The Bahá’í Faith
and the World’s Religions

edited by
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George Ronald
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The Báb’s Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God

A Provisional Translation by Todd Lawson

1. In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

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

3. ‘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!”’

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. Verily, Religion is supported by four pillars:

   1) Affirming Divine Unity
   2) Prophethood
   3) Guardianship, and
   4) The community of true believers

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

7. 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 higher good.’

8. 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.
9. At such a time you are indeed in conformity with the true religion and the true balance and the obvious and clear path. Above this station there is no higher good.

10. 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.

11. There can be no question, the Shari’a in its entirety is one method in the quest of the servant for his Lord, but by proceeding according to the guiding principle as We have indicated.

12. As for the method of attaining the guiding principle – know that attainment to the station of your 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.’

13. 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.

14. 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 knower is he whose heart is with God and he has no speech, thought, nor act except in, by, with and about God, exalted be He.

15. Neglect not your personal struggle thereby forfeiting 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.’

17. So pass on whither We have been commanded 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.

18. Flee from whatever distracts you from God. Indeed such is a deadly poison which will consume you in flames while you are unaware.

19. Nay, were you to know certainly see hellfire.

20. It is incumbent upon is the chief of all evil a dog of the Jews is people of the marke the source of that ne

21. Indeed, the world an God, exalted be He, self then you are in l and sever thyself fr alienation of people the enemy from am

22. And when you have of God will open to the Holy One.

23. For the people of in ‘Rend the veils of g veils and be attracte until the light of dav city of unity while everything that has the praised station glorify God at night midst of intense dar a praiseworthy stati

24. Finally, this book, possessed of insight believers in the divi my master, my sup God lengthen his li your Lord made sm diverse of hues, w oppressors increase
19. 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.

20. 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 lingering. Verily, such lingering is the source of that negligence which bars access to God.

21. Indeed, 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 malicious joy of the enemy from among family and offspring.

22. And when you have begun your quest along this path of search, then the gate of God will open to your soul and you will request entrance into the realm of the Holy One.

23. 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 through 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. Thus will you attain to the praised station that God, exalted be He, has promised the people who glorify God at night – that is: turning towards the absolute divine unity in the midst of intense darkness. And so, it may be that thy Lord will raise thee up to a praiseworthy station.’

24. Finally, this book, on the proper method of search, is kept brief for those possessed of insight. In it is that which will suffice 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-Rashtí, 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 provisional translation offered here is of one of the Báb’s earliest extant writings (perhaps the earliest) known as the Risdá fi’s-súlik. MacEoin lists five privately published ‘editions’ for the Risdá and correctly observes that the original work ‘appears to have been written during the later years of the life of Sayyid Kazim Rashti (and thus before the commencement of the Báb’s own dispensation).’ MacEoin has chosen to translate sulík as ‘right behaviour’ 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 above translation of the text is offered without the encumbrances of copious notes and references, except as indicated by quotation marks and other minor punctuation (Arabic has no punctuation system analogous to English usage). Also, in some cases the above translation violates strict literalness in the interest of readability.

Much of the Quranic and Hadith material in this work will continue to figure prominently in later writings of the Báb. For example, the relatively lengthy quotation with commentary from the Hadith Kumayl (begins: ‘Rend the veils of glory’ and ends ‘raise thee up to a praiseworthy station (QWM)’ in the above translation and slightly differently in the one below) in this short work is noteworthy because it shows the importance the Báb attached – from the beginning – to this celebrated and widely-commented short sermon of ‘Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib, the first Imam of the Shi’i and prime bearer of post-prophetic spiritual authority and charisma (wáliyya). This Hadith is also known as the Hadith má ’l-haqqá, that is to say the sacred words in answer to the question ‘What is divine reality?’. It should be noted, also, that this very important Hadith is not found in the canonical Nahj al-balágha (the standard compilation of the writings and sermons of the Imam ‘Ali). Reference to this hadith by the Báb is significant because it shows that he was clearly engaged in the long, venerable and exceedingly rich Shi’i mystical – or gnostic – discourse. Indeed, the Báb also wrote a separate commentary devoted solely to this sermon. In the Báb/Bahá’í tradition, interest in the Hadith did not stop with the Báb, one of whose more prominent followers eventually adopted one of its distinctive formulations, subh-i azal, as an honorific title. Bahá’u’lláh 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’ (subhát al-jalá). The literal meaning, ‘lofty praises of divine glory’, suggests that one must rigorously avoid equating one’s understanding (and therefore one’s self) with sublime divine qualities with the absolute unknowable essence of God (hence ‘veils of glory’ could be translated as ‘delusions of grandeur’). ‘Veils of glory’ is a symptom of spiritual disease diagnosed originally by ‘Ali.

The translation offered here also demonstrates, if such were necessary, how important the Qur’án was for the Báb. It is essential to point out that many of the Quranic 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 Shi’i understanding of the verse or exegetical tradition. Therefore, in the notes accompanying the second translation below, some of the unquoted Quranic context is supplied.

This Risdá also shows movement to the teachings of mention of the latter, Shaykh Baha’i belief and practice number of the traditions ‘doctrinal’ matter, the six the profound laws of c example, the realms of / worlds which individual One sees this concern in writings of the Báb. Hi Baqara (Chapter of th attributes and qualities number four as far as e There is little doubt that traceable to the teachin work at hand, the four Tawhíd, Nubuwwa, Imáments’ of love, beloved, the symbolic important passage in the Seven Ve modes of time6 or the s Whether this preoccupa tional work of Mullá Ṣadári established.

The understandings, rather than place Shaykh Ahmad and Say. A good example of the the Shari’a in its entirety but by proceeding accor idea is in line with the t the spiritual masters of gious law, is absolutely is destined to lead that is symbolized by the w standard technical term collectively as the ‘ ultimate’ or ‘divine’ Re highest possible limit of such aspiration (see, fo three traditional stages frequently coordinated
This **Risála** also shows quite clearly the interest the Báb had in and his attachment to the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim. Apart from the explicit mention of the latter, the basic quaternary structure of the discourse reflects Shaykhi teachings. Shaykh Ahmad al-Áhsá’i introduced certain changes in Twelver Shi’i belief and practice. Among the more prominent of these was to reduce the number of the traditional pillars of faith from five to four. Far from being a merely ‘doctrinal’ matter, the Shaykhiya held that this number was more in harmony with the profound laws of creation and the cosmos. According to the Shaykhis, for example, the realms of *láhút, jabarút, malakút* and *násút* are, among other things, four worlds which individual souls must traverse in order to reach their ultimate destiny. One sees this concern with the fourness of things, or quaternity, throughout the writings of the Báb. His earliest sustained Qur’án commentary on the Súrat al-Baqara (Chapter of the Cow) is full of tetradic structures of various spiritual attributes and qualities. The Qayyum al-asma itself is structured around the number four as far as each of the separate chapters of that work are concerned. There is little doubt that these quaternary structures in the writings of the Báb are traceable to the teachings of the first two masters of the Shaykhi school. In the work at hand, the four Shaykhi pillars of belief are explicitly mentioned (viz: Tawhíd, Nubuwwa, Imáma, Shi’á) and tacitly correlated with four spiritual movements of love, beloved, lover and Beloved. One may also see the continuation of the symbolic importance of four in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. For example, the passage in the Seven Valleys that speaks of the four kinds of love and the four modes of time or the structure itself of the entire work entitled the Four Valleys. Whether this preoccupation with quaternity is directly connected with the influential work of Mullá Sadrá (namely his magnum opus, *The Four Journeys*) has not been established.

The understanding of the ‘next world’ (paradise or hellfire) as spiritual conditions, rather than places, is also a distinctive Shaykhi teaching and shows how Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim combined the languages of Sufism and Shi’ism. A good example of the way which the Báb continued this is his statement: ‘Indeed the Shari’á in its entirety is one method for the quest of the servant for his Lord, but by proceeding according to the guiding principle as We have indicated . . . ’ This idea is in line with the traditional Sufi motto: Shari’á, Tariqá, Ḥaqiqá. According to the spiritual masters of the Islamic tradition, the Shari’á, or obedience to the religious law, is absolutely essential for the spiritual life of the believer. This obedience is destined to lead that believer to a fuller knowledge or awareness. This awareness is symbolized by the word *tariqá* which literally means ‘way’ or ‘path’ and is the standard technical term for a mystical order. The Sufi orders of Islam are referred to collectively as the *tariqá* or *tariqát*, plurals of the singular *tariqá*. Finally, *ḥaqiqá* ‘ultimate’ or ‘divine’ Reality is the word used by these same masters to indicate the highest possible limit of human aspiration. Indeed, *ḥaqiqá* generally remains beyond such aspiration (see, for example, the Báb’s allusions to this in this **Risála**). These three traditional stages of the quest (all of which are addressed here by the Báb) are frequently coordinated in the mystical literature with three modes of being: *muslim,*
mu‘min, mu‘min. The muslim is the one who submits to the law or Shari‘a, even if he does not fully ‘understand’ why he should. The mu‘min, or secure (or faithful) believer, has through his submission acquired a fuller understanding of obedience and the law. The mu‘min, one made pleasing to God, ‘automatically’ reflects in his actions and deeds the transformative beauty of this faith and understanding. The three stages are also frequently correlated with the three modes of perception referred to in the Qur’an as ‘ilm al-yaqin (Qur’an 102:5), ‘ayn al-yaqin (Qur’an 102:7), haqq al-yaqin (Qur’an 56:95, 69:51): the knowledge of certitude, the perception of certitude, the reality of certitude. Note that the Báb also refers to this triad towards the end of the Risálá. These three modes of certitude are also associated with the three modes of soul mentioned in the Qur’an: al-nafs al-‘ammara bi‘l-sulţán (Qur’an 12:53), al-nafs al-lauwâma (Qur’an 75:2), al-nafs al-mu‘mânâ’îna (Qur’an 89:27): the erring soul, the guiding soul, the soul at peace.\footnote{For those who would like to pursue a more detailed study of the Risálá, I offer below a second translation. This one is more technical in general, does have some explanations scattered throughout the text and in the accompanying notes there are references to some pertinent scholarly literature. Before proceeding to this second translation, it is necessary to mention an essential feature of the manner in which the Báb expresses his ideas. He does this not only by citing words of scripture – Qur’an and Hadith, or through demonstrating his knowledge of Shaykhi philosophy. A striking feature of the Báb’s style – and one that would continue to characterize it throughout his ministry, is the poetic and ‘musical’ use of the Arabic language. In the brief work at hand, the most frequent Arabic roots used are Q-W-M (straightness, rising, standing), B-W-B (gate), W-H-D (oneness). These have been indicated below in this second translation to attempt to give some idea, however self-defeating, of the Báb’s artistry. Also, in the following translation those words that are taken from the Qur’an are indicated in italics, while in one paragraph words from the Hadith Kumayl are in small capital letters. Qur’an translations are based upon those of Yusuf Ali.}

Epistle on the Spiritual Discipline Required for the Journey towards God

**The Báb’s Risálá fi’s-Sulúk ilá Alláh**

**IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE (QUR’AN PASSIM)**

Be steadfast (QWM), O seeker of piety (TQM), in the station (QWM) of affirming the divine unity (WHID).\footnote{Indeed, [true] Religion is the same as the Lord’s Treasure to which the angels, appearing (4Jiat) before He, love us there is no higher signs (4Jiat) appearing (4Jiat) before He, love us there is no higher}

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’an 41:30; cf. also 46:13)

**The Báb’s Epistle on**

Know ye that ‘the path tures’,\footnote{And it (i.e. this ‘face of the Four Gates’ is the same as the Lord’s} while there is no re Cause of God (amr Alláh; but a single (act) (wa mà the verse, not quoted here) \footnote{So set thou (fa-‘aqim; QW Alláh) in which He has m the end of this verse ar by the Báb: That is the r 31: turn ye back in repentence [wa‘aqim in al-salád; QWA mushrikín]. 32: those who rejoicing in what they had i} the others.\footnote{And it (i.e. this ‘face of the Four Gates’ is the same as the Lord’s Treasure to which the angels, appearing (4Jiat) before He, love us there is no higher signs (4Jiat) appearing (4Jiat) before He, love us there is no higher}

So love (hubb), beloved signs (asyd) appearing (4Jiat) before He, love us there is no higher...
THE BÁB’S EPISTLE ON THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TOWARDS GOD/Lawson

Know ye that 'the paths to God are as numerous as the breaths (anfās) of the creatures',12 while there is no soul but one (nafs wāhid; WHD; cf. Qur’an 4:1; 31:28; 39:6), and that there is no religion but the one religion (dīn wāhid; WHD), and it is the Cause of God (amr Allāh; Qur’an 33:37; 49:9 and passim). And our command (amruna) is but a single (act) (wa amrunā illā wāhid; WHD; Qur’an 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-)āqim; (Q;W.M) thy face steadily to the true faith – the nature made by God (fitrat Allāh) in which He has made men. There is no altering of God’s creation. (Qur’an 30:30; cf. the end of this verse and Qur’an 30:31–2 alluded to here but not explicitly quoted by the Báb: That is the right religion [al-din al-qayam; QWM], but most people do not know. 31: turn ye back in repentance to him and fear him {zīttaquhu; TQW}, establish regular prayers [wa aqimu al-salāt; QWM], and be not of those who join gods with god [wa la takumū min al-mushrikin}. 32: those who split up their religion and became mere sects [shī`an], each party rejoicing in what the had with them.)

Indeed, [true] Religion is supported (mutaqawwam; Q WM) by four pillars.

1) Tawhīd (affirming the divine unity)
2) Nabuwwa (prophethood)
3) Walqa (guardianship), and
4) Shi`a (the community of true believers)

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

And all of this is the face of God (wajh allāh) which will never perish (cf. Qur’an 28:88).13 And it (i.e. this ‘face of God’) is the love of the Family of God (hubb al-Allāh)14 which is the same as the love of God (taw huwa nafs hubb Allāh). This is the Hidden Treasure15 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.’16

So love (hubb), beloved (habūb), lover (muhābb), and Beloved (mahbūb) are four divine signs (āyāt) appearing from the self-manifestation of the family of God (tajallī al-Allāh) in you and they constitute your spiritual reality.17

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;18 upon him be peace.

At such a time you are indeed upon the True Religion (al-dīn al-qayyım, Qur’an 30:30; QWM) and the True Balance (al-qisṭas al-mustaqīm, Qur’an 17:35, 26:182; QWM) and
the obvious and clear Path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-wādiḥ al-mubīn*). Above this station (*QWM*) there is no [other conceivable] good (*hasana*). Thus one ascends unto the abode of the permanence of God (*bagdi* *Allāh*).¹⁹

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

This is the guiding principle (*qutb*) of the search.²⁰

Indeed the Shi‘a in its entirety is a method for the quest of the servant for his Lord but by movement according to the guiding principle (*qufb*) as I have described.

As for the road to attaining the guiding principle (*qufb*) – know that attainment to the station (*QWM*) of your sign is attainment to your Lord.²¹ And this is the station of pure piety (*TQJrif*) 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.’²²

And this is why the station (*QWM*) of the novices (*al-mubtadi‘in*) is conditional upon denying the self what it passionately desires and forcing upon it what it detests because there is no veil more base (*awlash*) 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, you would not be negligent of His station even as you were being cut to shreds, 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.²³

Neglect not your personal struggle (*ijthād*) and thereby forfeit thy portion in this world but do thou good as God has been good to thee. (cf. Qur’an 28:77)²⁴

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’an 39:56).²⁵

So pass on whither we have been ordered²⁶ and fear not²⁷ 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’an 5:54)²⁸

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-yaqin*) (you would be aware). You shall certainly see hellfire. Again you shall see it with certainty of sight (*‘izn al-yaqin*). (Qur’an 102:5–7)
of the servant for his (b) as I have described.

Indeed, 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 habits and lusts. And endure patiently the alienation of people and the blame of the companion and the malicious joy 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 Most Generous (mulk al-karim).

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

Pierce the veils of glory unto [All] allusion and efface the idle fancies and rend the veils and attract the ability of [properly] affirming divine unity through [beseeching] the Divine Exclusive Unity until the light of dawn shines forth from the sun of thy reality and you enter the city of unity while your [!] people are unaware and extinguish the lamp of everything that has veiled you from God, exalted be He. Thus will you attain to a praised station (QWM) such as 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, soon thy Lord will raise thee up to a praiseworthy station (QWM).

And this book, on the way (sabīl) 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-Ráští, 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. (Qur'an 16:69)

and a mercy;

While the oppressors increase only in ruin (Qur'an 17:82).
Appendix 1: Translation of the Hadith Kumayl

Kumayl bin Ziyād asked 'Ali: 'What is Reality?'

‘Ali replied: ‘What are you compared to Reality?’

Kumayl said: ‘Are you not the master of your own secret knowledge?’

‘Ali replied: ‘Most certainly! But you will receive only a few drops of the ocean of knowledge that overflows from the abundance of my own knowledge.’

Kumayl: ‘Is it like you to disappoint a questioner?’

‘Ali responded: ‘Reality is dispersing the clouds of glory without allusion.’

Kumayl said: ‘Explain this further!’

‘Ali said: ‘It is the effacement of vain imaginings with clear consciousness of that which is known.’

Kumayl said: ‘Explain this further!’

‘Ali said: ‘It is the rending of the curtain for the conquest of the divine secret.’

Kumayl said: ‘Explain this further!’

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

Kumayl said: ‘Explain this further!’

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

Kumayl said: ‘Explain this further!’

‘Ali said: ‘When the dawn breaks, extinguish the lamp.’

Appendix 2: Text of the Spiritual Journal

This text is based on Archives and representations.
Appendix 2: Text of the Báb’s Risálah fi’s-Sulúk ilá Alláh (Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God)

This text is based on a manuscript (no. 6006, pp. 73-4) in the Tehran Bahá’í Archives and represents a study towards a critical edition.

From the Báb to Allah

In the ocean of knowledge drops of the ocean of knowledge radiate its effects and it radiates its effects of unity, and it radiates its effects of unity, and it radiates its effects of unity, and it radiates its effects of unity.

The divine secret.

The Báb’s Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God

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Bibliography


Notes

1. Tehran Bahá’í A begins on the 7th day
2. MacEoin, *Sources*
3. I should like to thank
4. MacEoin, *Sources*
5. Lawson, *The* (1819–1850)
6. Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Things*
7. For a fuller discussion
8. Invocation at the *rahám*. It is usual
9. *’istaqam – This* ird demonstrates
10. *ya sá‘íl al-tuqá – I*
11. *maqám al-tawzíh* ‘station’. Dependent
   *stations* that advance towards God.
THE BĀB’S EPISTLE ON THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TOWARDS GOD/Lawson

(Dec. 1985), pp. 4–64; see now the revised version available on the World Wide Web at: http://www.northhill.demon.co.uk/relstud/kkm.htm


Notes

1. Tehran Bahá’í Archives MS. 6006. C., pp. 73–4, 23 lines per page. The Risāla begins on the 7th 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. 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: http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/trans/vol2/suluk/suluktr.htm

2. MacEoin, Sources, p. 44, also p. 196 (n.b. under, Risalat at-tasdid).

3. I should like to record my debt to Dr Muhammad Afnan who years ago kindly agreed to look over a preliminary edition of the Arabic text and offered several valuable suggestions based upon his precious and intimate knowledge of the Báb’s writings and manuscripts of the Risāla not available to me. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr Hermann Landolt for valuable suggestions and comments on an earlier draft of the translation. I am also grateful to Mr Abu Haydar Acqići who kindly looked over the Arabic typescript and made crucially important suggestions. Thanks also to Dr Moojan Momen for his critical reading of the text and especially the suggestion to arrange the translation in verse form. All errors in the translation are mine and mine alone.


7. For a fuller discussion of these topics see Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, for the greater Islamic tradition and Corbin, En Islam iranien, for the cross fertilization between Sufism and Shi’ism.

8. Invocation at the beginning of every Quranic sura but one: Bismillahir-raḥmânir-raḥîm. It is widely used throughout 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 18 living manifestations of its holy letters.

9. ‘istaqim – This imperative of the eighth form of the verb QWM is noticed here to demonstrate two features of the Risāla. First, this usage shows that the Báb is directly addressing an anonymous male, probably the same person who asked the Báb about sulâk in the first place (see next note). Second, this also is the first instance of the several appearances of the root QWM in the Risāla. Among the various words that are derived from this root, two would gain greater and greater prominence as the Báb’s ministry unfolded: 1) qiyâma: Resurrection, the Shi’i eschaton; and 2) qa’im: Resurrector, One Who Arises, according to Shi’i tradition, in order to replace the injustice of the world with justice. Note, in this regard, the closing Quranic quotation of the Risāla.

10. yâ sa’îl al-tuqa – Note that the root from which the word for piety is derived TQW recurs throughout the text.

11. magâm al-tawâhid – Traditional Sufi terminology: magâm 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' – *ahwāl*, singular *ḥāl* (see below, note 21). *Tawhīd* is frequently mistranslated as 'unity'. It is important to stress here that it is an act, 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 Hadith *Kumayl* (and the appendix where this Hadith is translated). Here the central subject is precisely guidance, from the Imam 'Ali to another questioner, Kumayl ibn Ziyād, on how to properly affirm or 'believe in' divine unity.

12. Hadith, also quoted in the Báb’s *Tafsīr surat al-baqara* ad 2:38, frequently quoted in the Sufi tradition. For a discussion of this Hadith in the Naqshbandi Sufi tradition, see Algar, *Silent and Vocal dhikr*.

13. The 'face of God' is mentioned several times in the Qur’an. Its interpretation, like many other important Quranic 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. This caused a stir in the young community and several of Muhammad’s followers questioned this action. In response to these challenges, the verse was revealed: *Unto God belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of God. Lo! God is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.* (Qur’an 2:115) '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 or the *Deus Absconditus*. There is another sense in which 'face' can be understood. The root *wajh* denotes surface and direction. The derivative *jihāt* 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 Hadith quoted above 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 *jihāt*, *wujūd/wujīd* as technical terms in commentary literature, *tafsīr*. A verse may be said to have several *wujūd* ‘approaches’: several different meanings or intentions.

14. *al Allāh* – 'Family of God' is most immediately understood as the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima and the twelve Imams. There is also a feature of this usage that indicates *‘id* (as distinct from *‘ahl*) can also include faithful followers whether related or not. The epithet is frequently used by the Báb throughout his writings.

15. Cf. the Hadith Qudsi known as *kuntu kanzan makhfsīyan* 'I was a Hidden Treasure' and the commentary on this important Hadith by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá translated and commented on in Momen, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: “I was a Hidden Treasure...”*.

16. I have not found a source for this Hadith. 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 'problems': 1) the 'face of God' and 2) the identity of the 'Hidden Treasure'.

17. The text is difficult to read here. Previously, I saw it as: *fīka wa fi nafsīka*. Now I think it is really *fīka wa hiya nafsīka*. One awaits other MSS, with which to compare this reading. It is useful to recall that the Arabic word *nafs* means both 'soul' and 'self', and in certain grammatical constructions, 'the same as'. This, then, could also be translated 'and they are the same as your soul'. The key to this problematic formulation most probably lies in seeing it as an allusion to the famous Hadith *man ‘arfāfa, the Hadith of self knowledge*. 'Who knows himself knows his Lord' (man ‘afraf nafsahu faqad ‘arfaf rabbahu). Although it is not quoted in this Risāla, its 'presence' is nonetheless felt in a number of passages. See below.

18. ‘Ali ibn Abī Talib, the first Imam of the Shi’a.
It is important to note the mention of the Hadith, frequently quoted in references to the Hadith, and the verse was revealed: The Prophet said, 'Whoever seeks to annihilate (fana) the self, ego (nafs) so that nothing remains (baqa) except divinity.

Qulub is another traditional Sufi technical term. It typically refers to an individual who is the bearer of spiritual authority (waliyya). It means 'axis', 'pivot' and 'centre'. 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 earliest widely celebrated sermons from the Shaykh-Babi-Bahá’í tradition, namely that it continued a process of using mystical terminology in a Shi‘i context. The idea of ‘centre’ figures prominently in the later Qayyim al-asmá. See Lawson, ‘The Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyim al-asmá’.

One of the most important features of the Shaykhi-Shaykh-Babi-Bahá’í tradition, namely that it continued a process of using mystical terminology in a Shi‘i context. The idea of ‘centre’ figures prominently in the later Qayyim al-asmá.

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In the Sufi tradition, this Hadith is ascribed to Abú Yazid al-Bistámi, the important 9th-century mystic, Maláhí and composer of the famous (or infamous) šaṭābāt, divine paradoxes such as ‘Glory be to me! How great is my majesty’, ‘I am the Well-preserved Tablet’ or ‘I saw the Ka‘ba walking around me’. It occurs in several variants. See ‘Abdur Rabb, Life, p. 93. None of the variants referred to there, however, perfectly matches the vocabulary here. In the most important recension of Báyázíd’s ‘scandalous sayings’ the phrase occurs as follows: I [i.e. al-Bistámi] saw the Lord of Power in a dream [and I said] “O God! What is the way to thee?” He responded: “Cast away thyself and rise [to Me] / di’ nafsaka wa ta’âlā.” (Quayyim al-asmá, p. 96. In the Sufi tradition, this Hadith is ascribed to Abú Ša‘īd al-Kharráz, the important 9th-century mystic of Baghdad.

The ‘self’ referred to here in the first instance would correspond to the ‘erring soul’ or nafs ammārīa mentioned above in the introduction. In reality, the three souls are one. It is transformed through the proper spiritual discipline (sulţān) from erring against God (and paradoxically itself) through acquiring its own awareness or conscience (nafs lauvsâma) to guide itself, until finally it is at peace and pleasing to both God and itself (ma‘ṣīma ‘inna).

Qur’an 28:77 is part of the story of Qárún, corresponding to Korah of the Bible (Num. 16: 1–35) whose boundless wealth made him and his followers proud and arrogant towards Moses and Aaron. He thought his great wealth had been bestowed upon him because of some innate ‘divine’ knowledge. This reference may be a clue to the social class of the addressee of the tablet. This verse continues: and seek not occasions for mischief in the land. For God loves not those who do mischief. The exhortation to a personal jihád (jihád hukka) or ‘independent reasoning in religious matters’ as distinct from a clerical jihád, is very much in line with the teachings of Shákh Ahmad. See Ahsá’í, ‘al- Risálat al-‘Ilmiya’, p. 152.

Qur’an 39:56 mā farrottu fi jān al-‘ilah (jān) is a metaphor implying threshold and by extension door or gate, that is to say Báb. The verse continues: and was but among those who mocked.

Paraphrase of Qur’an 15:65.

Quranic diction

The Báb deviates, with remarkable deftness, from the Qur’an in this citation. Again, it is important to note the mention of the true friend (waḥid, corresponding to imáma) as well as the other elements of the Shaykhi Four supports in the verse of the Qur’an immediately following (but unquoted by the Báb): your real friends are no less than God (corresponds to the first pillar, ta’awdha). His messenger (corresponds to the second pillar, nubuwaw): and the fellowship of the believers (corresponds to the fourth pillar, waḥdāt).
pillar, shī'ā) . . . (Qur'an 5:35)

29. That is 'lingering/loitering/ hesitation' - waqīf - 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 comes sulūk.

30. Hālī - Traditional Sufi technical term transformed here by the distinctive (zaqīq is 'the source of that negligence.


32. Ar. shamāla. German has a perfect word for this: Schadenfreude: the 'destructive happiness' one feels at another's misfortune, destructive both to the one who feels it and to the one experiencing the misfortune.

33. People of insight = ahl al-baṣīra

34. This introduces a brief running improvisatory paraphrase of the famous Hadith Kumayl and two verses of the Qur'an, beginning with the word 'Pierce' and ending with the word 'station'. The Hadith Kumayl, upon which the Bāb also wrote a commentary (MacEoin, Sources, p. 199), is translated below in the appendix. The following text is problematic as it stands and seems to misquote the Hadith. This is no doubt due to the copyist. Such problems are not unusual in the manuscript transmission of texts. In the English translation, words and phrases taken from the Hadith Kumayl are underlined.

35. Reference to Qur'an 28:15 and the story of Moses' act of murder. This verse is also noteworthy for the occurrence in it of the Arabic word shī'ā. Moses killed a man who was not of his own group or party; this 'stranger' was fighting with someone who was of the shī'ā of Moses. Presently, at 28:18, there is a mention of Dawn or Morning (subḥ), an important word in the Hadith Kumayl. Such skilful terminological coordinations, even if tacit, demonstrate the Bāb's astonishing knowledge and 'scriptural fluency'.

36. The Arabic runs: fa'akshif subhāta al-jalālī hattā al-išārah wa'amhu 'īl-mawhučāt wa'ībikh al-astār wa'yūdh bi'l-ahādiyya sīfāt al-tawhid hattā ta'la'a nūr al-subḥ min haqiqa ta'la wadkhil madīnāt al-waḥda wa aqīfīt ahluka wa atīf sirāj kullu man ḥujabaka 'an allāh ta'āla.'

37. maqām mahmūd, cf. Qur'an 17:79 and the later use of this epithet by Bahā'u'llāh in the Four Valleys.

38. On spiritual or luminous darkness, see Corbin, Man of Light, pp. 110-20; see also Izutsu, 'Paradox'.

39. Qur'an 17:79. NB the uncited previous verse: establish worship at the going down of the sun until the dark of night, and the recital of the Qur'an at dawn. Lo! The recital of the Qur'an at dawn is ever witnessed. And some part of the night awake for it (fa-taḥajjad bīhi ), a largess for thee. (Qur'an 17:178) which connects the Bāb's language mentioned in the previous note to the Qur'an. 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 honour, and grant me from thy presence an authorit).

40. Qur'an 2:2: dhīlīkha al-ḵalīb may also be translated as This is the book (in which there is no doubt). Here the Bāb shows an early instance of putting his writings in the same category as the Qur'an. This would become one of the most prominent features of his work as represented, for example, in the later Qayyūm al-asmā'.

41. waqīf = Arabic sabīl. This imperative phrase has different grammar from the beginning of the following verse in the Qur'an on which it is patterned but it can have the same meaning.

42. This is a quotation from the Qur'an, Shīrāz al-Nāḥi: The Bees. This particular verse is extremely important in Shi'i Qur'an interpretation (ta'wil) because of the occurrence of the word 'revelation' (waqīf). In standard Islamic theory, waqīf is used to refer to t...
to refer to the inspiration given only to the prophets of God. In contrast, the inspiration given to the Imams of the Shi'a is usually referred to by the word ilhām, thought to represent a lesser degree of divine interpretation. It is highly significant that the Bāb concluded his epistle with this verse. Sayyid Kāzīm Rašhtī, to whom the Bāb refers above, had taught a characteristic ta'wil of this verse in which he said that the esoteric meaning of the word Bees (nahl) was actually the Imams. Thus, the Imams are seen as receiving revelation as well as ilhām. Later, the Bāb would return to this important verse, devoting an entire chapter to its interpretation in the Qayyūm al-asnā. Notes to Rašhtī’s commentary, a complete translation of the chapter (93) of the Qayyūm al-asnā in Lawson, ‘Reading Reading Itself’.

43. From the Arabic text appearing in Amuli, Jāmi’ al-asrār, p. 170.
44. ‘Reality’ is a translation of the Arabic word haqiqa.
45. or ‘How dare the likes of you ask such a question!’
46. or ‘What is the matter, can’t you answer my question?’
47. balā
48. wa laḥīn yarshahu ‘alayka mà yafṣū hu mīnna. Note here the verb yarshū from rashh ‘to filter, perspire’. From this verb is derived the noun rashh ‘droplets, sprinkling, filtration, perspiration’. It is interesting to note that Bahá’u’lláh’s earliest extant work is a poem entitled Rash-h-i ‘amad, ‘Dew drops from the cloud of unknowing’. It deals, among other things, with the problem of the communication of divine reality to those of limited capacity, the problem indicated in the words of the Persian mystic poem quoted by Bahá’u’lláh in his Seven Valleys: ‘How can feeble reason encompass the Qur’ān? / Or the spider snare a phoenix in her web?’ See Lambden, ‘An Early Poem’ for a provisional translation of this poem.
49. al-haqiqat kashf subūh al-jalāl man ghayr iṣrāna = ‘The perception of reality is achieved only in dispelling one’s delusions of grandeur in vain attempts to compare that reality with anything whatsoever.’
50. subh al-azal