The Most Learned of the Shiʿa

The Institution of the Marjaʿ Taqlid

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The power and authority of the millennial or apocalyptic imagination is fully evident in the success of the Babi movement of nineteenth-century Iran. Among the most striking and memorable features of Babism is surely the prominence, prestige, and religious authority acquired by the woman disciple of the Bab known as Tahireh. The famous Babi cleric, poet, martyr, and symbol of Iran's encounter with both its own history and the version of modernity proffered by the West is possibly more noted by posterity than the founder of the Babi movement himself because she represents both an apparent anomaly and a heroic symbol of modern female liberation. Tahireh after all left an unhappy marriage and her children to follow her revolutionary vision for a more just society. She was accomplished in a virtually completely male dominated milieu, the clerical. She traveled widely throughout Iran preaching to audiences of men and women the dawn of a new day, and most dramatically, she threw off her veil in public in direct defiance of social and religious norms. She was also a martyr. After the attempt on the life of the shah in 1851, Tahireh was strangled by her own silk scarf and buried in a well in the courtyard of a religious official in Tehran.

However much the story of Tahireh is appreciated by modern and contemporary feminists and suffragists, it is important to recognize that while her heroism may have inspired many in far-flung salons of Europe and eventually America, she is very much a daughter of her own culture, history, mythology, and religion. This assertion will perhaps be received with cynicism, for how could such a paternalistic and male-dominated religion and culture as Iranian Islam of the first half of the nineteenth century produce such a woman celebrity and champion of women's rights? Indeed, it has never been established that Tahireh was a champion of women's rights. What we know is that she felt a new day arising in the world. She was a messianic player. But it was not accidental that she was a woman, and it is not without consequence for the history of the Babi movement, which though it passed from the stage of history more or less a failure, it nonetheless gave rise to several other trends and movements in Iran whose influence may still be felt. Tahireh the Babi walked, it seems, right out of the poems, songs, and higher forms of religiocultural literature as the return of Fatima. It was a sacred performance.

Tahireh, whose full name was Fatima Zarīn Tāj Baraghānī, Qurrat al-'Āyn, was seen by a large number of her fellow Babis as the "return," or reincarnation, of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad and wife of the first Imam, ‘Ali. Whether this exemplifies reincarnation or transmigration remains to be addressed. It is indisputable, however, that Baraghānī was seen by the Babis (and perhaps herself) as the personification of those virtues and attributes that Fatima had come to symbolize for the Iranian Shi’ī community. At the most superficial level, her name was Fatima and her cognomen Tahireh was first applied to her holy ancestor, as was the other name by which she is so widely known, Qurratul-'Āyn, "Soul of the eyes." As an antitype of the Fatima known and venerated by nineteenth-century Iranian Muslims, she may be expected to be rather distinctive. The Fatima of the Bab’s Qur’ān commentary is particularly useful as a function of many different factors: she is a bearer of religious authority (walāya: see the discussion that follows for a further elaboration of the meaning of this term); she is a focus of religious devotion and meditation, an icon, as it were, without which the spiritual and religious life may be considered incomplete; she is seen as the embodiment of the spiritual reality of the earth itself, a cosmogonic principle, and at the same time a recurrent actor in a historical drama that will lead ultimately to the long-awaited Day of Resurrection. An examination of the Fatima in this commentary, written before the actual formation or founding of the Babi movement, will help us to understand how many of the Bab’s contemporaries saw Tahireh (i.e., the nineteenth-century religious scholar and poet) and, perhaps most important, how Tahireh saw herself. On this latter question, Abbas Amanat has offered the following interesting suggestion:

Frustrations in her family life and persecutions in her Babi career both served as impetuses for inspiration that she transposed into a religious paradigm; what she terms "the state of primal truth." By assuming the symbolic role of Fatima, she envisaged a feminine model—a "primal truth," as she called it—that substantially differed from the role assigned to Fatima in the Islamic, more particularly Shi’ī, tradition as the daughter of the Prophet, the wife of ‘Ali, and the mother of Hasan and Husayn; the role that guaranteed her sanctity (wilāyat) by lineage, marriage, and motherly love. Qurratul-'Āyn’s Fatima was one of independent will and action. The leadership she assumed in the ‘Atabat and later at Bādasht was the realization of this paradigm. . . . The only solution she saw, for women and men alike, was a break with the past, and as the first step, a deliberate infringement of religious norms. To find her in the forefront of Babi radicalism and an advocate of progressive revelation is only logical. Her initiation in the Letters of the Living, on the other hand, was an acknowledgment of her equal place with men in the first unit of the ideal Babi order of All-Beings.

This study suggests that it was not so much a break with the past—that is, the past as "primal truth"—as the revivifying of its paradigm that was really at work in the rise of the Babi movement and perhaps its most famous proponent, the woman Tahireh. Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and wife of ‘Ali was, according to tradition, something of an activist, such as it could be expressed within the confines of seventh-century Arabia. But it seems clear that that tradition honors Fatima for her heroism, a brief outline of which is offered below. In the introduction to his Persian Bayan
after 1848, the Bab specifies that his first followers, the eighteen Letters of the Living, are the return of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, the Family of God plus the historical four emissaries of the disappeared twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-'Askari (disappeared in 873-74) who successively represented the highest authority in the Shi'i world from that time until 949-50. Thus Tahireh not only assumed the role of Fatima. She was Fatima.

In the course of this article I also demonstrate that the Bab did not invent such doctrines out of whole cloth, but rather his ideas are, in the main, consonant with the general position of Fatima in Shi'i religiosity, piety, and mysticism. Most important is Fatima's recognized status as an equal bearer of religious authority (disappeared in 873-74) who successively represented the highest authority in the community to interpret (never reveal) scripture. But their interpretation is essential because only through this office of guardianship (walaya) is seen to be a divine attribute certainly shared by all prophets, with nubuwwa representing in some ways a subfunction of walaya. Postprophetic guardians (awliya') do not have nubuwwa; it is only by virtue of their walaya that they have authority in the community to interpret (never reveal) scripture. But their interpretation has the authority of revelation.

Another complementary meaning of the term walaya is kinship, closeness, allegiance and, in some ways, intimacy. A bearer of walaya is thus seen to enjoy an especially close relationship to, in this case, God. This feature of the word has lent it so well to all those contexts in the Islamic tradition which have to do with sanctity and sainthood. To take a recent example, it was on the basis of these factors that Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) formulated the influential and politically astute doctrine known as "The Guardianship of the Jurist" (Vilayat-i faqih), through which he demonstrated to the satisfaction of his numerous followers that the decisions and opinions of the godly jurist are guided by the unerring (ma'sum) hand of the Hidden Imam and would therefore be identical with His teaching. Furthermore, these rulings and opinions would somehow represent the very presence of God and the Hidden Imam, a figure with almost ineffable sacral and charismatic authority and power. Earlier examples of the usage have been recently singled out as possibly the most important factor at play in the spiritual authority of the Sufi shaykh or pir from very earliest times in Islam. It is something of a truism that the Shi'i Imam is the analogue of the Sufi shaykh (or vice versa). One reason is that the basic understanding and function of the term walaya seems to be fairly constant across the borders that otherwise separate the two. The point is that concern with walaya means concern with power and authority. In the early work by the Bab, there is a great deal of concern with walaya. In this study we are interested mainly in the walaya and spiritual authority of Fatima. It is with an enhanced appreciation of this topic that the remarkable life of Tahireh, and the religious leadership of women, can be better understood within the context of nineteenth-century Iran.
Usuli/Akhbari Debate

Before we turn directly to the writings of the Bab on this topic, it is important to summarize, in very general terms, some of the pertinent historical developments in Shi’i legal theory that serve as immediate background to his career. By the time the Bab was writing, which was very close to the time of the fulfillment of the Shi’i eschaton, a thousand years having elapsed since the disappearance of the Twelfth/Hidden Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hassan al’Askari, a longstanding dispute among religious scholars had been settled for a number of decades. This dispute had to do precisely with the way religious authority (welaya) would be expressed and recognized among the believers and is known as the Akhbari/Usuli debate. Although the Usuli position eventually won the day, it is important to know what was at stake. In one sense, this dispute can be characterized as “reason vs. revelation.” The Akhbari position was against the institutionalization of “independent jurisprudence” (ijtihad), and the Usuli position upheld it. At stake, then, was not only a more or less abstract legal theory, but also the potentially powerful office of mujtahid, independent legal scholar, whose findings in all aspects of religion would be binding upon the believers. These findings were derived through resort to so-called sources (usuli: roots) by the legal thinker or jurisprudent (faqih): (1) Qur’an, (2) Sunna, or (3) Qiyas/Analogy. The process whereby these elements were employed to derive a solution for a legal problem is called ijtihad—“independent intellectual exertion.” The Akhbaris asserted that there was only one legal authority, namely, the Hidden Imam, the bearer of welaya for this time, and that in such a circumstance there was in effect only one mujtahid whom the faithful were required to emulate and follow namely, the Hidden Imam. Thus the Akhbari position threatened the social standing of an elite group of highly qualified legal experts by asserting that each believer was to work out their own “salvation” through contemplation of the sources of religion: (1) the Qur’an and (2) the Sunna. The name Akhbari comes from the word used to refer to the thousands of traditions—akhbar, sing. khabar, sometimes called hadith—that preserve the Sunna of not only the Prophet, but the other thirteen imamincarnates, the twelve Imams and Fatima. The Akhbaris taught that each believer had direct access to the truth through reading the Qur’an and this supplementary material. The Usuli position was eventually to lead to the establishment of the important institution known as marja ‘tsagld, “one who is to be [blindly] imitated in matters of religion.”

In the process of winning the battle, Usulis argued heavily against the kind of mystical or intuitive communion with the Hidden Imam that made the Akhbari position feasible. In so doing, they argued very persuasively for the superiority of the rational faculty and the use of reason. One response to this argument would come in the form of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahwa’i (d. 1826) and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti (d. 1843), who throughout their works cautioned against the elimination of the mystical or intuitional aspects of religion and argued, for an epitomeology composed of equal parts of reason and “revelation.” The Shaykhi position won many supporters precisely because it rescued, in a reasonable manner, the mystical poetic so dear to the Persian soul. The Bab’s writings, especially the ones examined in this article, are perhaps an equally strenuously (if differently) argued mysticism. As we will see, the Bab’s source of authority is the Qur’an and the Family of God and no one or nothing else.

The Bab’s Writings

There has been a tendency to regard the Tafsir Surat Yusuf as the first work of any significance written by the Bab, but this is wrong. The Tafsir Surat al-Baqara—a work that has been habitually ignored by persons writing on the Babi religion—is really the Bab’s first major religious work. It first became known in the West through E. G. Browne, who discussed it and the circumstances under which he received a copy, in an article written in 1892. (It had been sent to him by Mirza Yahya Subhi-i Azal, who had received it from a scribe in Tehran.) By virtue of the number of existing manuscripts of this work that he enumerated, Denis MacEoin rekindled interest in it as a valuable source for the history and doctrines of the Babi movement. Through further research it has become clear that the Bab’s Tafsir surat al-baqara enjoys a unique and heretofore unappreciated significance for a study of the growth and development of the Babi religion. MacEoin may have been correct when he suggested that it is much less likely to have been corrupted by partisans of the later Baha’i/Azal dispute because of its status as a proclamation work. On the other hand, such corruption may be a red herring, since a study of a number of manuscripts of the later and much more famous and pivotal Tafsir Surat Yusuf reveals very little willful tampering with the text. But MacEoin is certainly correct in his assertion that “since this tafsir is the only extended work of the Bab’s written before May1844 [when he made his momentous claims public] and till extant, it is indisputably of unique importance as a source of concrete evidence for the development of his thought in the six months or so that led up to the initial announcement of his prophetic claim.” Insofar as this first major work was also a tafsir, its interest goes beyond the confines of a study of a specific heresy to engage with the greater Islamic tradition itself on the common ground of the Qur’an.

Indeed, it is of some significance that this first major work by the Bab is a commentary on the Surat al-Baqara, or Surah of the Cow (in actual fact, it is a commentary on both the Surat al-Fath, the first sura and the Surat al-Baqara, the second sura), a sura sometimes regarded by exegetes as “the Qur’an in miniature” because in it are found many of the same concerns, ordinances, concepts, and images found throughout the book. A commentary on this sura by any given author would therefore tend to reveal the way he would approach the entire Qur’an. It may be, in fact, that the Bab had intended to produce a commentary on the whole Qur’an at this time. He is said to have later produced no less than nine complete commentaries on the Qur’an during his incarceration in Azerbaijan. Why he would have suspended such a project at this earlier date is open to speculation. We do know, however, that it was shortly after the completion of the commentary on the first part of the Qur’an that Mulla Husayn Bushiri made his visit to Shiraz, during which time the Babi movement may be said to have been born. Such a dramatic occurrence might possibly have had the effect of deflecting the Bab’s attention from such a merely literary project to concentrate on newer and more important developments. One of these developments was the composition of another tafsir (the Qayyum al-asma’ or Tafsir Surat Yusuf) of such a startlingly different nature from this earlier work that the two might be thought to have been written by two different authors, though in reality this is probably not the case.

The radical interpretation of several passages in the Surat al-Baqara as speaking directly to the subject of welaya is not an innovation of the Bab’s but has character-
ized a strong tendency in Shi'i exegesis from the earliest times. This is clarified in notes in the following text that direct the reader to similar interpretations in classical literature. Of interest here is that such a commentary was written by one who was not a member of the ulama class, but rather a young merchant. The nature of the commentary shows that there was a perceived need to reassert, revalorize, or perhaps take possession of this cardinal Shi'i doctrine. Why such a need was felt at this particular time and within the Iranian merchant class, has been discussed at length by scholars concerned with the social history of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Iran. The following discussion attests to the degree to which this need was felt, and the consequences it had for the interpretation of scripture. Here we begin to understand why the *Tafsir* surat al-Baqara provides invaluable information about the development of the Bab's religious ideas.

Walaya in the Bab's Earliest Work

The subject of walaya is introduced very early in the *tafsir* where reference is made to the Absolute Walaya (al-walayyatu al-mustalaqa) of 'Ali. (In the following pages, Qur'anic citations are presented in small capital letters in order to make as clear as possible the connection between the words of the commentator and the sacred text.) In the course of the Bab's commentary on the second verse of the Fatiha, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds," the verse is said to be the book (kitob) of 'Ali, in which God has placed all the principles (ahkam) of Absolute Walaya pertaining to it. It is designated here, the Paradise of the Inclusive Unity (jannat al-wahidiya), whose protection has been reserved for all those who affirm 'Ali's *walayya*.

In this very brief statement, certain important terms are introduced, which play a key role throughout the rest of the tafsir. Apart from the word *walaya* (guardianship, friendship), the designation *wahidiya* occurs over and over again throughout the work. It is descriptive of one of the degrees of divinity which constitute the whole hierarchical metaphysical structure of the world. It is the degree immediately inferior to the divine Exclusive Unity (ahadiya). Such terminology betrays the influence of the so-called wahdat al-'awijd school associated with Ibn 'Arabi. Sufficient it here to say that the Absolute Walaya represents a theoretical position, at least one remove from the Ultimate. A third ontic level, "existence as an expression of divine mercy," is associated with Fatima (see discussion that follows).

The choice of the word *principles* (ahkam) has several connotations. In this short introductory sentence to the *tafsir* on the Fatiha, the Bab characterizes this opening chapter of the Qur'an as containing seven clear verses (asat muhkanan). The hermeneutic polarities of *muwahabhah/muhkama* represent one of the oldest concerns of *tafsir* in general and have occasioned much speculation on the part of exegetes of all schools and attitudes. The primary idea is that the Qur'an contains both ambiguous and unambiguous verses. At the most basic level, these thought to be divided between straightforward legal prescriptions and the rest of the book. The terminology here is taken from Qur'an 4:2.

He it is who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning) [muhkam]. They are the foundation of the Book (umm al-kitab). Others are allegorical (muwahabhah). But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings [ta'wil]. But no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book, the whole of it is from our Lord." And none will grasp the message except those who have understanding.

With this verse comes one of the more fundamental differences between the Sunni and Shi'i exegetes who disagree about the sentence structure of this verse. The above translation represents the "Sunni" reading. A Shi'i reading would be: "And none knows its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge" (al-muwahhid fi l'ilm). These *muwaqih* are of course the Imams, in the first place, and in the second place, at least amongst the Usulis, the mujtahids. So understood, the designation of the verses of the Fatiha as unambiguous strongly suggests that the Bab read them as having a positive and binding relationship with a true understanding of the Book. Seen in this light, his statement that verse 2 of the Fatiha ordains belief in the Absolute Walaya of 'Ali must be taken as divine law, binding upon the believer in the same way as legal prescriptions for the terms of inheritance, or even prayer and fasting, are obligatory.

In this same commentary on the seven verses of the Fatiha, we first encounter Fatima. In line with his method and the structure of this section, the Bab designates the third verse, "the merciful the compassionate" (ar-rahman ar-rahim), as "the book of Fatima" (kitab Fatima salatallah 'alaiha). That Fatima is associated with rahma, "mercy," is in line with the general idea of existence as mercy and the role of the feminine articulated in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi. It should also be noted that rahma is a feminine noun constructed on the root *rah*, which is also the basis for the word rahm, "uterus, womb." Fatima is associated with this verse because it is gender-specific so that grammar reflects reality—a basic axiom of the worldview we are investigating. That it is also the third verse of the sura means that the order: Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima (shadiya, wahidiya, rahmaniya) is corroborated both through the gender reference and chronological order of birth. The remainder of the commentary runs:

And God has put in [this verse] all that is hers and all that pertains to her. [This verse] is the Garden of Divine Grace (jannat al-rahma). God has ordained its shade for the one who believes in her and loves her after he has recognized her as she deserves (ba la ma 'arafahu bihi). The gnostic through his own self (ama ma tatallat li 'arraf li-lahu bihi). Then this garden will open to him. While there is no explicit mention of *walaya* here, it is nonetheless assumed throughout the *tafsir* that Fatima is, as a member of the Family of God, one of the fourteen bearers of *wahdiya*. The Bab, it seems, wishes to highlight various nuances of this religious authority according to the particular bearer/wali he is discussing. In the case of Fatima, this religious authority is clearly associated with love (mahabbah) and knowledge/gnosis (iftan), and as we already saw, mercy. For example, in his commentary on 2:25, the Bab states that Paradise or "the Garden" is indeed the love of the form of Fatima (mahabbat shabah Fatima). Before we look further at this material, it may be helpful to offer a brief summary of the general place of Fatima in Islam and Shi'ism.
Fatima of History

Fatima (11/633), the daughter of Muhammad and wife of the first Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (40/661) enjoys an exalted position in Shi'i piety and is thought by some to when the Banu Hashim imposed a ban upon dealings with Muhammad, Fatima is singled out as having endured the privation with great dignity and patience. Other sources say she was a difficult marriage. But while she lived, she was his only wife. She is venerated as the mother of the second and third Imams 'Ashari Ismail, Hasan and Husayn (and by extension all of the Imams). She is held up to the believers as a model of suffering, patience, generosity, wisdom, and valiant heroism ending in martyrdom. During the Prophet's Meccan and early Medinan periods, when the Banu Hashim imposed a ban on dealings with Muhammad, Fatima is singled out as having endured the privations with great dignity and patience. Of all the Prophet's children, Fatima lived the longest (although she died only a few months after the Prophet's death) and gave Muhammad, who would otherwise have been bereft of male progeny, many descendants. Indeed, one of the many calomnies directed at Muhammad was that he was without male progeny. Such a man was known in this milieu as "cut off" (al-abbar), and Muhammad was cruelly taunted with this epithet by his fellow Meccans because of the death of his and Khadija's two infant sons, Qasim and Abdallah. Fatima is seen by the tradition as being the one responsible for giving the lie to this cruel insult by providing the Prophet his two grandsons, Hasan, Husayn, and their sisters Zainab and Umm Kulthum. Shi'i religious literature delights in demonstrating how this event changed the course of history; for while she lived, she was his "Mother." Fatima's "sublime," "luminous" (Fatim), "Creator" (Fatir), and "Mother of her Father." Others include the masculine form Fatim, al-Tahina, and Maryam of the highest degrees of esteem. Fatima's "Mother of the cloak." These are Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn, a group that represents an "elite" in Shi'i Islam.

Fatima is greatly venerated by all Muslims who, when speaking of her, typically add the honorific al-Zahra' (the shining one, the luminous, the gloriously radiant). Among the Shi'a this veneration reaches its greatest intensity. Two Western scholars, Henri Lammens and Louis Massignon, studied the historical basis for this reverence and reached diametrically opposite opinions: Lammens argued that the historical Fatima was "a woman devoid of attraction, of mediocre intelligence, completely insignificant, little esteemed by her father, ill-treated by her husband, ... anaemic, often ill, prone to tears, who died perhaps of consumption." Massignon has made Fatima "sublime, elevating her to a position often reminiscent of that which the Virgin Mary holds among Christians. For Massignon, she represents the beginnings of "Universal Islam" because of her care for the non-Arab converts. Massignon's study improves upon Lammens by offering a "psychologico-religious explanation for the origin and development of the legend of the daughter of the Prophet and bridges the gap between legend and reality as Lammens's book fails to do. However, "Massignon's work cannot escape the objection of the historian, who will consider that the author subordinates the facts to beliefs about Fatima which appeared only later." This statement obviously represents a certain historiographical approach. Beliefs, it is clear, have frequently been as crucial to history as facts. Indeed, in this article beliefs are of primary interest; whether or not they represent, in the case of Fatima, "true historical reality" is immaterial. This is so precisely because we can see how much such belief actually influenced the unfolding of radical religious activity in nineteenth-century Iran. But it is also true—and this is a historiographical element of consequence—that Fatima's life was so obscure that Ibn Hislam and the historians had little occasion to concern themselves with her.

Fatima died in the eleventh year of the hijra, six months after the death of the Prophet. Today (because her grave is unknown), Shi'i visit three places in Medina in order to pay homage to her: her house, the Buq' cemetery, and the space in the Great Mosque between the rowda and the tomb of the Prophet. Her nickname, "Mother of her father," (Umm Abiha) has several explanations: she learned through a revelation that the name of her very last descendant would be Muhammad, perhaps as a logical inference from the story of her heavenly, luminous origin and birth. Her name Creator (Fatim), which is one of the names listed in an eleventh-century source, represents a glorification of Fatima that seems to be characteristic of the extreme Isma'ili and of "aberrant" sects such as the Nusayris rather than of the Imamis. Have we here a borrowing of the latter from the former? Vecchia Vaglieria asks. The belief that Fatima is Fatir, Creator, would also help explain her kunya Umm Abiha. Another explanation for the name is that it became Fatima's as a result of her providing comfort to Muhammad during the darkest times. It has been suggested that because of the connections between the cult of Mary among Christians and that of Fatima among Muslims, it is possible that the title arose as a counterpart to that of "Mother of God," especially since the name seems to be found only later (that is, twelfth-century) sources.

Islam has honored 'Asiyah bint Muzahim (Pharaoh's wife), Maryam bint 'Imran (Mary, mother of Jesus), Khadija, and Fatima as the four perfect women of the world, the best women of Paradise. By the twelfth century, Shi'i scholars had compiled a list of nearly a hundred names and attributes by which Fatima should be honored. This veneration may be best seen in three of the titles by which she is most frequently designated: al-Zahra', "the luminous"; Fatim, "Creator"; and Umm Abiha, "Mother of her Father." Others include the masculine form Fatim, al-Tahina, and Maryam al-Kubra, and especially significant in connection with Tahireh, Qurat al-'Ain—one of the most common names by which Tahireh the Babi was known. Official occasions for honoring her are her birth (20 Ramadan), marriage to 'Ali, the public feast of Mubahala (21, 24, 25 Dhul-Hijja). This deserves a special word because it is in connection with the Mubahala that Fatima becomes known as one of the Ahl al-Kisa', "People of the cloak." These are Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn, a group that represents an "elite within an elite" in Shi'ism. The anniversary of her death (3 Jumada II and 2 Ramadan) is also being commemorated. These are all public holy days in Iran and observed around the world. Other holy days, such as the Day of al-Ghadir (18th of Dhul- 'Hijja) and the Muharram observances—tradition has Fatima making a post mortem appearance at Karbala (which the Bab mentions in his ta'zis) to lament the cruel fate of her son and his family and companions—are public and private occasions for honoring her memory.

Other events in her life have particular interest here: she is depicted as threatening to remove her head covering twice: on one occasion to protest the treatment of 'Ali after he lost the Battle of 'Umar from forcibly entering her house after the so-
called election of the first caliph. This will bring to mind Tahireh’s removal of the veil that so scandalized even the Babis themselves. In another tradition, she is presented as defiantly turning her back to the intruders to express her repugnance, as she is also seen traveling on horseback with ‘Ali to ask for the support of the Ansar (who, unfortunately had already committed themselves to Abu Bakr). She is quoted as having challenged ‘Umar himself: “You have left the body of the Apostle of God with us and you have decided among yourselves with consulting us, without respecting our rights.”

Thus we clearly see the figure of a politically active woman, one who could easily inspire others to similar action. It is curious, in light of this that one of the prevailing images associated with Fatima is that of a sickly and timid victim. Another element in Fatima’s political biography is the troublesome Fadak affair. Abu Bakr, according to Shi’i sources, deprived Fatima of inheriting this productive oasis that the Prophet had promised her. This deprivation caused great hardship for her and her family and also deprived the cause of ‘Ali essential material support. In addition, there is the legend of the murder of Fatima, the book that Gabriel brought her for consolation after the death of her father. As Vecchia Vaglieri points out, the material on Fatima remains to be systematically studied. Once it is, however, it will be most interesting to notice whether or not these conflicting images are the result of confessional influences. In the meantime, the question posed by Vecchia Vaglieri, did Isma’ili Shi’ism borrow from Isma’ili Shi’ism in the veneration of Fatima? is quite pertinent to the study of the literature of the Shaykhi school in general. As I demonstrate, it is also pertinent in the study of the writings of the Bab, who, as far as we know, was an Isma’ili Shi’i, born in Shiraz on 20 October 1819 (1 Muḥarram 1235).

The Bab’s Fatima

Many of the events or topics recounted above are touched upon and elaborated in the Bab’s tafsir. It is crucial, however, first to establish some idea of what is to be expected. To do this, I rely upon the studies of Henry Corbin, who is the one Western scholar to have penetrated many of the mysteries that this kind of literature holds. In this case, we are particularly fortunate that Corbin devoted an entire book to the study of the spiritual feminine in Iranian religion. In Corbin’s distinctive approach, Mazdean religious ideas are connected with Islamic Shi’ite gnosis, first in the work of Suhrawardi and finally, and more resoundingly, in the corpus of the Shaykhis, a corpus that remains understudied, though progress has been achieved since Corbin’s time. In any case, Corbin saw the founder of the Shaykhi school, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i (1826) and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashi, as revivers of “primitive Shi’ite gnosis.” It is even more fortunate that part of this book is a study of Fatima in the writings of Haj Karim Khan Kirmani (1870), the Shaykhi leader who was, in some respects, the Bab’s (1850) most bitter opponent. Both had been avid students of the teachings of Ahsa’i and Rashi (as had Tahireh herself). Corbin’s reading of Kirmani’s works will be shown to resonate with the image of Fatima in this early commentary by the Bab. It is still too soon to determine on what doctrinal grounds they might have differed with regard to Fatima, or indeed, if they differed at all. The main area of disagreement between the two was not a matter for scholasticism.

In this school of thought the Family of God, the Fourteen Very-Pure, function, according to Corbin, in a way “analogous to the Aeons of the pleroma in Valentinian gnosis.” One of the distinctions between the Suhrawardian and Shaykhi cosmologies is discerned in the shift from a threefold to a fourfold cosmology. For Suhrawardi these were 1) the earthly, human world, “the object of sensory perception”; 2) the world of Soul or Malakut, “the world of imaginative perception” and 3) the cherubic or angelic world of Jabarut, “the object of intelligible knowledge.” Consonant with the motif of quaternity by which much of their thought is distinguished, Shaykhiism added a fourth realm (as did Ibn ‘Arabi), namely the sphere of deity, the world of ilahut. For the Shaykhis, however, this realm was “occupied” only by the Family of God—not, as it were, God Himself. Fatima is located first and foremost in this supranatural realm. As Corbin says, using one of his favorite metaphors:

One might say that [Shaykhi thought] allows us to hear the theme of the celestial Earth...in a still higher octave. Each octave is a new world, a new beginning, where everything is rediscovered, but at a different height, that is, in a higher mode of being. This succession of octaves is what allows the ta’wil, or spiritual hermeneutics, to be practiced authentically. Moreover, in the transcendental Person of Fatima as a member of the supreme Pleroma, we shall be hearing something like the motif of the supranatural Earth...78

The four universes or realms “symbolize with” each other so that the “historic dimension” is a means of discovering the sacred relationship between and among these worlds.

This will be essentially the esoteric hermeneutic, the ta’wil; it will be a discovery of the true and hidden meaning, the spiritual history that becomes visible through the recital of external events. It will mean to “see things in Hurqalya.”

In this quaternity world the relationship between male and female is accorded the highest possible value. Hurqalya is, of course, the abode of the Hidden Imam who is alive there and “in hiding” since his disappearance in 260/874. There is ample evidence throughout the works of the Bab, and particularly in the one under study here, that he himself shared a similar, if not identical, approach to history and scripture (although he does not use the word Hurqalya here). But we will see more of this later in this essay.

There is no need to dwell further here on Corbin’s harmonic rendition of the history of Iranian mythology and religious symbolism whereby he can see the ancient Spandarmad in the Fatima of the Shi’as, except to say that the apokatastasis, the “restoration of all things to their primordial splendor and wholeness, to the state in which they were before the invasion of the Ahrimanian Counterpowers” that he perceives in Shaykhiism, is very much a feature of the dal of Babis. As we have already indicated, the authority and power of Tahireh (and the other Babis) is a result of three simultaneous events: a fulfillment of the past, a reenactment of the past, and a break with the past.

Day of the Covenant

One of the more important controlling myths in Islam, whether Sunni or Shi’i, is the drama of God’s establishing a covenant (ʿrhad, mithqāl) between Himself and humanity through the prophet Adam. The Qur’an tells the story in a characteristically terse passage...
at Qur'an 7:172. At a time before the creation of the world, God summoned Adam to His presence whereupon he caused the "seeds" (al-dharr) of all future generations to come forth from Adam’s loins. God confronted Adam, thus arrayed before Him, and so that no human would be able to say on the stme, and Medina considered given their just deserts, that they should be excused for their sins because they were not aware of their obligation to God. The "Yea verily!" constitutes humanity’s primordial assent to the divine covenant. Within this covenant myth dwells the explanatory theory of all Islamicate religious authority. It has been particularly instrumental in justifying the mediation and negotiation of charismatic power and authority in a Sufi milieu, but no less in the Shi’i milieu.

In Shi’i communities throughout the world, the eighteenth day of Dhu’ l-Hijja, the pilgrimage month, is commemorated as the Day of the Covenant (yawm al-mithaq) and anniversary of the public appointment by the Prophet Muhammad of ‘Ali as his successor at a small oasis known as Ghadir Khumm, "the pool of Ghadir." (In Iran, a Shi’i state, this date is an official public holiday.) This oasis was a way station between Mecca and Medina and it was here, during a rest on the way back from his last pilgrimage, that the Prophet made his famous speech, the words of which are preserved in both Sunni and Shi’i books of Tradition:

We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khumm. We performed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. And then he took ‘Ali by the hand and said to the people: 'Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: 'Yea verily!' [bala] And he took ‘Ali’s hand and said: 'Of whomsoever I am Lord [Mesle], then ‘Ali is also your Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports ‘Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.' And ‘Umar [the future second caliph] met him [‘Ali] after this and said to him: 'Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i.e., forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman.

This passage (along with its several variants) is important for two main reasons: 1) the establishment of the continuance of religious authority by the Prophet—"the covenant"; 2) the use of the exquisitely polyvocal term mawla, which is a derivative of the root wla, upon which the word wala is built. Mawla is a particularly interesting Arabic word in that it can mean either "master" or "client"—dialectically opposite denotations, according to usage. As such, it represents admirably the munuality and reciprocal nature of wala. But it also gives rise to alternate interpretations of this sermon, as the entire history of Islam will attest. It is as the de facto and de jure establishment of the sacred covenant that this sermon occupies us for the moment. This covenant functions as the raison d’être of Shi’ism. Those who recognize, subscribe to, uphold, and defend the appointment of ‘Ali as Muhammad’s rightful successor and leader—both spiritual and temporal—of the community of Muslims, is faithful to the covenant and may be considered a believing Muslim (muslim mu’min). Those who acknowledge anyone else as the successor of Muhammad and leader of the community is accounted abreaker (mutqi) of this covenant and an infidel (kafir).

The Authority of the Feminine and Fatima’s Place in an Early Work by the Bab

A natural starting place, then, for a detailed examination of the person/figure/symbol of Fatima in the Bab’s Qur’anic commentary is the Covenant. The Bab draws a comparison or homologue between the Qur’anic primordial yawn al-mithaq, the events of which are narrated in Qur’an 7:172, and the Day of al-Ghadir. The first Qur’anic cue for this comparison is in verse 2:8: "Of the people there are some who say: ‘We believe in God and the Last Day; but they do not really believe.’ " The people specified here, according to the Bab, are those whom God will cause to forget faith in ‘Ali’s wala’ya on the Last Day. They are not believers because their faith is flawed, even though they may consider themselves true believers in ‘Ali’s spiritual authority:

Whoever knows that ‘Ali is the sign of God in the station of the Exclusive Divine Unity ... is one of the believers ‘in God and the Last Day,’ which is really the First Day, and it is the beginning of the mention of the created thing in the world of contingency, and it is the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of ‘Ali. Such a one is one of the believers. And whoever abandons this station enters into the category: "he and he is not an exalted believer." May God protect us through Muhammad and his family from entering into this error.

It will become clear below that “the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of ‘Ali” is an indirect reference to Fatima, who is the source of all light. The Bab strengthens the connection or homology between the Last Day mentioned here and the Day of the Covenant and the Day of al-Ghadir Khumm by quoting a long hadith from the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al’Askari’s tasfiir, in which the occasion of revelation (known in some circles as sabaq al-nu‘l) for this verse is established as the Day of al-Ghadir. In this verse, the Imam says God was warning Muhammad about those who feigned allegiance to ‘Ali following the sermon, quoted above. The Bab says:

That place of testimony is the same as the "dimension" (dharr) of the primordial covenant, when the covenant of lordship was taken: whoever was recognized [then] was recognized [for all time]. Indeed, "those possessed of minds" know what happened there by what happened here (Ghadir Khumm), the realm of this world (or "religion" fasir) is in accord with the realm of that world (or "divine creation" takwin). But this place of testimony (viz. the Day of al-Ghadir) is greater than the first place of testimony, the dimension of the affirmation of Divine Unity, while the second place of testimony is the dimension of the affirmation of Prophethood—may it be the essence of the Divine Cause. This place of testimony of the Day of al-Ghadir is the third place of testimony and the greatest dimension. The remaining place of testimony is the last: it is the dimension of the Fourth Support, the rising of the Qa’im, may God hasten his glad advent. This occasion of testimony will occur in the beginning of his appearance (whwa) and it is the dimension of the affirmation by their Shi’i that the Family of God are the word of magnification in the midstmost sanctity of praise.

Thus the fourfold structure of the Bab’s approach. The Bab says that the shahada, the true testimony to the truth of this, is none other than the Imams and Fatima. The Bab demonstrates how Fatima is implicated in this covenant in his commentary on Qur’an 2:83. Here he says that the esoteric meaning of the word kindred is a clear designation of Fatima, just as the word orphans is a reference to al-Hasan and al-Husayn.

"God has spoken here about the taking of the covenant with all created things in the eight Paradises, in affirmation of the wala’ya of ‘Ali." The Qur’anic verse is:

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\text{\textit{Yea verily!} [bala] And he took ‘Ali’s hand and said: ‘Of whomsoever I am Lord [Mesle], then ‘Ali is also your Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports ‘Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.’ And ‘Umar [the future second caliph] met him after this and said to him: ‘Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i.e., forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman."
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And remember We took a Covenant from the Children of Israel: Worship none but God; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, And orphans and those in need; Speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and practice regular charity. Then did ye turn your back, except a few among you, and ye were backside even now. [Qur'an 2:83]

In another quaternary interpretation, the phrase: "those who broke the covenant" [Qur'an 2:27] refers to the covenant (‘ahd) of Muhammad vis-à-vis the signs (ayat) of ‘Ali. This covenant was instituted in the world of the Unseen (al-qayb), the spiritual realm. Although the term ‘ahd is not used, nor the word hurqalya, it is clear that the realm of al-qayb is a spiritual "space" with its own "time."

These signs were placed within (fā) the dimension of the hearts (which represents) the station (maqam) of Divine Unity (tawhid), and [in] the dimension of the intellects (which represents) the level (suluk) of Prophethood (nubuwwa), and [in] the atoms of souls (which represents) the abode of the Imamate (imama), and [in] the dimension of the bodies (which represents) the place (mahall) of the love of the Shi’ite God imposed this solemn binding upon all created things [which is] faith (iman) in Muhammad, ‘Ali, Hasan, Husyn, Jafar, Musa, and Fatima. 89

The first who "broke the covenant" was Abu Bakr.

He broke the covenant of God concerning His friends ( walaya) in the unseen worlds and he violated the walaya of ‘Ali in its [future] appearances in the visible Imams. . . and he broke the covenant by taking the land of al-Fadak away from Fatima after he knew very well that the Apostle of God had specified it for her during his life and forbidden its produce to go to anyone else. 90

In Kirmani’s treatment of the Qur’anic Day of the Covenant when God demanded from the seed of Adam absolute obedience, this drama was originally played out in the Earth of the Divine Exclusive Unity, which is Fatima, for Muhammad, upon him be God’s blessing and peace. He is the 'first' of the mighty portents, a warning to mankind. to any of you that follow behind . . . Then he turned Himself to heaven, and he gave order and perfection to the seven heavens; and of all things he hath perfect knowledge.” [Qur’an 2:29].

Fatima here is described as being this "universal earth" out of which the Imams will appear.

God made the real meaning of this "comprehensive earth" to be Fatima, upon her be God’s blessing and peace. And He made what was in her to be the Imams, upon them be God’s blessing and peace. He is the One who created, through the angels, all that is in the Earth of the Divine Exclusive Unity, which is Fatima, for Muhammad, upon him be God’s blessing and peace.

"Then He lifted Himself to heaven," that is, He married her [Fatima] to ‘Ali and thus she is equated with heaven as far as honor (sharfa) is concerned. Thus God made her . . . "one of the mighty portents, a warning to mankind, to any of you that choose to press forward or to follow behind." [Qur’an 74:36-37]. 91

In Corbin’s summary of Kirmani, we discern the logic of the Bab’s hermeneutic: Since all earthly events are reflections of a pre-eternal order, the earthly marriage of ‘Ali and Fatima also had its purest and holiest occurrence in the supracosmic realm. The earthly marriage in Medina thus symbolized the original union that was itself "the manifestation of an eternal syzygy originating in the eternity of the pleroma of the Iahut. The First Imam and Fatima are related to each other in the same reciprocal way as the first two hypostases [of neoplatonism], ‘Ali and Nafs, Intelligence and Soul, or in terms more familiar to us (because they go back to Philo): Logos and Sophia." 92 It is also of some interest to note that Kirmani "finds" Fatima in the Qur’anic verse quoted here by the Bab (74:36-37). 93 An examination of more traditional commentaries discloses that this exegesis is quite old indeed. Thus the interpretations of both the Bab and Kirmani represent in this instance a revivification of ancient religious ideas. 94 Whether the following striking development also has its roots in the early history of Shi’i Qur’an interpretation remains to be established. The Bab continues his commentary on Qur’an 2:29:
So, in reality it was she who turned to the heaven and fashioned them seven heavens that is, the seven proofs who are equal to 'Ali, upon him be God's blessing and peace, with regard to their Origination. The seven, when they go through the processes of Origination and Invention become fourteen manifestations of Origination and they are seven heavens.80

The words fashioned and equal do not convey the exegetical device of paranomasia with which the Bab conveys this interpretation. The Qur'anic order and turned smooth, "making equal," "ordering." chaos-is these the only the stance:

the twelve "the and that is why she is the archetype of the heavenly lmamate, nor lmamic intitiation." 85 Corbin points out that it is in the light of such theories the Isma'ili epithet Fatima Fatir (Fatima the Creator) begins to be heard and that is, the seven proofs who are equal to 'Ali, upon him be God's blessing and peace, with regard to their Origination. The seven, when they go through the processes of Origination and Invention become fourteen manifestations of Origination. And they are seven heavens.80

Kirmani says the Imams are the brides of the prophet inasmuch as they have been created from the soul or are the soul of the Prophet. As the Qur'an [16:74 and 30:20] says, "He has made wives for you out of your own souls." The real "mother of the believers" is the initiatic function of the Imams. But this "motherhood" ultimately has its source in Fatima. Spiritual birth happens through the "Fatimic" agency of the Imams. The Prophet has said, "I and 'Ali are the father and the mother of this community." The Bab quotes this tradition in his commentary on Qur'an 2:83.86

At Qur'an 2:65–66 Fatima as the creative element par excellence appears as both the true meaning of "the Sabbath" and the primary principle of creation or "primal command." It is reasonable to ask if Tahireh the Bab radiating was referring to this when she spoke "the primal truth" mentioned by Amanat. There, she is presented as seeing Fatima as a role model.86 It is possible that she was referring to Fatima as the cosmogonic principle we are discussing. This is not to say that Tahireh the Bab radiating did not see Fatima (the mother of the Imams) a role model. But in line with the metaphysical mood of the time and place which our texts reflect, it is probable that she was interested in Fatima's ontological value before her sociological value. We also see in this commentary a reappearance of the idea introduced at verse 3 of the Fatima above: a soul perceives according to its capacity, through itself. It sees what it is.

The comprehensive or universal dimension of the Fatimid reality is brought out again in the Bab's commentary on 2:37: "Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and turned towards him; truly he turns, and is All-compassionate" [Qur'an 2:37].

The Bab introduces his discussion by pointing out that words are "single letters that have been combined." The Family of God represent several stations with regard to these letters: Muhammad is the point, Ali, Hassan, and Husayn are each different kinds of alif (viz., layniya, muadharaka, ghayr ma'fu), the letters that do not change form in the Arabic script (dal etc.) represent the remainder of the Imams. Finally, the status of word is reserved for Fatima alone, the point being that "meaning" itself is implicated and articulated through the Fatimid reality. The belief in the Divine unity taught by the other prophets is in fact created by God himself from this word. In actual fact, the Bab says, "Adam received certain words" of acknowledgment of the oneness of the Tree of the Divine Exclusive Unity that God had forbidden "all other than itself from approaching." But when the visible form of Fatima was manifest to him, by means of his own self, God cast into his soul (his huwya) the likeness of repentance and "He turned to him." Typically, the Bab here cites, in rapid and skillful succession, a Tradition and another Qur'anic verse supporting his taqsim: "The Imam, upon whom be peace, said: 'We are the words of God.'" "God (al-Haqq)," says the Bab, "confirms this statement in His mighty Book with the following words."89

Say: "If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Lord are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it." [Qur'an 18:109]

And the "replenishment" (madad) is origination (ibda) and invention (ikhtira'), which God placed under the grade of their lordship. And this origination is spent before the light of Fatima is spent. "And [this light] is inexhaustible" [wa la huwa min nifad = Qur'an 38:54].
Fatima is also "the Sabbath":

And well you know there were those among you that transgressed the Sabbath, and We said to them, "Be you apes, miserably slinking" (2:65).

In the presence of the Lord, the meaning (al-murad) of Sabbath is Fatima the Resplendent (al-Fatima al-Zahra), because she is the Day of the Book. Verily, God has caused all created things to appear through her; this is clear. And verily God knows that the people of the contingent world are not the Family of Muhammad, because their realities are the shadows of her body, according to the degree to which she appeared to them through their own souls (la-hum bhihi). But they transgressed what God had taught them concerning true doctrine (i'tiqad) [namely, they thought] "our [human] realities are in the station of unity and gnosti (maqam al-wahda wa-lma'a ila), and thus more exalted than her body." God said to them: "The wage of their [meager] knowledge concerning the gnosti of Fatima is "Be you apes, miserably slinking'.

He who claims that the prophets have become unified in the region of their own hearts as the body of Fatima was unified, his Creator has made him, at the very moment of this arrogant claim, an ape. The wage of sin is justice from God, for what they claimed.91

Kirmani has elaborated on the epithet al-Zahra in a discussion of the Logos/Intellect. Corbin summarizes: The Intellect is the suprasensory calling for visible Form, while the station of Fatima corresponds exactly to this visible Form: "Her eternal Person, which is the secret of the world of the Soul, is also its manifestation (bayun), without which the creative Principle of the world would remain unknown and unknowable, forever hidden."92

The Bab's commentary on 2:66 is similar:

And We made it a punishment exemplary for all the former times and for the latter, and an admonition to such as are godfearing. [Qur'an 2:66]

God tells about the evildoers who are opposed [to the true way] namely, that they allude to God by means of a triple allusion (isharat al-ashariat).95 They say that they are apes referring to those who turn to the sign of their own traits (bila kif aw ishara). Those who "fear" what God commanded vis à vis drawing near to [Fatima] by naming the beginning of the Fatimid Exclusive Unity (lujat al-ashriyat al-fatimiyat) without modality or allusion (bila kif aw ishana)96 and fear what God commanded, namely that none would draw near to her/it (bina is feminine) except by clinging to knowledge of Fatima (bi'tiqad fi ma'lufat Fatima). This itself is impossible in the contingent world, except to the degree that she appears to whatever is other than her by means of whatever is other than it. And she is the Primal Command (al'amr al-awmal), and nothing else. Therefore God made His admonition compelling for the godfearing.97

In his discussion of the various levels of the "return" to God (shuma ila'ihi turja lana, Qur'an 2:28), the Bab says that God created Fatima from the light of His essence (dur al-haqa) and that all the prophets have their beginning, and therefore their return in the Depth of the Exclusive Unity which Depth was "invented" (ikhira) from the light of the body of Fatima. "And as for the generality of believers, God originated them from the shadows of the realities of the prophets (wll hasa ila'l-ambiga). So their return is to these."98

The beginning of the Act (a'fis) is the Depth of the Exclusive unity (lujat al-ashriyat) and its return is to it. And the beginning of passivity (that which is receptive of act infa) is the sea of the inclusive unity (tamam al-wahidin), and its return is to it. And for each grade there is a station in (the cosmic process of) Origin and the Return.99

Another interesting appearance of Fatima in this commentary is her identification with the Tree that Adam and Eve were commanded to avoid at Qur'an 2:35. Here the Bab says that the Tree is "absolute contingency—because all of the manifestations (tajalliyat) are enfolded in it. "Tree," shajara, it will be noted, is feminine, so that the Arabic reads "enfolded in her." This is perfectly analogous to the Imams being enfolded within Fatima as discussed earlier in this study. Continuing, the Bab says, "As for Adam, God created the beginning of his existence from the superabundance of the luminous rays of the body of Fatima."

And a thing may not draw nigh to anything beyond its origin. So when Adam drew nigh to the Tree of Reality shining forth from Fatima by means of the drawing nigh of existence, he disobeyed his Lord, because God commanded him to not to approach it, except through ecstasy (al-widan). Because at the time of ecstasy the "thing drawn nigh unto" is the Tree, itself nothing other than it.100

Adam's disobedience is also related to Fatima in the commentary on verse 6: "Verily as for those who disbelieve, it is all the same to them whether ye warn them or ye warn them not, they will not have faith." [Qur'an 2:6]. Adam's repentance after his expulsion from the Garden is the result of his having been made aware of the generosity of Fatima. Adam had shown covetousness, one of the three sources of kafir according to Ja'far al-Sadiq, when he wanted to eat from the Tree.

The first disobedience of Adam was his desire for the Tree of the Divine Inclusive Unity. Indeed, his desire was the very creation of this Tree! Otherwise, he would have remained a dweller in the Divine Exclusive Unity, not desiring anything else. He would not have abandoned the Garden of Muhammad and his Family. At the time of this desire came shirk.

And when this desire came about he abandoned the Garden and the Divine Will became attached to the Divine Purpose, and this is Eve and Adam. God created her from the Divine Will for the comfort of Adam. When he disobeyed, he left the Garden of the Divine Ispenity (hawaya) and he entered the black sea of this world below—a veritable fire of duality—where even the qualities of submissiveness and humility fight with one another. He received the generosity (jud) of Fatima. Then he lamented and he affirmed to God his belief in al-bada' [i.e., the distinctively Shi'i belief that God can change His mind, or "start anew"], and ascribed to the prohibition of wine and he wept thirty days, then he repented towards God by clinging to the love of the recognition of the Family of God. God accepted his repentance, and thus did Adam become one "of those who do good."101

Love and Authority

We close this survey of Fatima in the Bab's a'fisir with the subject that opened the study, namely waliyya, "spiritual authority," and its dimension of love (mahabba). At verse 3 of
Surat al-Baqara, the subject of Absolute Walaya is encountered. Here the Qur'anic statement "those who perform the prayer" is said by the Bab to imply general obedience to Muhammad and his Trustees (awlāya) and his Progeny (nabt) through the Most Great Absolute Walaya (al-awlāya al-mutlaqa al-kubra). While in other statements Absolute Walaya was linked to 'Ali alone, here it includes all of the Imams. In the same section walaya is identified with tawhid, the affirmation of the divine unity. The Bab says that the act of prayer (salat) is associated with the "form for affirming divine uniqueness" (surat al-tawhid), the "temple (bayt)" for affirming the divine unity (tawhid), and the "visible form (shahid)" of walaya. This being the case, only the actual bearers of walaya are able to perform it properly because it is the foremost station of distinction between Beloved (mahbub, i.e., God) and the lover. The Family of God (al-Allah = Muhammad, Fatima, and the 12 Imams) are the true bearers of the meaning of the divine love mentioned in the famous hadith qudsi: "I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created mankind in order to be known." This love (mahabba) was manifested (tajallla) by God to them by means of their own selves (lahum bi-him), to such a degree of exclusivity that this divine love subsists only through them, and pure servitude appears only in them.

The Bab continues to say that the Family of God are the places (mahall) where servitude and all lordship (subadhat and nabubiat) distinguish themselves, implying that it is through their act of servitude that they have been invested with the rank of lordship in relation to others. "Whoever, then, confesses the truth of their walaya in the "region of servitude" has in fact performed the prayer according to all the stations of the Merciful One. And he who performs the prayer "and pierces the 'veils of glory' and enters the house of glory (bayt al-jalil), such a one will dwell under the protection (zill: shade) of their walaya."

At verse 62, the term Absolute Walaya is associated again with the entire Family of God, because they are sanctified servants who do nothing of their own wills, but rather the will of God: "Surely, they that believe, and those of Jevry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whose believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness—their reward awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow."

The "works of righteousness" mentioned in this verse therefore are described as being represented, par excellence, by the act of recognizing the Absolute Walaya of the Family of God; and "their reward awaits them with 'Ali." In the context of the verse itself, the suggestion is that non-Muslims are implicated in the responsibility of recognizing the authority of 'Ali and the Family of God. This may offer an indication of the way in which "absolute" (mutlaq) is to be understood. It should be noted that the last phrase of the above verse is repeated at Qur'an 10:62, where it is specifically "the friends of God" (auliya' allah) who will neither grieve nor sorrow. Such cross references and correspondences are most certainly not accidental, particularly in this case where the later verse corroborates this interpretation by virtue of its vocabulary (auliya' plural of wali). Love as a synonym for walaya is of course not new with the Bab, but it is important that this aspect of walaya be constantly kept in mind as a means of holding the other connotations of the term, such as "authority" and "power," in perspective. This equivalence led Corbin to state that Shi'ism is pre-eminently a religion of spiritual love—a very large assertion that must be considered in the somewhat rarified context of Corbin's preoccupations. However, insofar as devotion to the walaya of the Imam represents, in essence, an act of love, the assertion seems to stand.

In the commentary on Qur'an 2:23, "love" is again associated with walaya. The Bab says:

None can attain to the Depth of the Exclusive Divine Unity (lujat alahaddiya) except by means of his ('Ali's) walaya. It is the goal (maqad) of your existence (wujudkum), because God has made you for this sake of love (mahabba). And He has put His life (hayat) and His might (hr) in it, to the extent that such is possible in the contingent world—if only you understood.

Love is related to the idea of knowledge/ma'rifah (gnosis), by virtue of the "theosophical" axiom: the more one knows the more one loves, and the more one loves the more one knows. This axiom is represented in the Islamic instance by the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure, quoted above: God's love or desire to be known set the terms of spiritual development for "all time." True knowledge is attained through love and devotion, and if this devotion be tested through hardship, the love, and therefore the attendant knowledge (or vice versa) is the purer. All of the Family of God suffered, but perhaps none more than Fatima, who as the mother of all suffers doubly. In his commentary on Qur'an 2:25, the Bab states that "the Garden," that is, Paradise, is indeed the love of the visible form of Fatima (mahabbat shabah Fatima).

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before." For they are given things in similitude (muhashabat); and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein forever. [2:25]

For the people of inner knowledge "God gave glad tidings to those who believe" in Muhammad and do righteous deeds with regard to his Trusteeship by means of allegiance to 'Ali. For them await gardens, and these [gardens] are the love (hubb) of Fatima underneath which are rivers, meaning the two Hasans [i.e., al-Hasan and al-Husayn]. . . . the fourth [river] is of red wine, flowing for the fragmentation (hais) of all things and their refashioning (sawq) according to the divine signs and tokens. And by it the love bodies (al-ajsad al-mahabbat) of the Shi'a of the Pure Family of God are reddened. And God fashioned in this river the forms of the believers. And God wrote at its head; "Love of the Shi'a of Ali is My fortress (kasr). Therefore, he who enters My fortress is secure from My chastisement." Every one who drinks from a river: they say, "This is that" in which God has put in all the lights of the four signs [i.e., tawhid, nabubiat, imama, sh'ia]. . . . And there for them shall be spouses purified and virtuous . . . And they shall dwell forever in the love of Fatima.

Given the dramatic role played by Tahireh—as the reappearance of Fatima—in the formation and development of the Babi religion, such words as these of the Bab's give us an enhanced understanding of the sources of her authority and influence and raise the question, Must a challenge to the status quo entail a break with the past?

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22. This much more famous second work, the

23. If the basic conclusion of this paper is correct, namely that the Babi movement represents

21. Literally

20. Zarandi,
The Concept of Sayyid Husayn in Early Islamic Mysticism

19. MacEoin, "Sources," p. 47. Extant works that were probably written by the Bab before the

Tafsir Surat al-Baqara include the short Arabic Risalat fi al-Suluk (on which see MacEoin,

"Sources," pp. 44-45). For a translation and description of this short epistle, see, Lawson, "Qur'an

18. Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation .... in Approaches to the History of the Interpretation

17. Ibid., p. 41.


14. Even as recently as 1899, we find the following statement on the date of the Tafsir surat
Yusuf: As far as can be established, up to this time [when he produced the Tafsir surat Yusuf] the
Bab had not produced any work of significance, and it was only during his encounters with his

13. On the subtle, amphibious, and powerful relationship between Imam and Text, see
Todd Lawson, "Reading Reading itself," Baha'i Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i
Studies 1/5 (November, 1997).

12. The Bab, the leader of the Azali

11. On this topic see the works of Kuhlberg and Newman listed in the bibliography of this
chapter.

10. Bernd Radke and John O'Kane, The Concept of Sayyid Husayn in Early Islamic Mysticism

9. Hermann Landolt, "Walayah," Encyclopedia of Religion, and now the appropriate passages in

8. The most recent scholarly treatment of the key events and personalities in the drama that
unfolded after the death of the Prophet is Madelung, The Succession in Muhammad, 2 vols. (Ann


6. I prefer "Family of God" as a translation for this term to "clan of God" found throughout
Amanat, because of the obvious differences in connotation and denotation it carries: nearness,
tightness, and familiarity. These persons are seen as the Holy Family in Shi'ism, not the Holy
Chn.

5. This word is sometimes spelled as qulay and frequently nice distinctions are made between
the two spellings in which qulay refers to spiritual authority and qilay refers to political
authority. Linguistically and etymologically there is no basis for this distinction. One important
Shi'i lexicon states that the wording is optional and the word connotes both political/temporal

4. Such a status is reflected in the words of Ali Shariati: "She herself is an Imam .... " ('Ali

3. The Persian Bayan of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shamsi, the Bab, 1, 2, tr. Dr. Denis MacEoin,
The Second Chapter of the First Unity: [Baha'i] Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts

This appeared to me to be an error, and I remarked, "Here it should be 'the immost,' and
they have written 'the inmost of the inmost.'" "What can I say?" [the Bab] answered, "the
author of the Commentary lays claim to even more than this of greatness, glory, and knowl-
edge. Consider the passage attentively," I did so, and said, "It is quite correct. But I am
weary. Do you read and I will listen." He read for a time, and then, as men were wont, I
said, "It is enough. Do not trouble yourself further." (Browne, "Catalogue," 496-97)
rhamiya, and so on constitutes one of its more distinguishing characteristics. The terminology comes originally from Ibn 'Arabi (638/1240) and its use here by the Bab offers yet another example of how the work, if not the thought, of one of history's greatest mystics had thoroughly permeated Iranian Shi'i spiritual discourse (rifa') by this time. For a study of these terms as they were received by Ibn 'Arabi's student Qusayri and others, see Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," Muslim World 72 (1982), pp. 107-28. (See also the critique of this article by Hardout in Studia Iranica, Suppl. 8 [1985], p. 488, p. 126.) Briefly, the term wahdyya represents the highest aspect of the Absolute about which we can notion (if one may use a noun as a verb) but does not, of course, define the Absolute that must always be beyond whatever occurs about in our minds. The term wahdyya refers to the second highest aspect of the Absolute, the aspect that involves the "appearance" of the divine names and attributes. See also Ibn al-Razi's al-Kashani, al-khulafa al-Safina, pp. 25 and 47. The proper understanding of this technical terminology has been a subject of scholarly debate in Iran for centuries.

25. Etymologically feminine, rhamiya, from the Arabic word for "womb," is the abstract noun motherfulness. Ibn Arabi seems to be the one responsible for characterizing the existentiation of creation as an act of mercy, an expression of rhamiya.

26. In the commentary on the rest of the Fatihah, each verse of which is designated as "the book" or writing of one of the four men of Transcendence, that is the twelve imams, Fatima, and Muhammad. For specifics on the heptadic structure that reflects the realities of Family of God, see Lawson (1986).


28. It should be noted that we find no mention of Fatima at the corresponding place in the eleventh-century classical work by the otherwise influential Shi'i theologian al-Tusi, al-Tibyan fi Tafsim al-Qur'an (Najaf 1597-63), vol. 1, pp. 28-30.

29. Bag, p. 8, 114.4.8. The phrase "Garden of Grace" (janat al-an'am) is determined by Qur'anic usage (see, e.g., 26:85). "Gnostic" translates arif. There are other choices: "recognizer," "knower," "seeker.

30. The bibliography on Fatima remains to be compiled. For this paper I have benefited from Laura Vecchia Vaglieri's excellent Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd ed., entry (see my list of sources for the details of this and all other works mentioned in these notes), Corbin, Massignon, Lamennais, Ibn Shihh Shihab, Kashani, Lawson, Manecke, Amanat, MacEvion, Frey, Rahnna, Isfahani, Momen, Tusi, and Tabrizi. For example, the very early Shi'i Tafsim Furuq ibn Ibrahim mentions Fatima in over twenty places. The commentators of the two famous classical Shi'i exegetes, Tusi and Tabrizi, also mention her at various points in their commentaries. The commentaries of Muhsin Fayed Kashani and others also frequently cite hadith, or more appropriately ahadith, which mention Fatima's name.

31. Al-lf's nickname Abu Turab is said to have originated because whenever he and Fatima would quarrel, he would leave the house and cover his head with dust, presumably out of the frustration at being married to the Prophet's daughter. Indeed, the Prophet himself bestowed the house and cover his head with dust, presumably out of the frustration at being married to the Prophet's daughter. Indeed, the Prophet himself bestowed this name upon him (Vecchia Vaglieri, "Fatima"). For other explanations of the distinctive nickname, see Kohlberg, "From Imamyya to Ihna'Ashariyya," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 39 (1976), pp. 521-34; and Lawson, The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty ..., ed. L. Lewisohn (London: University of London, 1992), p. 268. One of the key figures in the drama and legend of Tahireh the Babi is one Shaykh Abu Turab. For the most recent and quite penetrating study of this drama, see Matttheese, "Ruptured Spaces and Effective Histories..." Occasional Papers 2/2 (February, 1998).

32. "She is usually depicted in the Shi'i sources as a bitter woman who spent her last days mourning the death of her father and refusing any contact with the outside world." Ayoub, Redemptive Suffering in Islam (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), p. 40.

33. The lack of descendants is a topos in Muhammad's biography and is reflected in the Qur'an as well. This meant that his progeny was destined to issue only from his daughters, which in his society this meant that he was without descendants.

34. A third son, Muhsin, was stillborn.

35. Later on in his career, the Bab himself would compose a lengthy commentary on this very sura. See Lawson, "Qur'an Commentary..."

36. Vecchia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

37. Momen, "La construction du voe et la devotion musulmane a Fatima" (Rome: 1956), vol. 1, p. 118f. But see the legend of the heavenly table being removed from the al-hall by because they tried to share it with outsiders, Ayoub, Redemptive Suffering, pp. 44-45.

38. Vecchia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

39. Ibid.

40. Dala'il al-halima by Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Najif, 1949/1369, pp. 1-58. This subject is used heavily by Vecchia Vaglieri in her excellent Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd ed., article. It is, unfortunately, unavailable to me.


42. Vecchia Vaglieri, "Fatima."


45. For details on the proper observance of this important day, see Qummi, Mafatih al-jinan (Beirut: Dar al-Idha, 1407/1987), pp. 350-54. See also the related hadith akhla'i, Qummi, pp. 386-89; cf. also Momen, An Introduction to Shi'I Islam (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 14. The following will help set the tone for the Bab's commentary:

The designation shi akhla'i is traced to an important drama that happened during the so-called year of delegations (631 C.E./9 ah), when various tribal and religious leaders are said to have come to Medina to pledge fealty to the Prophet. On one particular occasion, a delegation from the Christian village of Najran came to determine whether the Prophet's claims were in line with the prophecies of their holy books. One of these prophets--Adam's vision of a bright light surrounded by four lesser lights said by God to represent five of Adam's descendents--would figure prominently in the Najran Christian's eventual acceptance of Islam. In the initial meeting with the Prophet, the discussions became deucedlocked and it was decided to arrange for a special kind of "arbitration" or mubahala, a traditional mutual cursing match in which the wrath of God is called down upon the liar. This mubahala was set for the next day. In a typical mubahala each side would bring to the contest their most accomplished poets and learned men. The Najrians and their religious scholars were thus surprised when Muhammad came to the duel accompanied only by 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. This event is said to be the subject of the Qur'anic verse 3:61. One account, preserved by the sect of the Shi'a known as the Masmimians (precisely, devotees of the "five" People of the Cloak), is worth quoting here in Massignon's paraphrase. It was on the red sandhill (kabih akhla'i) that the apparitional forms (ashikh) of the Ahl al-Kisii flashed forth like lightning, during the contest. The Shi'i school of the Masmimians was interested in interpreting in all of its symbolism, the mubahala scene.

At the cemetery in Medina, at the bottom of the Bqti', on the red dunke like the voice of the Adamites, in the mubahala like Moses on Sinai, we see the Five standing under the Mantle, illuminated with thunderbolts and lightning flashes. Before them, together with the other initiated mawali, stands Salman pointing out the Five for the verification of the amzed Najarian Christians. At the call of the Initiator, they recognize the Five in their glorious transfiguration (mi'ilii).
Their halo of lightning flashes signifies that their authority is a divine "right," inducing them to affirm that their bodies are shadows (aštâl, ašâl) cast by Divine Light, silhouettes (kashâh) temporarily outlined in the divine emanation, exempted from the generation of suffering and death. It is the call (nîda') of the Initiator that animates and sets the scene: the affirmation temporarily outlined in the divine emanation, exempted from the generation period, whose drama, described above, is the time when his Lord tested him (i.e., accept my repentance). Thus, according to the Bab, the words were this special invocation calling upon the People of the Cloak whose drama, described above (note 45), had already been established and "rehearsed" during the time of the primordial Covenant before creation. Through his primordial submission to God, for example, Abraham automatically numbers himself among the Shi'is of Ali (Baq, p. 229). Jesus is the most noble of the Shi'is of Ali.

Muhammad asked Imam Sadiq about the statement of God: "And when his Lord tested Abrahám with certain words..." What were these words?" The Imam said, "They are the words which Adam received from his Lord when he turned toward Him. [Slight variation in other ms.] Adam said: "O Lord! I implore Thee by the truth of Muhammad and Ali, and Fatima, and al-Hassan, and al-Husayn, please turn to me (i.e., accept my repentance)." And He turned to him "truly He turns and is All-compassionate."

Baq, p. 273. In another context, ad Qur'an 2:37, the Bab quotes this tradition: The Imam has said: "Verily Adam saw written upon the Throne the mighty noble names. And he asked about them. And it was said to him, 'These are the most glorious names of creation in the estimation of God.' And the names were Muhammed and 'Ali and Fatima and al-Hassan and al-Husayn. And Adam imploded the favour of God by means of them to accept his repentance, and to raise his station (manzala).


55. Corbin, p. 58; "primitive" here is both a formal and a chronological designation. By it such groups as the Nasaras, the early Ibad'is, and other of the so-called ghulat are intended.

56. Corbin, p. 59

57. The passage continues: "And through this supracelestial Earth, we are led to the idea of a Shi'Ite Sophiology, by which we shall perceive aheight something that Mazdaean Sophiology already perceived in the Angel of the Earth, but this time at a new and higher level, since the progressio harmonica produces the resonance of harmonics which until then had remained silent" Corbin, pp. 59-60.

58. Corbin, p. 60.

59. All of this may be found amplified in greater detail at Corbin, pp. 60-73.

60. Nothing if not baroque, Corbin's interest in the theme of the "celestial earth" (a basic coincidence opfomenum, it should be noted) went far beyond, yet somehow remained centered, in the figure of Fatima. He offered the metaphor of music, specifically the progressio harmonica of the pipe organ, to explain what he saw as a beautiful and compelling Iranian enrichment of intellectual history: "Whoever is somewhat familiar with the organ knows what are referred to as "stops." Thanks to these stops, each note can cause several pipes of different lengths to "speak" simultaneously; thus, besides the fundamental note, a number of harmonic overtones can be heard. Among the contrivances that regulate them, the progressio harmonica designates a combination of stops which allows more and more overtones to be heard as one ascends towards the upper register, until at a certain pitch the fundamental note also resounds simultaneously" (Corbin, p. 51).

61. Corbin, p. 69.


63. See, e.g., Bowering, Kazemi-Moussavi, Dabashi, Arjomand, Calder, Stewart.

64. Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, tr. Mommen, p. 15.


66. Ibid., pp.49-50.

67. Ibid., p.52.

68. Ibid., p.224.

69. Ibid., p.94. kashf instead of the Qur'anic "looters" (kasirun, all mas.). These seven names are used as a kind of shorthand to represent the Prophet, Fatima, and the twelve Imams because although they are twelve, they may be known by using only these seven names. That is, each of the names Muhammed, 'Ali, Hasan, and Husayn may be applied to more than one Imam while the names Fatima, Ja'far, and 'Ali can apply to only one person respectively. Earlier in this commentary, the Bab ad Qur'an 2:3 (Baq, pp. 22-23), speaks of seven grades of faith (iman), taking his cue from yaminuna, "those who believe." One grade, the third, is faithfulness (usan) -- a near synonym--associated specifically with Fatima.

70. Ibid., pp. 94-95.

71. For important background to the Shaykhi reading of Qur'an 7:172, see Lawson, "A 'New Testament.'"

72. Corbin, p. 63. A study of Shi'I akhbari tafsir on precisely the subject of the Day of the Covenant reveals that the appartmental forms of the first participants is more or less standard topos. See Lawson, "A 'New Testament.'" This, of course, was one of Corbin's main points: the Shaykhis represent a revivification of very ancient modes of thought in this see Lawson, "A 'New Testament.'"

73. Formed on the Arabic word ilah (god), lakah refers to the divine realm. Three other similar words are encountered in such discussions: jahabat, malakat, to refer to three realms that issue in descending order from the lakah. All of these worlds symbolize with each other. A fifth term, nasr (humanity, human dimension), is frequently encountered. It is built on the word nas and is the polar opposite of lakah. Between lakah and nasr the whole spectrum of cosmic activity and events occurs.
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such. The possible connection between anomalous invocations and their apparent meaning (Kashani, pp. 136-37 (680)), the title of the Bab's Risalat (Altmann and Steini, 1998). Unfortunately, the details of this are unknown to me.

The Bab says that God is speaking about His "taking compact" with all created things in the eight paradises, to recognize the walaya of 'Ali. The first of these paradises is the Depth of Unity (bujjat al-wahda) and is characterized by the command, "You shall not serve any save God . . . and this without reference [to anything else]." In the second paradise the compact was taken by means of recognizing the Universal Walaya (al-walayat al-kulliya) of the "parents," i.e., Muhammad and 'Ali who are, respectively, the symbols of universal fatherhood and motherhood. Such recognition, the Bab says, is in reality the good mentioned in the verse, because to do good means to do good to all according to what each merit. The good that these particular parents deserve has only been hinted at, because were the Bab to openly (bi-ta'isir) describe it, the prattling enemies (madhawah) would cavil at it. (Baq, pp. 223-24.)

Amanat, Retraction, p. 331. No source for this statement is given here.

91. Baq, pp. 159-60. On shaha: The beings of the pleroma of the labah are visible only in their appropiational forms, which are the reciprocals of their theophanies (Corbin, p. 63; cf. Husayni, kitab tafsir nur al-husayn). The six (above) and an invocation of these names. (Qum: n.p., 1383/1963-1385/1965), vol. 1, pp. 56-57, #142-44. The words are a prayer; the names of the six (above) and an invocation of these names. #149: God created the light of Muhammad before the heavens and the earth and the throne and the cursi and the tablet and the pen and paradise and hell. 149, (cont. p. 58) contains reference to ring of Solomon (Bahrani, Bahrani, vol. 1, p. 86, #2 as Husayni #3): Adam was expelled on 1 Dhu al-Qa'da, and on the 8th of Dhu al-Hijja Gabriel sent him to Minna.

92. Baq, pp. 198-99. The last two sentences are perhaps a reference to a specific controversy. Unfortunately, the details of this are unknown to me.

93. Corbin, p. 64.

94. Ibid., p. 65.

95. Baq, p. 200. This is possibly an allusion to the first three Sunni caliphs whom the Shi'a consider usurpers of 'Ali's position and breakers of the divine covenant.

96. That is through pure contemplation, without images or thoughts contaminated by "the world."


98. Ibid., pp. 109-110.


100. Ibid., p. 134.

101. Ibid., pp. 45-46 Cf. Tusi, al-Tibyan, vol. 1, pp. 59-60. This verse was revealed about Abu Jahl according to al-Rabi' b. Anis, and al-Balkhi and al-Maghribi chose this; according to Ibn Abbas, it was sent down about the Jewish leaders around Mecca; some say it was sent down about the Arab idolaters. Tabari chose Ibn 'Abbas: "We say rather that the verse has a general meaning."


103. This is perhaps an example of the antinomian motif so prominent in certain so-called extremist Shi'i texts and teachings.

106. Baq, p. 87: "love of the form of Fatima" becomes (mubakabat shahabat Fatima).

Abbreviations

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