BELLIES A DRINK DIVERSE OF HUES , WHEREIN IS HEALING FOR MANKIND AND A MERCY ; WHILE THE OPPRESSORS INCREASE ONLY IN RUIN .

The Spiritual Journey towards God

Annotated translation of The Báb's "Journey towards God": the Risálah fi's-Sulúk ilá Alláh

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE²

Be steadfast (*QWM*),³ O seeker of piety (*TQW*),⁴ in the station (*QWM*) of affirming the divine unity (*WHD*).⁵ God, exalted be He, said:

AS FOR THOSE WHO SAY "OUR LORD IS GOD" THEN CONTINUE STEADFAST (*QWM*), THE ANGELS DESCEND UPON THEM SAYING "FEAR NOT, NOR BE GRIEVED, AND RECEIVE GOOD NEWS OF THE GARDEN WHICH YE WERE PROMISED!" (Qur'án 41:30; cf. 46:13)

Know ye that "the paths to God are as numerous as the breaths (*anfás*) of the creatures,"⁶ while there is NO SOUL but ONE (*nafs wáhida*; *WHD*; cf. Qur'án 4:1; 31:28; 39:6), and that there is no religion but the one religion (*dín wáhid*; *WHD*), and it is the CAUSE OF GOD (*amr Alláh*; Qur'án 33:37; 49:9 and *passim*). AND OUR COMMAND (*amruná*) IS BUT A SINGLE (ACT) (*wa má amruná illá wáhida*; *WHD* Qur'án 54:50; the second half of the verse, not quoted here by the Báb, continues: AS THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE).

SO SET THOU (*fa-'aqim*; *QWM*) THY FACE STEADILY TO THE TRUE FAITH—THE NATURE MADE BY GOD (*fitra alláh*)—IN WHICH HE HAS MADE MEN. THERE IS NO ALTERING GOD'S CREATION. (Qur'án 30:30; cf. the end of this verse and Qur'án 30:31-32 alluded to here but not explicitly quoted by the Báb: THAT IS THE RIGHT RELIGION (*al-dín al-qayyim*; *QWM*), BUT MOST PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW. 31: TURN YE BACK IN REPENTANCE TO HIM AND FEAR HIM (*ittaquhu*; *TQW*), ESTABLISH REGULAR PRAYERS (*wa'aqímú al-salát*; *QWM*), AND BE NOT OF THOSE WHO JOIN GODS WITH GOD (*wa lá takínú min al-mushrikín*). 32: THOSE WHO SPLIT UP THEIR RELIGION AND BECAME MERE SECTS (*shí'an*), EACH PARTY REJOICING IN WHAT THEY HAD WITH THEM.)

Indeed, (true) Religion is supported (*mutaqawwam*; *QWM*) by four pillars.

- 1) *Tawhíd* (affirming the divine unity)
- 2) *Nubuwwa* (prophethood)
- 3) *Waláya* (guardianship), and
- 4) *Shí'a* (the community of true believers)

These are four gates (*abwáb*, sing. *báb* *BWB*) of which no one is of any use without the others.

And all of this is the FACE OF GOD (*wajh Alláh*) WHICH WILL NEVER PERISH. (cf. Qur'án 28:88).⁷ And it (i.e. this "face of God") is the love of the Family of God (*hubb ál Alláh*)⁸ which is the same as the love of God (*wa huwa nafs hubb Alláh*). This is the Hidden Treasure⁹ to which the Prophet, upon Him and His family be peace, openly alluded when He said: "Above each good is another good until one loves us, and when one loves us there is no higher good above it."¹⁰

So love (*hubb*), beloved (*habíb*), lover (*muhibb*), and Beloved (*mahbúb*) are four divine signs (*áyát*) appearing from the self-manifestation of the family of God (*tajallí ál Alláh*) in you and they are your soul.¹¹

Whenever these four signs are remembered within you and your heart is illumined, and your soul stirred, and your spirit moved and your body quakes with longing (*shawq*), then you are truly (*haqqan*) among the people of paradise and the companions of the Commander of the Faithful,¹² upon him be peace.

At such a time you are indeed upon the TRUE RELIGION (*al-dín al-qayyim*, Qur'án 30:30; *QWM*) and the TRUE BALANCE (*al-qistás al-mustaqím*, Qur'án 17:35 and 26:182; *QWM*) and the obvious and clear PATH (*al-sirát al-wádh al-mubín*). Above this station (*QWM*) there is no good (*hasana*).

Thus one ascends unto the abode of the permanence of God (*baqá' Alláh*).¹³

There is no end to the love of God and no finish.

This is the guiding principle (*qutb*) of the search.¹⁴

Indeed the *Sharí'a* in its entirety is a method for the quest of the servant for his Lord, but by movement

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according to the guiding principle (*qutb*) as I have described.

As for the road to attaining the guiding principle (*qutb*)—know that attainment to the station (*QWM*) of your sign is attainment to your Lord. And this is the station of pure piety (*TQW*) towards God, exalted be He, as when one of the prophets asked of God, praised be He, “How can we attain to Thee?” God, may He be exalted, said, “Throw down thyself and rise to Me.”¹⁵

And this is why the station (*QWM*) of the novices (*al-mubtadi’ín*) is conditional upon denying the self what it passionately desires and forcing upon it what it detests because there is no veil more base (*awhāsh*) for the servant than his own self.

By God! If you struggle against your self and thereby send it to the station of nearness and remembrance and intimacy in the shade of your Beloved and adore Him above all else, even if you were cut to shreds you would not be negligent of His station because the knower is he whose heart is with God and he has no speech, allusion nor act except in, by, with and about God, exalted be He.

Neglect not your personal struggle (*ijtihād*) and thereby forfeit THY PORTION IN THIS WORLD BUT DO THOU GOOD AS GOD HAS BEEN GOOD TO THEE.¹⁶

And if you are neglectful it will be your great loss on the Day of the Return and you will say: “AH! WOE IS ME!—IN THAT I NEGLECTED MY DUTY TOWARDS GOD!” (Qur’án 39:56)¹⁷

So pass on Whither We Have Been Ordered¹⁸ and Fear Not¹⁹ THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO FIND FAULT. THAT IS THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH HE WILL BESTOW ON WHOM HE PLEASETH AND GOD IS THE OWNER OF ALL GRACE AND THE ALL-KNOWING . (Qur’án 5:54)²⁰

Flee from whatever distracts you from God. Indeed such is a deadly poison which will consume you in flames while you are unaware. NAY, WERE YOU TO KNOW WITH CERTAINTY OF MIND (*ilm al-yaqín*) (YOU WOULD BE AWARE). YOU SHALL CERTAINLY SEE HELLFIRE . AGAIN YOU SHALL SEE IT WITH CERTAINTY OF SIGHT (*‘ayn al-yaqín*). (Qur’án 102:5-7)

It is incumbent upon you to abandon the world and all that is in it. Indeed, it is the chief of all evils. And in your quest do not linger in any station. Verily, a dog of the Jews is better than the people of the marketplace because the people of the marketplace are the people of lingering (*ahl al-wuqúf*). Verily, such is the source of that negligence which bars access to God.²¹

Indeed, the world and the hereafter are two spiritual states.²² If you turn towards God (19), exalted be He, then you are in paradise and if you are occupied with your self then you are in hell and in the world. Therefore understand these allusions (*ishárát*) and sever thyself from all habits and lusts. And endure patiently the alienation of people and the blame of the companion²³ and the *Schadenfreude* of the enemy from among family and offspring.

And when you have begun your quest along this path of search, then the gate of God (*báb Alláh*; *BWB*) will open to your soul and you will request entrance into the realm of the the Most Generous (*mulk al-karím*).

For the people of insight these subtle allusions [will suffice]:²⁴

“Purge” to the highest possible degree “the sublime praises of divine glory” of “allusions” and “efface the idle fancies and rend all veils and be attracted to the divine exclusive unity—[by] the quality of affirming the divine unity until the light of dawn shines forth” from the sun of thy reality and YOU ENTER THE CITY of unity WHILE ITS PEOPLE ARE UNAWARE²⁵ and extinguish the lamp²⁶ of everything that has veiled you from God, exalted be He, so that when you attain to a PRAISED STATION²⁷ (*QWM*) such as God, exalted be He, has promised the people who glorify God at night²⁸ that is to say the turning towards the absolute divine unity in the midst of intense darkness, SOON THY LORD WILL RAISE THEE UP TO A PRAISEWORTHY STATION . (*QWM*)²⁹

And THIS WRITING on the METHOD (*sabíl*) of search, is kept brief for those possessed of insight and in it is that which will be sufficient for the pure amongst the believers in the divine unity. The particulars have been fully written about by my master, my support, my teacher, the pilgrim Sayyid Kázim al-Rashdí, may God lengthen his life and bring forth from it good results. So seek the WAY³¹ OF YOUR LORD MADE SMOOTH FOR THEE. THERE COMETH FORTH FROM THEIR BELLIES A DRINK DIVERSE OF HUES, WHEREIN IS HEALING FOR MANKIND AND A MERCY; WHILE THE OPPRESSORS INCREASE ONLY IN RUIN . (Qur’án 16:69)

Appendix

Hadíth Kumayl*

Kumayl bin Ziyád asked ‘Alí:

“What is reality?”

‘Alí replied: “What are you compared to reality?” (i.e., “How dare you ask such a question!”)

Kumayl said: “Are you not the master of your own secret knowledge?” (i.e., “What is the matter, can’t you answer my question?”)

‘Alí replied: “Most certainly (*balá*)! But you will receive only a few drops of the ocean of knowledge that overflow from the abundance of my own knowledge.”

Kumayl: “Is it like you to disappoint a questioner?”

‘Alí responded: “reality is dispersing the clouds of glory without allusion.” (*al-haqíqat kashf subuhát al-jalál min ghayr ishára* = [The perception of] reality [is achieved only in] dispelling one’s delusions of grandeur in vain attempts to compare that reality with anything whatsoever.)

Kumayl said: “Explain this further!”

‘Alí said: “It is the effacement of vain imaginings with clear consciousness of that which is known.”

Kumayl said: “Explain this further!”

‘Alí said: “It is the rending of the curtain and being overwhelmed by the divine secret.”

Kumayl said: “Explain this further!”

‘Alí said: “It is the irresistible attraction of the exclusive divine unity [achieved] by means of the quality of affirming the divine unity.”

Kumayl said: “Explain this further!”

‘Alí said: “A light shines forth from the dawn of eternity and it radiates its effects upon the temples consecrated to affirming the divine unity.”

Kumayl said: “Explain this further!”

‘Alí said: “When the dawn breaks, extinguish the lamp.”

* From Sayyid Haydar Ámulí, *Jámi’ al-asrár wa manba’ al-asrár*, edited by H. Corbin and O. I. Yahyá. Bibliothèque iranienne, vol. 16, Institut Français de Recherche en Iran: Tehran, 1989 (first published 1969), p. 170.

Notes

- 1) An earlier version of this translation was posted on H-Bahai a few years ago. It is available, along with the unedited Arabic text, at www2.h-net.msu.edu/bahai/trans/vol2/suluk/suluktr.htm
- 2) Invocation at the beginning of every Qu’anic súra but one: *bismilláhir-rahmánir-rahím*. It is widely used through the length and breadth of Islamic written culture to begin a piece of writing or speech. The Báb would continue to employ the symbolism of this phrase, known as the *basmala*, throughout His ministry. The Letters of the Living are understood to be the living manifestations of its eighteen letters.
- 3) *’istaqim*: This imperative of the 8th form of the verb *Q-W-M* is noticed here to demonstrate two features of the *Risála*. First, this usage shows that the Báb is directly addressing an anonymous male, probably the same person who asked the Báb about *sulúk* in the first place (see next note). Second, this also is the first instance of the several appearances of the root *Q-W-M* in the *Risála*. Among the various words that are derived from this root, two would gain greater and greater prominence as the Báb’s ministry unfolded: (1) *qiyáma*: Resurrection, the Shí’í eschaton; and (2) *qá’im*: Resurrector, One Who Arises, according to Shí’í tradition, in order to replace the injustice of the world with justice. Note, in this regard, the closing Qur’anic quotation of the *Risála*.
- 4) *yá sá’il al-tuqá*: Note that the root from which the word for piety is derived *T-Q-W* recurs throughout the text.
- 5) *maqám al-tawhíd*: traditional Sufi terminology: *maqám* is usually translated as “station.” Depending upon the schema, there may be 4, 7, 8 or any number of “stations” that a seeker might expect to achieve and master in the quest or journey towards God. In each station, it should be noted, the seeker may also expect to encounter various spiritual changes referred to as “states” —

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ahwál, singular *hál* (see below note 21). *Tawhíd* is frequently mistranslated as “unity.” It is important to stress here that it is an active participle, not a noun. The perfect performance of this act is the goal of all believers in the divine unity. See below the references to the *Hadíth* Kumayl (and the Appendix where this *Hadíth* is translated). Here the central subject is precisely guidance, from the Imám ‘Alí to another questioner, Kumayl ibn Ziyád, on how to properly affirm the divine unity.

- 6) *Hadíth*, also quoted in the Báb’s *Tafsír súrát al-baqara ad 2:38*, frequently quoted in the Sufi tradition.
- 7) The idea of the “face of God” is mentioned several times in the Qur’án. Its interpretation, like many other important Qur’anic words and phrases, is highly controversial. One of the more frequently-quoted verses in which the “face of God” is mentioned is in the context of the story of the changing of the Qiblah from Jerusalem to Mecca. At 2:115, the Qur’án says: UNTO GOD BELONG THE EAST AND THE WEST, SO WHITHERSOEVER YE TURN, THERE IS THE FACE OF GOD. LO! GOD IS ALL EMBRACING, ALL KNOWING. “Face of God” has been interpreted a number of ways. The Manifestation is the “face” of God in the sense that He represents the visible aspect of the divine, the Deus Revelatus, as distinct from the eternally hidden aspect of God, the divine Essence, the Deus Absconditus. There is another sense in which “face” can be understood. The root *W-J-H* denotes surface and direction. The derivative *jihá* means aspect or sense (cf. the French *sens* “direction” as in the word for “one way [street]”: *sens unique*. Looked at this way, then the “face” of God, far from denoting or even connoting any crude anthropomorphism, means “God’s direction.” Thus, the above verse says all directions lead to God. This is in accord with the partial *hadíth* quoted below by the Báb. The direction in which God may be sought is therefore a perfect topic in an epistle devoted to the best way of journeying towards God. Cf. also *jihát*, *wajh/wujúh* as technical terms in *tafsír*. A verse may be said to have several *wujúh*, or “approaches”: several different meanings or intentions.
- 8) *hubb ál Alláh ál Alláh*, “Family of God,” is most immediately understood as the Prophet Muhammad, His daughter Fátima and the twelve Imáms. There is also a feature of this usage that indicates “*ál*” (as distinct from “*ahl*”) can also include faithful followers whether related or not. The epithet is frequently used by the Báb throughout His Writings.
- 9) Cf. the *Hadíth* Qudsí known as *kuntu kanzan makhfiyan* “I was a Hidden Treasure” and the commentary on this important *hadíth* by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá translated and commented on by Moojan Momen available on the World Wide Web at www.northill.demon.co.uk/relstud/kkm.htm
- 10) Although the relevant sources are full of countless traditions enjoining the believers to love the Prophet and His Family, I have not found a source for this *hadíth*. Note here, however, that the Báb, in the course of His epistle on the topic of the mystic quest also provides an interpretation of two key Islamic texts: (1) the “face of God” and (2) the identity of the “Hidden Treasure.”
- 11) The text is difficult to read here. Previously, I saw it as *fika wa fí nafsika*. Now I think it is really *fika wa hiya nafsika*. One awaits other *mss.* to compare this reading with.
- 12) ‘Alí ibn Abí Tálib, the first Imám of the Shí‘a, cousin and half-brother of the Prophet Muhammad, husband of Fátima and “father” of all the other Imáms.
- 13) Traditional Sufi technical term, usually seen paired with its conceptual opposite “annihilation,” *faná’*. See, for example, Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness. The basic idea is that one seeks to annihilate (*faná’*) the self, ego (*nafs*) so that nothing remains (*baqá’*) except divinity.
- 14) *Qutb* is another traditional Sufi technical term. It typically refers to an individual who is the bearer of spiritual authority (*waláya*). It means “axis,” “pivot,” and “center.” (The North Pole is called, in Arabic *al-qutb al-shamálí* [*shamálí* = “north”]) Although it is generally thought that the word acquired its meaning central spiritual authority in a more or less purely Sufi context, it is important to note that in one of the most widely celebrated sermons from the *Nahj al-balághh* ‘Alí refers to himself as the “pivot of the community” (*qutb al-rahá*). The Báb’s use of this term demonstrates one of the more important features of the *Shaykhí*-Bábí-Bahá’í tradition, namely that it continued a process of using mystical terminology in a Shí‘í context. The idea of “center” figures prominently in the later *Qayyúm al-asmá*. See my article “The Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyúm al-asmá” available on the World Wide Web at www2.h-net.ms.u.edu/bahai/bhpapers/vol5/tatanj/tatanj.htm
- 15) In the Sufi tradition, this *hadíth* is ascribed to al-Kharráz, the important ninth-century mystic of Baghdad.
- 16) Cf. Qur’án 28:77, the story of Qárún. This reference may be a clue to the social class, if not the identity, of the recipient of the tablet. This verse continues: AND SEEK NOT OCCASIONS FOR MISCHIEF IN THE LAND. FOR GOD LOVES NOT THOSE WHO DO MISCHIEF.
- 17) Qur’án 39:56 *má farrattu fí janb alláh (janb* is a metaphor implying threshold and by extension door or gate, viz., *báb*). The verse continues: AND WAS BUT AMONG THOSE WHO MOCKED!
- 18) Paraphrase of Qur’án 15:65.
- 19) Qur’anic diction.
- 20) The Báb deviates, with remarkable deftness, from the Qur’án in this citation. Again, it is important to note the mention of the TRUE FRIEND (*walí*) in the verse immediately following (but unquoted by the Báb) as well as the other elements of the *Shaykhí* four supports: YOUR REAL FRIENDS (*awliyá*, plural of *walí*: guardian) ARE NO LESS THAN GOD, HIS MESSENGER AND THE FELLOW-SHIP OF THE BELIEVERS. . . . Qur’án 5:55.
- 21) That is “lingering/loitering/hesitation” —*wuqúf*—is “the source of that negligence which bars access to God.” The root meaning of *WQF* is the diametric opposite of the root meaning of *SLK* from which *sulúk*.
- 22) *Hál* = Traditional Sufi technical term perhaps transformed here in a distinctive usage influenced by Hikmat-i-iláhi eschatology.
- 23) *malámat al-qarín*, cf. Qur’án 37:51; 43:36; 43:38; 4:38 where *qarín* is frequently an evil companion.
- 24) “People of Insight” = *ahl al-basíra*

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- 25) Reference to Qur'án 28:15 and the story of Moses' act of murder.
Shortly, at 28:18, there is a mention of DAWN or MORNING. See the following.
- 26) This is a brief running commentary, beginning here with the word "purge" and ending with the Qur'anic word STATION on an oft-cited portion of the famous Hadíth Kumayl (see appendix). The Báb also wrote a commentary on this hadíth (*Sources*, p. 199 lists 5 "mss." of this early work.)
- 27) *maqám mahmúd*, cf. Qur'án 17:79 and the later use of this epithet by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Four Valleys*.
- 28) *ahl al-tahajjud fí al-layl*
- 29) Qur'án 17:79. N.b. the uncited previous verse: ESTABLISH WORSHIP AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN UNTIL THE DARK OF NIGHT, AND THE RECITAL OF THE QUR'ÁN AT DOWN. LO! THE RECITAL OF THE QUR'ÁN AT DAWN IS EVER WITNESSED. AND SOME PART OF THE NIGHT AWAKE FOR IT (*fa-tahajjad bihi*), A LARGESS FOR THEE (Qur'án 17:178). This connects the Báb's language, mentioned in the previous note to the Qur'án. His reader was expected to grasp the allusion without His having to explicitly cite the precise language. Perhaps, though, the most important allusion His interlocutor was expected to understand was the one to the following verse (17:80): SAY "O MY LORD! LET MY ENTRY BE BY THE GATE OF TRUTH AND HONOR, AND GRANT ME FROM THY PRESENCE AN AUTHORITY (*sultán*) TO AID ME.
- 30) Qur'án 2:2: *dhálika al-kitáb* may also be translated as THAT IS THE BOOK (IN WHICH THERE IS NO DOUBT). Here the Báb shows an early instance of putting His Writings in the same category as the Qur'án. This would become one of the most prominent features of His Work as represented, for example, in the later *Qayyúm al-asmá*.
- 31) Different grammar but can have the same meaning as the beginning of following Qur'anic quotation.

