

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY & APOCALYPSE:
TAFSĪR AS EXPERIENCE IN AN EARLY WORK BY THE BĀB*

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It is of some significance that the first major work by ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (d. 1850), known to history as *The Bāb*, founder of the influential yet short-lived Iranian Bābī religion, is a commentary on the first two chapters of the Qur’ān—the short *al-Fātiḥa* (the Opening) and the longest sura of the Qur’ān, *al-Baqara* (the Cow). It is, however, known as the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*. The sura *al-Baqara* is sometimes regarded by exegetes as “the Qur’ān in miniature” because in it are found most of the same concerns, ordinances, conceits 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’ān. It may be also that the Bāb had intended to produce a commentary on the whole Qur’ān at the time he wrote this commentary in early 1259–60/1844. After all, he is said to have later produced no less than nine complete *tafāsīr* during his incarceration in Azerbaijan during the last months of his life. 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 this commentary on the first part (*juz’*) of the Qur’ān that Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū’ī made his visit to Shīrāz, and the Bābī “movement” may be said to have been born. It was during this visit that the Bāb laid claim to a new revelation, an apocalyptic event very much in line with the expectations of Twelver Shī’ism inasmuch as it was now a thousand years since the last or 12th Imām had gone into occultation. The medium for this apocalypse was an unusual commentary on the sura of Joseph (*Yūsuf*)—the 12th sura of the Qur’ān that was in fact written in the form of a Qur’ān: divided into suras and ayas with disconnected letters appearing at the beginning of the suras. The message to the Shī’a was: this is the true Qur’ān that had been in hiding with the 12th Imām until now and

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its appearance also entails the appearance or return of the hidden Imām. This second much more famous work, the *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, also known as the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* or the *Aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ*, appears to be the first work written after the commentary on *al-Baqara*. Its contents—which include in the course of things, a kind of commentary on most of the Qur'ān—suggest that the Bāb's desire to comment on the entire Qur'ān might have been expressed in it and it therefore became unnecessary to compose an actual commentary in the more traditional style of the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*.¹ Further, such dramatic events as unfolded in the wake of the new apocalypse possibly had the effect of diverting the Bāb's attention from such a very traditional, purely literary project to concentrate upon newer and more important developments.

Whatever the case may be, the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*—with which we are solely concerned in what follows—provides invaluable information about the nature of the Bāb's earliest religious ideas. There has been a tendency to regard the *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf* as the first work of any significance written by the Bāb.² Beginning with the invaluable research of Denis MacEoin on the sources for Bābī doctrine and history, it has become progressively more clear that the Bāb's *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* enjoys a unique and heretofore unappreciated significance for a study of the Bābī religion.³ Insofar as this first major work was also a *tafsīr*, 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'ān.⁴ Of the several topics and themes discussed in the Bāb's commentary on *al-Baqara*, four emerge as the most characteristic: divine self-manifestation—*tajallī*; the hierarchization of being and existence; eschatology—*khurūj*, *qiyāma*,

¹ See Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse* 21–45 for a fuller description of this later work.

² Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 172–73.

³ Furthermore, because it was written during the earliest period of the Bāb's literary activity, MacEoin thinks that it is much less likely to have been corrupted by partisans of the later Bahā'ī/Azalī dispute. MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine* 41.

⁴ Several manuscripts of the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* are known to exist. The interested reader is referred to MacEoin's book for details where 15 are listed with, in some cases, the name of the scribe and the date of transcription. MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine* 201; see also his comments on the work, 33, 37, 46–7 and 74. One should add to MacEoin's list the Leiden manuscript that was mistakenly thought to contain only a commentary on a few verses, MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine* 33: “verses 70–94 only”. and a manuscript of the work, as yet uncatalogued, in the Princeton “Bābī Collection”. This last item bears a provisional shelf number 268 and is dated 1328 [1910]. It is bound in one volume with another manuscript entitled *Kitāb al-jazā' min nuqṭat al-bā'*.

zuhūr; and “religious” authority—*walāya*. Here, we are concerned only with this fourth topic.⁵

WALĀYA

The heart of all Shī‘ism centers on the strong veneration of the first Imām, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) as the guardian, protector, and true friend of those who have acknowledged his station as the immediate successor of the Prophet Muḥammad. For this reason he is known as *walī*, and the quality of his authority is called *walāya*. Indeed, as indicated in an earlier study of the Bāb’s work, *walāya* may also be understood as a synonym for covenant itself.⁶ There is in Shī‘ism no notion more fundamental than this. The study of this commentary by the Bāb must begin, therefore, with an examination of the way in which the subject of *walāya* is treated. It will be seen, perhaps not surprisingly, that the idea was just as central to the Bāb’s thought, as it is to Shī‘ism in general. Also, it will be seen that belief or faith (*īmān*) is conditioned by the degree to which one accepts the *walāya* of ‘Alī, and after him the Imāms, to the extent that a deed, no matter how meritorious, is unacceptable unless it has been performed by one who has fully confessed the truth of this *walāya*. Moreover, this *walāya* has existed from eternity, much like the so-called “Muḥammadan light,” and numbers among those who have recognized it the prophets Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. As an eternal principle, it remains an imperative for all would-be believers at all times; through acceptance or rejection of this spiritual authority, one determines the fate of one’s soul.⁷

The radical interpretation of several passages in the *Sūrat al-baqara* as speaking directly to the subject of *walāya* is not an innovation of the Bāb’s, but has characterized a strong tendency in Shī‘ī exegesis from the earliest times. Of interest here is that such a commentary was written by one who was not a member of the ‘*ulamā*’ class, but rather a young merchant. The nature of the commentary shows that there was a need

⁵ Lawson, Qur‘ān, part II.

⁶ Lawson, Dangers 189–191; see now the very interesting discussion in Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran* 121–125.

⁷ See Landolt, *Walāyah* and now the excellent study by Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*. See also the appropriate passages in Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (q.v. index *walāya*, *walī*, *awliyā*) and his article Notes à propos de la *Walāya* Imamite, recently translated as Notes on Imāmī-Shī‘ī *Walāya*. A recent book on the topic of *walāya* in the early Šūfi/Sunnī milieu is also important: al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*.

to reassert or “revalorize” this cardinal Shī‘ī doctrine in an unaccustomed “location.” 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 and we may conclude that it has something to do with the conceptual contiguity of the two categories, religious authority (*walāya*) and apocalypse (*zuhūr, kashf*) a contiguity which was mirrored by the temporal contiguity of the date of the Shī‘ī eschaton and the literary activity of the Bāb. The following description will illustrate the degree to which this need was felt, and the consequences it had for the interpretation of scripture.

ABSOLUTE WALĀYA

The subject of *walāya* is introduced very early in the *tafsīr* where reference is made to the Absolute Walāya (*walāyatuhu al-muṭlaqa*) of ‘Alī, although the statement is not free of ambiguity. It comes in the course of the Bāb’s commentary on the second verse of the *Fātiḥa*: PRAISE BE TO GOD, THE LORD OF THE WORLDS. The verse is said to be the book (*kitāb*) of ‘Alī, in which God has placed all the principles (*aḥkām*) of Absolute Walāya pertaining to it. It is called here, the Paradise of the Inclusive Unity (*jannat al-wāḥidiyya*), whose protection has been reserved for all those who affirm ‘Alī’s *walāya*.⁸

In this very brief statement certain important terms are introduced, which play a key role throughout the rest of the *tafsīr*. Apart from the

⁸ *Baqara* 8 and I 156: *qad ja‘alahā Allāhu zillāhā li-man aqarra bi-walāyatihi*; cf. 2b: *qad ja‘ala Allāhu . . .* Repeated reference throughout this commentary to the ideas of *aḥādīyya*, *wāḥidiyya*, *raḥmāniyya*, and so on, constitutes one of its more distinguishing characteristics. The terminology comes originally from Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 638/1240) and its use here by the Bāb offers yet another example of how the work, if not the thought, of one of history’s greatest mystics had thoroughly permeated Iranian Shī‘ī spiritual discourse (*‘irfān*) by this time. For a study of these terms as they were received by Ibn ‘Arabi’s student Qunāwī and others, see Chittick, *The Five Divine Presences*. (See also the important critique of this article by Landolt.) Briefly, the term *aḥādīyya* represents the highest aspect of the Absolute about which man can notion (if one may use a noun as a verb), but does not, of course, define the Absolute which must always be beyond whatever occurs about It in the mind of man. The term *wāḥidiyya* refers to the next highest aspect of the Absolute, the aspect which involves the “appearance” of the divine names and attributes. See also ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Iṣtilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya* 25 and 47. The proper understanding of this technical terminology has been a subject of scholarly debate in Iran for centuries. One form of the argument is analyzed in Landolt, *Der Briefweschel* esp. 41–63.

word *walāya* (guardianship, friendship), the designation *wāḥidiyya* recurs over and over again throughout the work. It appears to be descriptive of one of the degrees of divinity that constitute the whole hierarchical metaphysical structure of the world. It is the degree immediately inferior to the divine Exclusive Unity (*aḥadiyya*). Such terminology betrays the influence of the so-called *waḥdat al-wujūd* school associated with Ibn ‘Arabi. Suffice it here to say that the Absolute *Walāya* represents a theoretical position, at least one remove from the Ultimate.⁹

The choice of the word “principles” (*aḥkām*) has several connotations. In his short introductory sentence to the *tafsīr* on the *Fātiḥa*, the Bāb characterizes this opening chapter of the Qur’ān as containing seven clear verses (*ayāt muḥkamāt*). The hermeneutic polarities of *mutashābihāt/muḥkamāt* represent one of the oldest concerns of *tafsīr* in general, and have been the cause of much speculation on the part of exegetes of all schools and attitudes. The primary idea is that the Qur’ān contains both ambiguous and unambiguous verses. At the most basic level these are thought to be divided between straightforward legal prescriptions and the rest of the Book. The terminology here is taken from Q 3:7:

IT IS HE WHO SENT DOWN UPON THEE THE BOOK, WHEREIN ARE VERSES CLEAR [*muḥkamāt*] THAT ARE THE ESSENCE OF THE BOOK [*umm al-kitāb*], AND OTHERS AMBIGUOUS [*mutashābihāt*]. AS FOR THOSE IN WHOSE HEARTS IS SWERVING, THEY FOLLOW THE AMBIGUOUS PART, DESIRING DISSENSION, AND DESIRING ITS INTERPRETATION [*ta’wīlihi*]; AND NONE KNOWS ITS INTERPRETATION [*ta’wīl*], SAVE ONLY GOD. AND THOSE FIRMLY ROOTED IN KNOWLEDGE SAY, ‘WE BELIEVE IN IT; ALL IS FROM OUR LORD’; YET NONE REMEMBERS, BUT MEN POSSESSED OF MINDS.¹⁰

With this verse comes one of the more fundamental disagreements between the Sunnī and Shī‘ī exegetes who differ as to the sentence structure of this verse. The above translation represents the “Sunnī” reading. A Shī‘ī reading would be: AND NONE KNOWS ITS INTERPRETATION SAVE GOD AND THOSE FIRMLY ROOTED IN KNOWLEDGE (*al-rāsikhūn fi-l-‘ilm*). These *rāsikhūn* are of course the Imāms, in the first place, and in the second place, at least amongst the Uṣūlīs, the mujtahids.¹¹ So understood, the

⁹ See Lawson, *The Structure of Existence*.

¹⁰ This and all subsequent Qur’ān quotations are from the Arberry translation, though the verse numbering is that of the standard Egyptian edition.

¹¹ A good summary of the general Sunnī/Shī‘ī debate on this topic may be found in B. Shah, *The Imām as Interpreter of the Qur’ān* 71 n. 14. On the question of *muḥkamāt/mutashābihāt*, see for example MacAuliffe, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Approach*. The author concentrates on al-Rāzī’s interpretation of this very verse, which becomes something of a

designation of the verses of the *Fātiḥa* as unambiguous strongly suggests that the Bāb 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 ordains belief in the Absolute Walāya of ‘Alī 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.¹²

At verse 3 of *Sūrat al-baqara*, the subject of Absolute Walāya is once again encountered. Here the Qur’ānic statement THOSE WHO PERFORM THE PRAYER is said by the Bāb to imply general obedience (*al-idh‘ān*) to Muḥammad and his Trustees (*awsīyā’*) and his daughter (*bintihī*) through the Most Great Absolute Walāya (*al-walāyat al-muṭlaqa al-kubrā*).¹³ While in the previous statement this Absolute Walāya was linked with ‘Alī alone, here it includes all of the Imāms. In the same section *walāya* is identified with *tawḥīd*, the affirmation of the divine unity. The Bāb says that the act of prayer “from beginning to end” is the “form of affirming divine uniqueness” (*sūrat al-tafrīd*), the “temple (*haykal*) of *tawḥīd*,” and the “shadow (*shabaḥ*) of *walāya*.”¹⁴ This being the case, only the actual bearers¹⁵ of *walāya* are able to perform it properly because it is the foremost (*awwal*) station of distinction between Beloved (*maḥbūb*, i.e., God) and the lover (*ḥabīb*, in this case Muḥammad and the Imāms). The Family of God (*āl Allāh* = Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the 12 Imāms) are the true bearers of the meaning of the divine love mentioned in the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: “I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created [hu]mankind in order to be known.” This love (*maḥabba*) was manifested (*tajallā*) by God to them by means of their own selves (*la-hum bi-him*), to such a

statement of method in which various points of view are mentioned. For a discussion of the issue within a tradition more akin to the one in which the Bāb wrote, see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mutashābihāt al-Qur’ān*.

¹² Al-Ṣādiq is said to have glossed *al-muḥkamāt hunna umm al-kitāb* as “the Commander of the Faithful and the Imāms” and *al-mutashābihāt* as “*fulān wa fulān*,” e.g., Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. See al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir’āt al-anwār* 132.

¹³ *Baqara* 25. This ms. and others have *nabtihi* which may be an error. The passage needs to be checked against all available mss. before a critical edition may be prepared.

¹⁴ On *shabaḥ* (pl. *ashbāḥ*), often encountered with a companion word *zill* (pl. *aẓilla*) see Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* 32, 33 and 40 where the translation of *ashbāḥ nūr* is given as “silhouettes of light”. These “silhouettes of light” represent the “ontological modalities of the Imams themselves during the “time” of pre-existence.

¹⁵ *Maẓāhīr* (sing. *mazḥar*) lit: “the place where *walāya* appears or is manifest”. It may be translated directly as manifestations as long as it is remembered that the manifestations themselves are not the agents or manifestors, but the vehicles by means of which the manifestation takes place as a result of God’s manifesting activity.

degree of exclusivity that this divine love subsists only through them, and pure servitude appears only in them.¹⁶

The Bāb continues to say that the Family of God (*āl Allāh*) are the loci (*maḥāll*) of all servitude and all lordship (*‘ubūdiyyāt* and *rubūbiyyāt*), 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 *walāya* in the “area of servitude” (*ṣuq‘ al-‘ubūdiyya*), has in fact performed the prayer according to all the stations of the Merciful One. And he who performs the prayer and “lifts the ‘veils of glory’ and enters the glorious house (*bayt al-jalāl*), such a one will dwell under the protection, relief and comfort (*zill*) of their *walāya*.”¹⁷

At Q 2:24, one of the *taḥaddī* or “challenge” verses, Absolute Walāya is explained negatively, as not being acknowledged by those who were challenged to bring a sura comparable to those in the Qurʾān.¹⁸ In short, those guilty of *kufṛ* (disbelief), are all those who have failed to recognize the Absolute Walāya of ‘Alī. Inasmuch as these unbelievers are said to be those who have been given the love of Abū Bakr (*maḥabbat al-awwal*) that is in fact a FIRE,¹⁹ it seems here that “absolute” refers not first of all to any philosophical or metaphysical absoluteness, but rather to exclusivity. That is, true *walāya* cannot be shared during a given period of time. In this connection, it may be added that there appears to be no difference in the quality of the *walāya* born by any of the Imāms. At verse 60 of *Sūrat al-baqara*, for example, the WATER which GUSHED FORTH from the ROCK at TWELVE different places after Moses STRUCK it with his STAFF, is said to represent the *walāya* of all the Imāms. The Bab says that although the WATER issued from these various places, it was in fact the same WATER.

WALĀYA OF GOD

A cognate notion of Absolute Walāya is the Walāya of God, *walāyat al-ḥaqq*. It is first encountered at Q 2:34, which is one of the longer commentaries on an individual verse in the *tafsīr*. Explaining the command

¹⁶ *Baqara* 25.

¹⁷ *Baqara* 26: *kashf subuḥāt al-jalāl*. This term comes from the famous tradition of Kumayl, a commentary on which is ascribed to the Bāb.

¹⁸ *Baqara* 75. Other *taḥaddī* verses are Q 10:39, 11:16, 17:90, and 28:49.

¹⁹ On such epithets as “The First” as a reference to Abū Bakr in Ismāʿīlī literature, see Strothmann, *Korankommentar*, Introduction 20. See now, also, Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification* 359, 283*, 474*, 522, 616*, 617, 621, 660, 672*, 684, and 698.

of God to the angels: BOW YOURSELVES TO ADAM!, the Bāb says that the esoteric interpretation (*tafsīr al-bātin*) understands the speaker of the command to be not God but Muḥammad, while the ANGELS are the seeds of all created things (*dharr al-ashyā' fī mashhad al-ūlā*), a reference to the Qur'ānic Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mīthāq*) mentioned at Q 7:172:²⁰

WHEN THY LORD DREW FORTH FROM THE CHILDREN OF ADAM, FROM THEIR LOINS—THEIR DESCENDANTS [*dhurriyatahum*], AND MADE THEM TESTIFY CONCERNING THEMSELVES (SAYING): “AM I NOT YOUR LORD (WHO CHERISHES YOU AND SUSTAINS YOU)?”—THEY SAID: “YEA VERILY! WE DO TESTIFY!” (THIS), LEST YE SHOULD SAY ON THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT: “OF THIS WE WERE NEVER AWARE.”

The act of prostration is the confession of servitude to the *walāya* of God, which is equated with allegiance to 'Alī, and the disavowal of all else.

Adam, furthermore, is none other than 'Alī, and Iblīs is none other than Abū Bakr. At this level the *walāya* is also characterized as the *walāya* of the Exclusive Unity belonging to 'Alī (*walāyat al-aḥadiyya li-'Alī*). The entire drama, it should be emphasized, occurs before “creation.” Thus Abū Bakr (almost always referred to as Abū al-Dawāhī “Father of Iniquities”) is the symbol of primordial infidelity and ignorance—*kufīr*, just as 'Alī is the symbol of primordial faith and knowledge—*īmān*. The ANGELS, as mentioned above, are taken as the seeds or potential of all created things destined to develop into actuality. They are also referred to as pre-existent forms (*ashbāḥ*) and shadows (*aẓilla*).

The primordial drama had its historical re-enactment or analogue on the day of al-Ghadīr, 18 Dhu-l-Ḥijja 10/16 March 632 when Muḥammad appointed 'Alī as his successor. At that time the ANGELS were Salmān, al-Jundab and Miqdād, the early stalwart supporters of 'Alī.²¹ It is important to note however, that here we use the word “re-enactment” rather inappropriately. It is obvious that for the author of this commentary it is the event of al-Ghadīr which gives meaning to the primordial drama described in Q 7:172, so from this point of view it is actually prior in spiritual value. Al-Ghadīr will shortly be re-enacted in the revelation of the *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*. This would seem to be a perfect, if rather distinctive, instance of

²⁰ *Baqara* 131. The term *mashhad al-ūlā* is determined by the fact that *al-ūlā* (“pre-existence”) is one of three technical terms, which refer to separate historico-spiritual cycles. The other two are *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā*. These words occur in a verse of a visitation prayer for the Imāms and are commented upon at length by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī in *Ziyāra* 68–70, in the course of which commentary their technical meaning is made clear.

²¹ *Baqara* 131. See Veccia Vaglieri, *Ghadīr Khumm*.

apocalyptic reversal. Here it is the events of metahistory which trump the events of linear or temporal history, though the events of al-Ghadīr came later than the Day of the Covenant, the true value and identity of this day rests in what appears to be the chronologically later event in which ‘Alī was appointed the center of Muḥammad’s covenant.

In the commentary on Q 2:62, the term Absolute Walāya is associated 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 JEWRY, AND THE CHRISTIANS, AND THOSE SABAEANS, WHOSO 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 all included in the act of recognizing (*i’tirāf*) their Absolute Walāya, and THEIR REWARD AWAITS THEM WITH ‘Alī. In the context of the verse itself, the suggestion is that even non-Muslims are implicated in the responsibility of recognizing ‘Alī. This may offer a further indication of the way in which “absolute” (*muṭlaqa*) is to be understood. It should be noted that the last phrase of the above verse is repeated at Q 10:62, where it is specifically the FRIENDS OF GOD (*awliyā’ Allāh*) who will neither grieve nor sorrow.²² Such cross-references and correspondences are quite likely not accidental, particularly in this case where the later verse corroborates by its vocabulary (*awliyā’* plural of *walī*) the theme of *walāya*.

At verse 83, the term Universal Walāya occurs:

AND WHEN WE TOOK COMPACT WITH THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: ‘YOU SHALL NOT SERVE ANY SAVE GOD; AND TO BE GOOD TO PARENTS, AND THE NEAR KINSMAN, AND TO ORPHANS, AND TO THE NEEDY; AND SPEAK GOOD TO MEN, AND PERFORM THE PRAYER, AND PAY THE ALMS.’ THEN YOU TURNED AWAY, ALL BUT A FEW OF YOU, SWERVING ASIDE.

The Bāb says that God is speaking here about His TAKING COMPACT with all created things “in the eight paradises,” to recognize the *walāya* of ‘Alī.²³ The first of these paradises is the Depth of Unity (*hujjat al-waḥda*), and is characterized by the command: YOU SHALL NOT SERVE ANY SAVE GOD

²² *Baqara* 195–6.

²³ *Baqara* 223.

“[and this] without reference [to anything else].”²⁴ In the second paradise the COMPACT was taken by means of recognizing the Universal Walāya (*al-walāyat al-kullīyya*) of the PARENTS, i.e., Muḥammad and ‘Alī who are respectively, the symbols of universal fatherhood and motherhood. Such recognition, the Bāb says, is in reality the GOOD mentioned in the verse, because to do good means to do good to all according to what each merits. The GOOD which these particular PARENTS deserve has only been hinted at, because were the Bāb to openly (*bi-l-taṣrīḥ*) describe it, the prattling enemies (*mubṭilūn*) would cavil at it.²⁵

Throughout the *tafsīr* there are numerous statements indicating that Absolute Walāya is in fact the same as *walāya* per se. The following presents the various aspects of this all-important notion and includes material related to the ideas of Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), Messengership (*risāla*), Trusteeship (*waṣīyya*) and Leadership (*imāma*).

FALSE WALĀYA

The idea that *walāya* can be either true or false may be traced to the Qur’ān itself. In such verses as Q 8:73, for example, reference is made to the UNBELIEVERS who are FRIENDS (*awliyā’*) OF ONE ANOTHER, or Q 62:6 where the Jews are criticized for their claim to be the FRIENDS OF GOD, APART FROM OTHER MEN. The two opposing groups, *ḥizb Allāh* and *ḥizb al-Shayṭān* mentioned respectively in Q 5:56 and 58:19, represent a basic division which provides at least theoretical support for the ideas presented in this *tafsīr*. This distinction between two fundamentally opposed groups is most evident in Medinese suras and has been seen to be related to the

²⁴ *Bī-lā ishāra*, an allusion to the *Ḥadīth Kumayl*. The distinctive term *lujja* deserves some attention. As *hapax legomenon* (Q 27:44) it raises questions of meaning, even though it occurs here along with the important marker of apocalypse *kashf*. Avicenna’s use of it in the last book of the *Ishārāt* (viz. *lujjat al-wuṣūl*: “depth or sea of re-union”) further domesticates the mysterious and poetic Qur’anic usage for the gnostic and mystical lexicon of Islam (Ibn Sina, *Kitāb al-ishārat wa-l-tanbihāt*, vol. 4, *namaṭ* 9, *bāb* 20, 98–9; see also the recent excellent translation of this important book of the *Ishārāt* by Keven Brown, listed below in the bibliography). It is one of several “hydrological” images used frequently in this work, others are *yamm*, *ṭamtām*, *taṭanjayn* in addition to the words denoting bodies of water found in *Sūrat al-baqara* or elsewhere in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*. For a study of the poetic and gnoseological role of water in the Qur’ān, see Lawson, *Divine Wrath and Mercy*.

²⁵ *Baqara* 224.

different concerns that faced the Prophet after his departure from Mecca, where *walāya* was purely God-oriented.²⁶

The figure of ‘Alī is presented as the bearer, par excellence, of this True Walāya, although it has already been emphasized that the quality of this *walāya* is not changed, regardless of who its (rightful) bearer might be. As we have seen, True Walāya, or the Walāya of God (*walāyat al-ḥaqq*), had its beginning in pre-eternity, or pre-existence when the sub-atomic existential potential identities or *dharr*, of all things were commanded to acknowledge the authority of ‘Alī. It was also at this time that its opposite, the Walāya of the False One (*walāyat al-bāṭil*) and Falsehood acquired potential existence. Just as ‘Alī is the bearer of True Walāya, Abū Bakr is designated as the bearer of False Walāya.

Such a statement is of course indicative of the milieu in which the Bāb was writing. It is remarkable that this kind of denigration of important Sunnī personalities is absent from the Bāb’s *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, written shortly after this commentary. The theme is an old and definitive one in Shī‘ī literature, and should be viewed as a standard element of religious vocabulary, and one which lends concrete and immediate meaning to various passages in the Qur’ān read in this Shī‘ī milieu. Akhbārī Qur’ān interpretation took for granted the perfidy of the first three Caliphs, as did other schools of Shī‘ī exegesis.

One of the earliest occurrences of the idea of False Walāya is at verse 58:

AND WHEN WE SAID, ‘ENTER THIS TOWNSHIP, AND EAT EASEFULLY OF IT WHEREVER YOU WILL, AND ENTER IN AT THE GATE, PROSTRATING, AND SAY, “UNBURDEN US”; WE WILL FORGIVE YOU YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS, AND INCREASE THE GOOD-DOERS.’ [Q 2:58]

Because the commentary on this verse contains several typical and significant elements, and because it is relatively concise, it is reproduced here in its entirety.²⁷

That which is intended (*wa-l-murād*) by TOWNSHIP is the depth of the Exclusive Unity (*tujjat al-aḥadiyya*) and the GATE (*bāb*) is ‘Alī, upon him be peace.²⁸

²⁶ Landolt, *Walāyah* 317.

²⁷ The following passage is found at *Baqara* 190–1.

²⁸ Cf. a later Bābī understanding of *al-qurā*, mentioned in MacEoin, *From Shaykhism to Babism* 171.

Verily the Messenger of God, may God bless him and his family, has said: "I am the city of wisdom (*ḥikma*) and 'Alī is its gate."²⁹

God commanded all people (*ahl al-imbān wa-l-akwān*) to ENTER THE TOWNSHIP of the sign of the prophethood of Muḥammad, may God bless him and his family, through allegiance to 'Alī, upon him be peace, PROSTRATING to God and magnifying Him AND SAYING at the time of their confession of the *walāya* of 'Alī, upon him be peace, "UNBURDEN US" (*ḥiṭṭatun*). That is to say: "[Give us] freedom (*barā'atun*) from allegiance to the First (*walāyat al-awwal*) and his followers, may God curse them."

WE WILL FORGIVE YOU YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS resulting from allegiance to the False One (*walāyat al-bāṭil*) and WE WILL INCREASE the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the secrets (*asrār*) of 'Alī, upon him be peace, . . . FOR THOSE WHO DO GOOD (*al-muḥsinīn*). The [true] muslim is the one who submits, with his whole being (*bi-kullihī*), to him ('Alī).

God has put in all created things a sign (*āya*) pertaining to His own self (*'an nafsihi*) and a city (*madīna*) pertaining to His Prophet (*'an nabiyyihi*). And He (God or Muḥammad?) fashioned the form of 'Alī, upon him be peace, with His own hand at (*'alā*) the GATE of the city. And He commanded those who attain [the gate] to PROSTRATE to him (*li-nafsihi* = 'Alī) through "the rending of veils and allusions (*bi-kashfal-subuḥāt wa-l-ishārāt*)" and to enter through this GATE by renouncing all but him ('Alī or God).

He who obeys his Lord according to these suggestions (*ishārāt*) is the one who truly says, "UNBURDEN US" [in the way the Qur'ān intends it]. And verily God will FORGIVE him to the extent that His knowledge encompasses the sin of the one who says, "UNBURDEN US" and He will INCREASE, through His power, his potential as much as such is possible in the contingent world.³⁰ There is no ceasing of the bounty of God (*ḥayd Allāh*). And he who enters through this GATE the Merciful will make lawful for him whatever he wants.³¹ And to the grace of God there is no cease. And in this GATE he wants only what the Merciful wants. Therefore at the time of the ["creation of"] Will, the object of the Will is also created concomitantly (*bi-lā faṣl*). This is one of the bounties of God for the GOOD-DOERS.

The Imām al-Bāqir, upon whom be peace, said: "We are the gate of your repentance/forgiveness (*ḥiṭṭatikum*)."³²

²⁹ A very well-known tradition.

³⁰ *Baqara* 191: *fi ḥaqq al-imbān*.

³¹ *Faqad ḥallala lahu al-rahmān mā shā'a*. Cf. the "they will have whatever they want" theme in the Qur'ān, e.g., Q 16:31.

³² See al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 104, #3 and al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 70, #210. This verse also carries an "original Qur'ān" tradition, see al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 104 #2 and al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 70, #214.

He who understands His [divine] speech (i.e. the Qur'ān) is the one who has understood the melody of his allusion: "I testify that they [all the Imāms] are the gate of repentance in all the worlds. And we submit to them."³³

The implications this passage has for an understanding of the Bāb's eventual appropriation of the title "Gate" are obvious and this topic has been dealt with elsewhere.³⁴ It is clear from this interpretation, however, that False Walāya pertains not only to what the Shī'a consider to have been the tragic turn in the history of Islam, but that it has implications for the inner life of the soul. Here the reference to Abū Bakr is read as a convenient symbol or personification of the otherwise abstract idea of misdirected belief.

The next specific mention of the False Walāya appears in the Bāb's commentary on Q 2:61. This long verse is one of the few that the Bāb quotes in sections. The commentary in question occurs at the third and final section:

GO BACK IN SHAME TO EGYPT; YOU SHALL HAVE THERE WHAT YOU DEMANDED.³⁵
AND ABASEMENT AND POVERTY WERE PITCHED UPON THEM, AND THEY WERE
LADEN WITH THE BURDEN OF GOD'S ANGER; THAT, BECAUSE THEY HAD DISBE-
LIEVED THE SIGNS OF GOD AND SLAIN THE PROPHETS UNRIGHTFULLY; THAT,
BECAUSE THEY DISOBEYED, AND WERE TRANSGRESSORS.

When the people of the depth of the Inclusive Unity accepted that which was MEANER than the most exalted land (*balad al-a'lā*), God CAST THEM DOWN [var. on GET YOU DOWN] from the depth of the *walāya* to the EGYPT of contingency.

AND THE ABASEMENT of allusions (*ishārāt*) and the POVERTY of limitations (*ḥudūdāt*) WERE PITCHED UPON THEM. They merited [only] the False Walāya (*walāya bāṭila*) [at the time of] the Origination (*bi-ibdā'*) of the *walāya* of truth because they disbelieved in the *walāya* of 'Alī, the Origin of all signs. Whoever disbelieves in his *walāya*, disbelieves in the signs of the Exclusive Unity and the tokens of the Inclusive Unity and the stations of *nubuwwa*. It is because of this disbelief that THEY KILLED THE PROPHETS WRONGFULLY. Because God made all the Prophets as rays of the sign of His *walī*, he who rejects his *walāya* has, at the time of such rejection, in fact KILLED THE PROPHETS.³⁵

³³ *Ashhadu an...inna nahnu la-hum muslimūn*. I have not found the source for this quotation. It sounds like a verse from a devotional work such as *Ziyārat al-jāmi'a al-kabīra*. It may also be the Bāb speaking in the first person, a rare but not unknown occurrence in this work.

³⁴ See Lawson, *The Terms*.

³⁵ *Baqara* 194.

Such a statement transposes the whole Sunnī/Shī‘ī polemic, in which the first three caliphs suffer so much derision, to a metaphysical register quite beyond, though not necessarily excluding, the concerns of communalism. The “historical location” of the events referred to in Q 2:61 is meaningful for the Bāb insofar as it permits him to speak about more fundamental spiritual issues. By use of the term Inclusive Unity, it would appear that False Walāya here does not represent pure unalloyed evil; rather, it is seen as a lesser unity. And, it was because the “people of the Inclusive (or Restricted) Unity” themselves desired a lower station, that they were cast out by God from the true *walāya* into the “Egypt of the contingent world” (*miṣr al-inkān*). Thus, they brought upon themselves those afflictions mentioned in the verse.

False Walāya is further indicated at verse 67, which the Bāb has divided in two for the purposes of his commentary. Here the Qur’ān tells the story of Moses leading the Children of Israel through the wilderness. In particular, it tells of the rebelliousness of those who were given certain commandments by God through Moses. The specific command is to sacrifice a cow, and the episode itself is the subject of several successive verses. An excerpt from this commentary follows the citation of the entire verse:

AND WHEN MOSES SAID TO HIS PEOPLE, ‘GOD COMMANDS YOU TO SACRIFICE A COW.’ THEY SAID, ‘DOST THOU TAKE US IN MOCKERY?’ HE SAID, ‘I TAKE REFUGE WITH GOD, LEST I SHOULD BE ONE OF THE IGNORANT.’ [Q 2:67]

When God COMMANDED Muḥammad to communicate to the people of the contingent world [the order to] SACRIFICE the concerns and affairs of the self (*al-shu’ūnāt wa-l-aṭwār al-naḥsāniyya*) and to turn their backs (*idbār*) to the False Walāya which is the COW, he communicated [it] on the eighteenth day of the month of pilgrimage that which he was commanded to [communicate] by his Lord.³⁶

The Bāb then cites a portion of the Farewell Pilgrimage sermon, which represents for him, it seems, not only a re-articulation of the basic theme of the verse but more importantly, the true type of covenant-taking by which all others must be measured, including the so-called primordial event described at Q 7:172.³⁷ The implication here is that while the verse in one of its intentions actually refers to the history of Moses, its more

³⁶ *Baqara* 201. Note here the use of *idbār*, a possible allusion to the famous ‘*aql*’ tradition on which see now K. Crow, *Islam and Reason*.

³⁷ The association of the *walāya* of ‘Alī with the primordial covenant is a reading common to Akhbārī *tafsīr*: al-Bahrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 2, 46–51 *ad* 7:172: AND WHEN THE LORD TOOK FROM THE CHILDREN OF ADAM, FROM THEIR LOINS, THEIR SEED, AND MADE THEM

important significance should be seen in connection with the so-called salvation history of the Shī'a. In this way, history itself is seen to be unified, if not actually an illusion altogether in the sense that time is an illusion and that all these apparently separate and discrete events share the same meta-temporal ground. The point is made through the incessant use of typological figuration. The celebrated passage from the Farewell Pilgrimage is:

Whoever I am the master of [The Bāb adds here: 'in the worlds of unity (*'awālim al-waḥda*)] then this man 'Alī is his master (*mawlāhu*). O God, befriend him who befriends him and be an enemy to him who is enemy to him. Assist to victory whoever assists him to victory, and abandon (*khadhala*) him whoever abandons him.³⁸

Both Sunnī and Shī'ī sources cite this tradition (and several variants) as a sound report. It has, however, been subject to various interpretations due, mainly, to the wide semantic range of the word *mawlā*. However, because of its status as a widely attested report (*mutawātir*) this passage has been cited by the Shī'a from the earliest times as a proof-text for their claims.³⁹

Walāya is that by which a human's distinctive (if not sacred) faculty of choice (*ikhtiyār*) is exercised. In this respect, all human beings, it would appear, are created equal. Several verses are interpreted by the Bāb as upholding this principle, for example his commentary on the following:

SO WOE TO THOSE WHO WRITE THE BOOK WITH THEIR HANDS, THEN SAY, 'THIS IS FROM GOD,' THAT THEY MAY SELL IT FOR A LITTLE PRICE; SO WOE TO THEM FOR WHAT THEIR HANDS HAVE WRITTEN, AND WOE TO THEM FOR THEIR EARNINGS. [Q 2:79]

Here the Bāb says that all created things were WRITING "the excellence (*faḍl*) of 'Alī WITH THEIR HANDS "by means of what they chose for themselves." At some point, however, certain ones abandoned the Exclusive Unity of the *walāya* of 'Alī and brought WOE upon themselves by WRITING his "excellence" (*faḍl*) with their own hands. That is, they distorted his excellence by ascribing it to someone else. The *walāya* of 'Alī, for having been acknowledged but rejected by them, will destroy them. This is the meaning of SELLING FOR A LITTLE PRICE. On the other hand, those who

TESTIFY . . .; cf. also al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 463–7 ad 5:3; TODAY I HAVE PERFECTED YOUR RELIGION FOR YOU . . .

³⁸ *Baqara* 201. See al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-irshād* 124.

³⁹ See Landolt, *Walāyah*, and the reference there to the *Hāshimīyyāt* of al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī (126/743), 318. See also L. Vaccia Vegliero, *Ghadīr Khumm*.

remained in this Exclusive Unity continued to benefit from this virtue or excellence (*faḍl*). The Qur'ānic WOE (*al-wayl*) is itself a direct reference to and synonym for False Walāya, and the fact that it is mentioned three times refers to the successive caliphates of “the First, Second, and Third.”⁴⁰ Here it is clear that False Walāya is not restricted to one personality, but like Absolute Walāya, it represents an enduring perhaps ontic principle. The following passages present the same “dangerous” aspects of the *walāya* of ‘Alī. In the first example it is characterized as a punishment:

AND THEY SAY, ‘THE FIRE SHALL NOT TOUCH US SAVE A NUMBER OF DAYS.’
[Q 2:80]

Those who love the false *walāya* [or; the *walāya* of the false one] have indeed worshipped the CALF (*al-‘ijl*). And THEY SAY, “THE FIRE SHALL NOT TOUCH US that is (*ay*) the *walāya* of ‘Alī, SAVE A NUMBER OF DAYS during the lifetime of the Messenger of God.”⁴¹

This refers to the duplicity of those who accepted the Prophet’s nomination of ‘Alī at Ghadīr Khumm, only to renege later. Among them, according to Shī‘ī tradition, was the arch villain ‘Umar himself:

Among those who were profuse in their congratulations on his position was ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. He gave a public appearance of great joy at it, saying: “Bravo, bravo, ‘Alī, you have become my master and the master of every believing man and woman.”⁴²

The subject arises again in the commentary on the following verse:

WHEN THERE HAS COME TO THEM A MESSENGER FROM GOD CONFIRMING WHAT WAS WITH THEM, A PARTY OF THEM THAT WERE GIVEN THE BOOK REJECT THE BOOK OF GOD BEHIND THEIR BACKS, AS THOUGH THEY KNEW NOT. [Q 2:101]

This verse is interpreted as referring to Muḥammad’s bringing the imperative of “servitude to his self” (*bi-l-‘ubūdiyya li-nafsihi*) in the realm of timeless Origination, which CONFIRMS not only that which is WITH YOU, but “that which came before and that which will come after you.” However, A PARTY OF THOSE to whom God had given the “possibility of shining by

⁴⁰ *Baqara* 219–20. It is surely not accidental to the *tafsīr* offered here that the word *wayl* represents a “corruption” of the word *walī*.

⁴¹ *Baqara* 220. Note how fire is transformed into a positive value, force as the “*walāya* of ‘Alī”.

⁴² al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-irshād* 125.

following the *walāya* of ‘Alī,” REJECT THE BOOK of his *walāya* BEHIND the False *Walāya*.⁴³

At verse 102, the Bāb makes a series of comments relevant to the frequently encountered notions of Exclusive and Inclusive Unity. Here the terms are seen to refer to True and False *Walāya* respectively. It is interesting that in this way, even False *Walāya* has some positive aspects:

SOLOMON DISBELIEVED NOT, BUT THE SATANS DISBELIEVED, TEACHING THE PEOPLE SORCERY, AND THAT WHICH WAS SENT DOWN UPON BABYLON’S TWO ANGELS, HARUT AND MARUT; THEY TAUGHT NOT ANY MAN, WITHOUT THEY SAID, ‘WE ARE BUT A TEMPTATION; DO NOT DISBELIEVE.’ FROM THEM THEY LEARNED HOW THEY MIGHT DIVIDE A MAN AND HIS WIFE, YET THEY DID NOT HURT ANY MAN THEREBY, SAVE BY THE LEAVE OF GOD, AND THEY LEARNED WHAT HURT THEM, AND DID NOT PROFIT THEM, KNOWING WELL THAT WHOSO BUYS IT SHALL HAVE NO SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME; EVIL THEN WAS THAT WHICH THEY SOLD THEMSELVES FOR, IF THEY HAD BUT KNOWN. [Q 2:102]

AND THAT WHICH WAS SENT DOWN UPON BABYLON’S TWO ANGELS, HARUT AND MARUT; THEY LEARNED, FROM THE TWO, HOW THEY MIGHT DIVIDE A MAN AND HIS WIFE, is an allusion to the one who abides in the land of the Two Gulfs⁴⁴ because it is he who understands [the relationship between] the Exclusively Unitary Lordship and the servitude of the self.⁴⁵ Yet they, i.e., the people of the Inclusive Unity, did no HARM in the place (*mash’ar*) where the perception of his Lord occurs,⁴⁶ namely through the *walāya* of ANY ONE of the Infernal Imāms, SAVE BY THE LEAVE OF GOD, that is (*ay*) the *walāya* of ‘Alī.

And he who FOLLOWS the *walāya* of the False One, has indeed LEARNED WHAT HURT him, from hating the Truth⁴⁷ AND [that the only thing which] PROFITS him (i.e., the only thing he gains) is Hell and the deprivation (*ḥirmān*) of the meeting with God.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Baqara* 242.

⁴⁴ I.e., ‘Alī: *al-wāqif fi arḍ al-taṭanjayn*. On the famous, influential and highly abstruse Sermon of the Two Gulfs (*Khuṭbat al-taṭanjīyya* or *tuṭanjīyya* or *tuṭanjīyya*) see the pioneering study of Corbin in *Intineraire* 113–18. See also the comments in Lawson, *The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty*. For the importance of this motif in the Bāb’s *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*.

⁴⁵ L 18: *mush’ir bi-l-rubūbiyya al-aḥadiyya wa-l-’ubūdiyya al-naḥsāniyya; Baqara* 245: *mush’iratun*. . . . On ‘Alī and the *arḍ al-taṭanjayn*, see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse* ch. 3.

⁴⁶ *Fī mash’ari al-naẓari bi-rabbi-hi min aḥadin*. On the translation of *mash’ar* see Corbin, *Le livre des pénétrations* 41–4.

⁴⁷ So L 18: *mā yaḍurruhu ‘an buḥd al-ḥaaq; Baqara* 245 and I 338: *mā yaḍurruhu ‘an bu’d al-ḥaaq*; cf. 91b: *mā yaḍurruhu ba’d al-ḥaaq*.

⁴⁸ *Baqara* 245.

Some notice of the way the Bāb introduces these comments is in order, inasmuch as they may reveal something of the way he saw himself at this time:

As for the *tafsīr* of this blessed verse, it is as profound as the profundity of Origination itself, glorified be its Originator. And behold! I am the one who can explain its reality and wisdom.⁴⁹

WALĀYA OF THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD

In the above discussion of False Walāya, the term Walāya of the First (*walāyat al-awwal*) was encountered. As mentioned above, this designation has a double reference. On the historical level, it alludes to the fact of Abū Bakr's acceptance of the caliphate upon the death of Muḥammad, becoming thereby the first successor to the Prophet. In what Corbin calls the metahistorical dimension, we have already seen that this primacy also refers to the first act of disobedience at the time of the creation of Adam, when God commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before the first man. Taken in this sense, the figure of Abū Bakr acquires the features of the symbol of a cosmic principle of rebelliousness to God's command, which puts him quite beyond the concerns of simple sectarian polemic.⁵⁰ In addition to these two aspects of the designation "First," the term carries with it a certain element of irony in that as a theological term, it is one of the recognized names (*asmā'*) of God.⁵¹ Furthermore, in normal discourse, it is used as a positive adjective of primacy in the sense of "foremost" or "most important." Is this another case of apocalyptic reversal at the level of semantics/rhetoric? The word is used frequently in this last sense in the *tafsīr*, as for example at verse 3, in the Bāb's discussion of the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), where the Bāb says that *ṣalāt* is the first or foremost station of distinction between God and the lover.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Baqara* 244. Such statements, while not frequent, occur several times in the *tafsīr*.

⁵⁰ For example, his identification as Iblis brings with it a whole series of extremely complex questions revolving around the problem of the way this figure is to be understood in: [1] The Qur'an, [2] Islamic Theology, [3] Mysticism and Theosophy, and the implications all this might have for an adequate appreciation of the problem of evil in Islamicate philosophy. For an introduction to the figure of "the devil" in Islam, see P. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*.

⁵¹ E.g., Q 57:3: HE IS THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE OUTWARD AND THE INWARD.

⁵² *Baqara* 25.

By way of further clarification, the Bāb discusses the Qur'ānic *al-ākhirā*, which may be thought of as the opposite of *al-awwal*. At verse 4, the Bāb says of the word **HEREAFTER** that it is in fact a designation of 'Alī. His *walāya* is the thing that was revealed to Muḥammad, and God has raised no prophet, nor revealed any book or command, except through the *walāya* of 'Alī.⁵³ Thus it would appear to carry the idea of "I am the alpha and the omega" with the emphasis here on omega.

One of the earliest allusions to the *walāya* of the First is found in the Bāb's commentary at verse 24. This is one of the so-called *taḥaddī* verses in which those who doubt the divine source of Muḥammad's revelation are challenged to produce something comparable:

IF YOU DO NOT—AND YOU WILL NOT—THEN FEAR THE FIRE, WHOSE FUEL IS MEN AND STONES, PREPARED FOR UNBELIEVERS. [Q 2:24]

Interestingly, the Bāb shifts the reference away from the Qur'ānic challenge, and discusses the verse in the following terms:

God [here] provides information [*akhbara*] about their *kufṛ* [and His statement may be phrased this way]: "IF YOU DO NOT accept the depth of the Exclusive Unity in the contingent aspect of your beings (*inkānikum*) THEN YOU WILL NEVER recognize the absolute *walāya* of 'Alī in the actualized aspect of your beings (*akwānikum*). THEN FEAR [heed > *ittaḡū*] THE FIRE of the call (*da'wa*) of Ḥusayn on the Day of Ashura. And if you do not HEED, God will make this retreat (*idbār*) the FIRE of the love of the First (*maḥabbat al-awwal*), [and] WHOSE FUEL, is the Second ('Umar) AND STONES [will be] the Third ('Uthmān). God has PREPARED the love (*ḥubb*) of these three FOR UNBELIEVERS.⁵⁴

Although the word *walāya* is not used here, a substitute or related term "love" (*maḥabba*, i.e., of the First), is clearly opposed to the idea of the Absolute *Walāya* of 'Alī. The commentary on this verse also carries one of the earliest references to the related negative designations of the "Second" and the "Third," and illustrates one of the more frequent exegetical techniques used by the Bāb, who many times exploits a series of substantives in order to more fully elaborate his theme. Here the Qur'ānic FIRE, FUEL, AND STONES are each considered separately. Through the sin of ingratitude (*kufṛ*), love is transformed into an infernal flame. It is not clear whether the equating of 'Umar with FUEL, while 'Uthmān is associated with STONES, represents a significant gradation. One of the more important

⁵³ *Baqara* 35.

⁵⁴ *Baqara* 85.

aspects of this section of the Bāb's commentary is the equivalence *walāya/maḥabba*. Either term can be positive or negative, as in the case here of wrongly-directed love, which ultimately becomes FIRE. Love as a synonym for *walāya* is of course not new with the Bāb,⁵⁵ but it is important that this aspect of *walāya* be constantly kept in mind as a means of holding the other connotations of the term, such as "authority" and "power" in perspective.⁵⁶ It is this equivalence that led Corbin to state that Shī'ism is pre-eminently a religion of love.⁵⁷ This is, of course, a very large assertion and one that must be considered in the somewhat rarified context of Corbin's key sources. However, insofar as devotion to the *walāya* of the Imām represents, in essence, an act of love, the assertion stands. In the commentary immediately preceding this section, the idea of primal evil is also brought out:

AND IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT CONCERNING WHAT WE HAVE SENT DOWN ON OUR SERVANT, THEN BRING A SURA LIKE IT, AND CALL YOUR WITNESSES, APART FROM GOD, IF YOU ARE TRUTHFUL. [Q 2:23]

DOUBT (*rayb*), we are told, is the quality of the First (*ṣifat al-awwal*) and his followers.⁵⁸ The verse is then paraphrased:

O those of YOU WHO ARE IN DOUBT and non-recognition⁵⁹ CONCERNING THAT WHICH WAS SENT DOWN UPON OUR SERVANT Muḥammad touching the *walāya* of 'Alī! [If you are in doubt] THEN search through all the contingent worlds. Is it possible that there is anyone equal to 'Alī in the matter of the caliphate? If it is possible, then prove it through your witnesses (*fa-tarifū bi-shuhadā'i-kum*) from among those you have set up as signs of your Lord (*āyāt rabbikum*) aside from 'Alī, IF YOU ARE TRUTHFUL.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ E.g., the discussion of *walāya* in al-Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār* 337–8. The author also says that *wilāya* means "assistance" (*al-nuṣra*), and *walāya* means "sovereignty" (*al-imāra, al-sultān*). On *maḥabba* as descriptive of the dynamic which binds the believer to his Imām, whether true or false, see Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Ziyāra* 190.

⁵⁶ "Love" corresponds to allegiance, i.e., *tawallin*, or "following"; it goes from the lower to the higher. "Authority" proceeds from the higher to the lower. On the several intentions of *walāya*, see Landolt, *Walāyah*.

⁵⁷ Corbin, *En Islam iranien* 1, 329.

⁵⁸ *Baqara* 84. *Furū'* = "followers".

⁵⁹ *Inkār*, the classic term used to describe the attitude of the early enemies of the Shī'a who refused to acknowledge 'Alī.

⁶⁰ *Baqara* 84.

At this commentary “love” is also associated with *walāya*. The Bāb says:

None can attain to the Depth of the Exclusive Divine Unity (*hujjat al-ahādīyya*) except by means of his (‘Alī’s) *walāya*. It is the goal (*maqṣūd*) of your existence (*wujūdi-kum*), because God has made you for the sake of this love (*maḥabba*). And He has put His life (*ḥayātuhu*) and His glory (*‘izzuhu*) in it, to the extent that such is possible in the contingent world—IF ONLY YOU WERE TRUTHFUL—(MEANING) IF ONLY YOU KNEW.⁶¹

At verse 27, the First is identified as the one who first broke the covenant of God (not in historical time but in primordial time), and as such has significance for the above-mentioned metahistorical dimension of sacred history:

SUCH AS BREAK THE COVENANT OF GOD AFTER ITS SOLEMN BINDING, AND SUCH AS CUT WHAT GOD HAS COMMANDED SHOULD BE JOINED, AND SUCH AS DO CORRUPTION IN THE LAND—THEY SHALL BE THE LOSERS. [Q 2:27]

The Bāb says that the phrase: THOSE WHO BROKE THE COVENANT refers to the COVENANT (‘*ahd*) of Muḥammad, about the signs of ‘Alī and was instituted in the world of *al-ghayb*:

These signs were placed within (*fī*) the atoms (*dharr*) of the hearts [which represents] the station (*maqām*) of *tawḥīd*, and [in] the atoms of the intellects [which represents] the level (*rutba*) of *nubuwwa*, and [in] the atoms of souls [which represents] the abode of *imāma*, and [in] the atoms of the bodies [which represents] the place (*maḥall*) of the love of the Shī‘a AFTER God imposed this SOLEMN BINDING upon all created things [which is] faith in Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Ja‘far, Mūsā, and Fāṭima. THEY SHALL BE the disbelievers (*kāfirūn* instead of *KHĀSIRŪN*, all *mss.*).⁶²

The first who broke the covenant of God in the contingent world in all of its stations, from the sign of *tawḥīd* to the last limit of multiplicity was Abū al-Dawāhī, may God curse him. He broke the covenant of God concerning His friends in the worlds of *AL-GHAYB* and CUT the *walāya* of ‘Alī in his visible manifestations (*fī maḥāhirihi*, *sic*) namely the Imāms of the visible world (*a‘immat al-shahāda*)...⁶³

⁶¹ *Baqara* 84–5.

⁶² *Baqara* 94. This statement is of course an affirmation of the doctrine of the four supports for which the Shaykhiyya is well known. On the spiritual significance of *dharr* in early Šūfism, see G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence*. “Atoms” is not a completely satisfactory translation, “seeds” being more suited to the idea of “development” which is intended here.

⁶³ *Baqara* 94–5.

With this commentary we encounter another designation of Abū Bakr—Abū al-Dawāhī. The Bāb refers to the first Caliph this way throughout the commentary, just as ‘Umar is often called Abū al-Shurūr (“Father of Evils”). It is not likely that these derogatory names are inventions of the Bāb, although I have not found them elsewhere.⁶⁴

At verse 34, in one of the several brief citations of the famous *Khuṭba al-shiqshiqiyya* that appear in the *tafsīr*, the *khuṭba* is quoted in connection with the Divine command to the angels to prostrate before Adam. All of the angels bowed except Iblīs, “that is the First, and he is the one about whom ‘Alī said: ‘Verily Ibn Abī Quḥāfa,’—and he is Abū al-Dawāhī—‘assumed the mantle (*la-qad taqammaṣahā*)’ [i.e., of the caliphate].”⁶⁵ This *Khuṭba* is found in the canonical *Nahj al-balāgha* and is referred to often by Shī‘ī writers. It begins as follows:

By God! that man snatched the caliphate as if it were a garment which could be put on by him, while all the while he knew that my station was like that of the pivot (*quṭb*) of the grinding stone.⁶⁶

Although no name, apart from *fulān* (“so-and-so”) is mentioned here, the statement is universally understood as referring to Abū Bakr, as ‘Abduh himself points out.⁶⁷ The *Khuṭba* continues to explain how the next two Caliphs wrongfully usurped ‘Alī’s position and the reasons for which this was tolerated by the Imām. The title of the sermon is derived in the following way. ‘Alī’s condemnation and lament was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger with a letter which ‘Alī then read, breaking off the address. After ‘Alī had read the letter, Ibn ‘Abbās asked him to resume his theme to which the Imām replied: “In no way, in no way. It was like the foam on the camel’s mouth (*shiqshiqā*) as it opens its mouth to bellow and then falls silent.”⁶⁸

The next mention of the First occurs at verses 41 and 42, which are separated in the text by their respective commentaries, but are presented together here for convenience:

⁶⁴ The first three Caliphs are frequently called *fulān* in the Akhbārī literature which has been published. Whether the manuscript sources of this literature contain other less neutral names, is something that can only be speculated upon.

⁶⁵ *Baqara* 131–2.

⁶⁶ The edition used here is the one by Muḥammad ‘Abduh and printed in Beirut (n.d.) 1, 30–8, material translated found on 30–1. Cf. al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād* 212, where Ibn Abi Quḥāfa (Abū Bakr) is mentioned by name.

⁶⁷ *Nahj al-balāgha* 1, 31.

⁶⁸ *Nahj al-balāgha* 1, 37 as translated in al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād* 213.

AND BELIEVE IN THAT WHICH I HAVE SENT DOWN, CONFIRMING THAT WHICH IS WITH YOU, AND BE NOT THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT. AND SELL NOT MY SIGNS FOR A LITTLE PRICE; AND FEAR YOU ME. [Q 2:41] AND DO NOT CONFOUND THE TRUTH WITH VANITY, AND DO NOT CONCEAL THE TRUTH WITTINGLY. [Q 2:42]

The FIRST [here positive!] that was sent down from God was the sign of the Divine Ipseity (*āyat hūwiyya*). And it⁶⁹ is the sign of the *walāya* belonging to ‘Alī (*li-‘Alī*). And it is this sign⁷⁰ which is CONFIRMING⁷¹ THAT WHICH IS WITH YOU through servitude to God.

And God placed the pre-existent form⁷² of this sign in all created things, for [effecting] faith thereby in order that he [the individual thing] might annihilate⁷³ and forget all things through its undying holiness (*li-baqā’i-hā*) and its (the *āya*’s) REMEMBRANCE.

And he who turned away from it (*a’raḍa ‘anhā*), was THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT⁷⁴ (*walāya* or *āya*). [And none in *al-imbkân* but Abū al-Dawāhī, may the curse of God be upon him, turned away from it FIRST. And for that reason, he became THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN HIM/IT].⁷⁵

And God commanded His servants to BE NOT (*lā takūnū*) like him, because whoever turns away from the sign of the Family of God becomes (*fa-huwa*) a sign of the First, and becomes [also] THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ *Baqara* 169; *I* 278 and *L* 5 = *hiya*; cf. 69a = *huwa*.

⁷⁰ It is important to bear in mind the two meanings of *āya*: sign or verse. The statement undoubtedly connotes a reference to those verses which are interpreted by the Shī’a to be “explicit” confirmations of ‘Alī’s appointment by Muḥammad, e.g., Q 5:55.

⁷¹ Cf. 69a = *muṣaddiq^{an}* as Qur’ān. All other *mss.*: *musaddiqat^{an}* to agree with *āya*.

⁷² *Shabaḥ*, but it is susceptible of eventual life.

⁷³ *Baqara* 169; *yafnā*; cf. 63b: *nafā*.

⁷⁴ Cf. 63b: *bi-hi*; all other *mss.* = *bi-hā*.

⁷⁵ [—] represents a lacuna in cf. 63b. This folio contains several errors or variants and it is therefore doubtful that this gap represents any attempt at bowdlerization. Other errors on this folio to be found are at lines 4–6, which present an exact duplication of the previous four lines and the variants mentioned in the two previous notes. Perhaps this portion of the *ms.* was written under some kind of stress?

⁷⁶ *Baqara* 169. Cf. al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 91, #2 where a similar idea is conveyed by referring to Abū Bakr as “*fulān*”. This particular *khbar* is of some interest. It is preserved in ‘Ayyāshī’s *tafsīr* of the authority of the important disciple of al-Ṣādiq, Jābir al-Ju’fī (d. 128/745) who asked the Imām al-Bāqir about the explanation of the verse from the esoteric point of view (*sa’altu Abā Ja’far ‘an tafsīr hādhihi-l-āyat fi bāṭin al-Qur’ān*). The Imām’s response helps us understand exactly how the word *bāṭin* was used: “AND BE NOT THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN HIM, that is, so-and-so and his companion (*sāhib*), and whoever follows him and subjects himself to their claim (*wa man dāna bi-dīni-him*). God reproves such by saying BE NOT THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT, that is [the pronoun stands for] ‘Alī.”

And those who SELL THE SIGNS of God by looking to other than the Family of God, have SOLD FOR A SMALL PRICE [which is the price of] the vision of *walāya* itself (or, the *āya* itself: *bi-ru'yati nafsi-hā*).⁷⁷

Verily he who accepts (*al-rāḍī*) permanence (*baqā'*) in the stages (*aṭwār*) of the *ṭamṭām* of the Inclusive Unity of the stations (*maqāmāt*) of Mercifulness, such a one has then SOLD the signs of the Exclusive Unity for the PRICE OF the Inclusive Unity. And this is [a] SMALL [price].⁷⁸

And ME (*īyyāya*) is (*ay*) the depth (*lujja*) of the Exclusive Unity.

And FEAR YE [refers to the fact] that the servant will never perfect pious fear (*taqwā*) except when he is firmly established in the cloud (*'amā*) of the Eternal Refuge (*al-ṣamadīyya*). Otherwise, as long as he continues to travel throughout the *aṭwār* of the Inclusive Unity he will continue to abide (*huwa al-wāqif*) in the station of limitation (*mash'ar al-ḥadd*). And God has forbidden the People of Love (*ahl al-maḥabba*) from this station (*al-mawqif*) with His statement FEAR YOU ME.⁷⁹

The word of God (*kalām al-ḥaqq*) is the creation (*ījād*) of the thing. And the TRUTH (*al-ḥaqq*) is the *walāya* of 'Alī and the VANITY (*al-bāṭil*) is the *walāya* of the First. God commanded His servants: "Do not try to understand

⁷⁷ I.e., they have lost the vision of 'Alī and gained a small price instead. *Baqara* 169–70. The act of regarding anything else, insofar as anything else is incapable of satisfying spiritual need, is a trifling recompense. N.b. cf. 63b: *bi-āyati nafsihi*.

⁷⁸ The Bāb adapts the grammar of the Qur'ān to mean that price is now the thing acquired. *Baqara* 170. These terms have been dealt with elsewhere, except for perhaps *aṭwār*, plural of *ṭawr*. On this word in 'Ayn *al-Quḍāt* see T. Izutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things* 126; cf. Isfarāyini, *Le Rélévateur des mystères*, q.v. index "coeur, sphères du, *adwār-i dīl*".

⁷⁹ The term *'amā* has a rich and complex history. As this word is frequently encountered in the writings of the Bab, Bahā'ullāh, and other Bahā'ī authors, some reference to this history is in order. The word figures in a *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet:

He was asked: "Where was our Lord before He created creation?" The Prophet answered: "In *al-'amā* having no air above or beneath it."

A part of this tradition is quoted by Ibn 'Arabi (*Fuṣūṣ* 1, 111) and al-Kāshānī, who cites it in a shorter form (the editor of *al-Iṣṭilāḥāt* gives a variant: "... having air above it and beneath it.") in the above form, comments as follows:

al-'amā is the level (*ḥadira*) of the Exclusive Unity, according to us.... It is said that it is the level of the Inclusive Unity which is the place where the divine names and attributes appear, because *al-'amā* is a thin cloud (*al-ghaim al-raḥīq*), and this cloud is a screen between heaven and earth. Therefore this level is a screen between the heaven of the Exclusive Unity and the earth of creaturely multiplicity, about which not even the [above] *ḥadīth* from the Prophet is very helpful. (al-Kāshānī, *al-Iṣṭilāḥāt* 131–2.)

Izutsu's translation, "abysmal darkness" (*Sufism and Taoism* 119) and Austin's "The Dark Cloud" (*The Bezels of Wisdom* 134) do not convey the diaphanous quality which al-Kāshānī emphasizes, suggesting a thin cloud at such a high altitude that it seems to appear and disappear from one moment to the next. A recent discussion of the use of the term in Bābī and Bahā'ī literature is Lambden, *An Early Poem of Mirza Husayn 'Ali Bahā'u'llāh*.

the sign of your own *tawhīd* by means of a quality of the contingent world (*ṣifat al-inkān*), nor be oblivious of the depth of the Exclusive Unity, WITTINGLY.”

Verily, whatever is other than it is VANITY, while it is the TRUTH and the ultimate goal of the bounty of the Lord (*ḥayd al-rabb*).

And the one who looks with other than the eye of God CONFOUNDS TRUTH WITH VANITY and CONCEALS THE TRUTH after God had taught him the *walāya* of ‘Alī, . . . THEN HOW ARE YOU TURNED ABOUT (Q 10:32).⁸⁰

Another mention of the First, in connection with the topic of *walāya*, is at verse 51:

AND WHEN WE APPOINTED WITH MOSES FORTY NIGHTS, THEN YOU TOOK TO YOURSELVES THE CALF AFTER HIM AND YOU WERE EVILDOERS. [Q 2:51]

Here MOSES means Muḥammad and the FORTY NIGHTS represent ‘Alī, who lived for “thirty years after the death of Muḥammad” plus the ten “Proofs” (*ḥujaj*) who were his progeny and successors. Together these eleven Imāms represent the period when “their glory was concealed by the darkness of disbelief” (i.e, the FORTY NIGHTS). The CALF (*al-‘ijl*) is none other than Abū al-Dawāhī. Finally, this darkness of disbelief will be relieved by the advent (*ḥuhūr*) of the Day of the Qā’im. “When God causes his Cause (*amr*) to come forth, what I have only hinted at will clearly appear.”⁸¹

Similar comments may be found throughout the *tafsīr*, notably at Q 2:58, where the TRANSGRESSIONS which God promises to FORGIVE are precisely those resulting from the *walāyat al-bāṭil*. Here *walāya* would seem to mean the “act” of following the wrong Imām.⁸² Reference is again made to the *Khuṭbat al-shiqshiqiyya* in the commentary on Q 2:59, where the EVILDOERS are those who SUBSTITUTED A SAYING (*qawl*) by following the one who WRONGLY “put on the mantle of the caliphate.”⁸³ Here the Bāb also invokes the Shī’ī *taḥrīf al-Qur’ān* tradition:

⁸⁰ *Baqara* 170–1. The complete verse is: THAT THEN IS GOD, YOUR LORD, THE TRUE; WHAT IS THERE, AFTER TRUTH, BUT ERROR? THEN HOW ARE YOU TURNED ABOUT? The allusion is particularly deft because of the obvious similarity in terminology, obvious only to those who “swim in the sea of the Qur’ān,” because the first part of the verse is not mentioned!

⁸¹ A possible reference to the Bāb’s future claims. *Baqara* 183–4. On the connotations of *Zuhūr* see al-‘Amilī al-İṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir’āt al-anwār* 227, where in addition to the ideas of “appearance” and “advent,” are mentioned “dispensation” and “victory” and where its *ta’wīl* is related to *al-bāb*.

⁸² *Baqara* 190. See below, however, where the Bāb says that disbelief in the *walāya* of ‘Alī will never be forgiven.

⁸³ *Baqara* 191.

Abū Ja'far said: "Gabriel originally brought this verse to Muḥammad in the following way: 'The evildoers substituted the right of the family of Muḥammad with a statement which had not been said to them. So We sent down upon those who perpetrated evil against the family of Muḥammad wrath out of heaven for their ungodliness.'"⁸⁴

This tradition is found in three of the four major *Akḥbārī* commentaries studied at length elsewhere.⁸⁵ Not only does its use here by the Bāb indicate that our author probably consulted other commentaries while writing this one, but it presents a good example of the way in which *Akḥbārī* commentators bolstered their claim that "the Qur'ān which we have in our hands is not the whole Qur'ān."⁸⁶

The commentary on verse 79 identifies the three separate mentions of WOE (*al-wayl*) with the first three caliphs.⁸⁷ Elsewhere we are told that the refusal to recognize (*inkār*) the *walāya* of 'Alī is accounted by God as "all transgressions." He who, in verse 81 is described as being ENCOMPASSED BY HIS TRANSGRESSION is in this condition because he EARNED "the *walāya* of the First." Similarly, the FIRE OF HELL is the subsequent "*walāya* of the Second."⁸⁸ To explain further this verse, the Bāb quotes a *ḥadīth* from an anonymous Imām:

When they disputed the Imāmate of the Commander of the Faithful THOSE WERE THE INHABITANTS OF THE FIRE, THERE THEY SHALL DWELL FOREVER.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *Baqara* 191.

⁸⁵ Lawson, Akhbari Shi'i Approaches to Tafsir.

⁸⁶ See above "Background". For this particular report ascribed to the fifth Imām, see: Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi fī tafsīr kalām Allāh al-wāfi* 32–3; al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 104, #2; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 70, #214. Curiously, the only *ḥadīth* presented for this verse in *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* is *Burhān* #2. The *isnād* may be of some interest: Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb (i.e., Kulaynī); Aḥmad ibn Mihrān (3rd cent. traditionist); 'Abd al-'Azīm ibn 'Abd Allāh; Muḥammad ibn al-Fuḍayl (follower of al-Ṣādiq, Mūsā and Riḍā. Regarded as reliable); Abū Hamza (Naṣir al-Khādīm seems to have been a servant of al-'Askarī; or, al-Thumālī (Thābit b. Dinār) follower of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq; al-Bāqir. (Information on these figures is taken from al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād*, q.v. biographical index.)

al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 25, speaks of Jews and Christians as the *fāsiqīn* intended here. Somewhat closer to the tradition in the Bāb's *tafsīr* is *al-'Askarī*, margin of al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 87. He identifies the WRONGDOERS as those who were not accounted in the *walāya* of Muḥammad and 'Alī, and their descendents.

⁸⁷ *Baqara* 219–20, quoted above.

⁸⁸ *Baqara* 221.

⁸⁹ *Baqara* 221. This *ḥadīth* is found in al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 160, #2 and al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 79, #258.

The Bāb then says:

And the secret of the thing I will now explain. It is that the Garden which the Merciful promised to His servants, to all others equally, [including] the Family of God, is the shadow of the body of Ḥusayn.

And the seven hells are similarly for the First and his manifestation (*maẓhar*). Verily God created them from the *kufr* of the body of al-Yazīd⁹⁰ (*sic*) may he be accursed and chastised.⁹¹

He who confesses to the *walāya* of ‘Alī will have entered the [paradise of the] GOOD PLEASURE [of God] (*al-riḏwān*), and he who rejects will have entered the Fires [of Hell] (*al-nūrān*). And that is the order of things firmly established (*taqdīr maḥtūm*) by one Mighty, Wise.⁹²

At the commentary on verse 85, we find another mention of these three:

THEN THERE YOU ARE KILLING ONE ANOTHER, AND EXPELLING A PARTY OF YOU FROM THEIR HABITATIONS, CONSPIRING AGAINST THEM IN SIN AND ENMITY; AND IF THEY COME TO YOU AS CAPTIVES, YOU RANSOM THEM; YET THEIR EXPULSION WAS FORBIDDEN YOU. WHAT, DO YOU BELIEVE IN PART OF THE BOOK, AND DISBELIEVE IN PART? WHAT SHALL BE THE RECOMPENSE OF THOSE OF YOU WHO DO THAT, BUT DEGRADATION IN THE PRESENT LIFE, AND ON THE DAY OF RESURRECTION TO BE RETURNED UNTO THE MOST TERRIBLE OF CHASTISEMENT? AND GOD IS NOT HEEDLESS OF THE THINGS YOU DO. [Q 2:85]

And the addressee (*al-mukhātab*) is the First and his companions [with the meaning]: YOU KILLED THE sign of ‘Alī, despite what God placed in YOURSELVES (*anfusi-kum*) after the Messenger of God had already taught you, “who of you knows best his self, is he who knows best his Lord”⁹³

... But, you were CONSPIRING AGAINST THEM with the polytheists by means of the *walāya* of SIN AND ENMITY. And SIN is the Second and ENMITY is the Third.

AND IF THEY COME TO YOU AS CAPTIVES—namely the people who do not know the Imām—YOU RANSOM THEM with the *walāya* of YOURSELVES. And in the estimation of God, this has been FORBIDDEN (*muḥarram*) TO YOU. Thus YOU EXPELLED THEM FROM the *walāya* of ‘Alī, after you had acquainted

⁹⁰ Sic. The reference is to Yazīd, son of and successor to the first Umayyad caliph Mu‘awiyya. He was the caliph responsible for the massacre of Ḥusayn, his family and entourage at Karbalā’ in 681. On the importance of this event in Shī‘ī Heilsgeschichte see M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*.

⁹¹ *Baqara* 222, and all *mss.*: *min kufri jismi-l-Yazīd*.

⁹² *Baqara* 221–2. Quite apart from its content, the tone of this first-person statement by the Bāb could suggest that he is claiming access to divine knowledge.

⁹³ *Baqara* 226–7: *a’rafukum bi-nafsihī a’arafukum bi-rabbihī*.

them with the *nubuwwa* of Muḥammad, for the sake of your own trusteeship (*wiṣāya*).

WHAT, DO YOU BELIEVE IN SOME OF THE BOOK after God has already taught you that it (*innahā* = “false *wiṣāya*”) is an ACCURSED TREE [Q 17:60] in the Qur’ān?⁹⁴

AND DISBELIEVE IN PART after God had already taught you that IN THE MOTHER OF THE BOOK, WITH US IT/HE IS ‘ALĪ INDEED, WISE.⁹⁵

AND GOD IS NOT HEEDLESS OF THE THINGS YOU DO in “donning the mantle” of *walāya* (*qamiṣ al-walāya*) by usurping it for themselves.⁹⁶

And they will meet with the justice of ‘Alī for their wrongdoing. He who veils anyone from the Remembrance of God, or the Remembrance of the Family of God, or the Remembrance of their Shī’a, then [he] will expel him from his HABITATIONS, AND HIS REWARD ON THE DAY OF RESURRECTION will be THE MOST TERRIBLE CHASTISEMENT, for what their hands have earned.⁹⁷ AND GOD IS NOT HEEDLESS OF THE THINGS THEY DO.

And verily al-Šādiq said, concerning the external (*zāhir*) meaning, that this verse was sent down about Abū Dharr, may God be merciful to him, and ‘Uthmān.⁹⁸

This *ḥadīth* deals only with the exoteric aspects (*wa amru-hu zāhirun*), and this is not the place (*al-maqām*) for the (full) revelation of its meaning (*li-izhāri amri-hi*). The point is that the universal fundamental principles (*qawā’idu kulliyatun*) have rained down (*tarashshaha*) in this verse. The

⁹⁴ Cf. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* 267 where Goldziher points out that the “*shajaratun ma’lūnatun*” is identified in some early Shī’ī *tafsīr* with the Umayyads.

⁹⁵ *Baqara* 227. The reference here is to Q 43:4: *wa innahu fi ummi-l-kitābi ladaynā la-‘alīyyun ḥakīmun*. In the Qur’ān, the pronoun refers to *al-kitāb al-mubīn* and *qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan*. It seems clear from the context that this translation is justified. See now Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 30, who cites material upholding the idea that the name ‘Alī is directly derived from the Divine name *al-‘Alī* and that such a derivation has permanent consequences for the spiritual dignity or charge of the name. The Bāb here and elsewhere depends upon such traditions throughout his commentary both here and in later works. See also the recently published book by Rajab Bursi (d. 1411), *al-Durr al-thamīn fi khams-mi’at āyāt nazalat fi Amīr al-Mu’minīn*, edited by ‘Alī ‘Āshūr, Beirut, 1422/2003.

⁹⁶ *Baqara* 227. N.b. the allusion to the *Khuṭbat al-shiqshiqiyya*. The symbol of *qamiṣ* has an important place in the story of Joseph, and the Bāb’s commentary on it, see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*.

⁹⁷ *Baqara* 228. Notice the prominence of “Remembrance” (*dhikr*) here. The Bāb was later to assume the word as a title. See Lawson, *The Terms*, mentioned above.

⁹⁸ Cf. al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 124 #3 where in the *tafsīr* of Qummī, this verse is said to have come down about Abū Dharr and ‘Uthmān. A very long report on this verse in which Abū Dharr and ‘Uthmān figure prominently may be found in al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 80–3, #271. See also Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 27–8.

believer recognizes his ('Alī's) cause through these HABITATIONS (*fī khilāli tilka al-diyār*).⁹⁹

Beginning at verse 90, a series of verses gives rise to comments in which the First, Second and Third are mentioned:

EVIL IS THE THING THEY HAVE SOLD THEMSELVES FOR, DISBELIEVING IN THAT WHICH GOD SENT DOWN, GRUDGING THAT GOD SHOULD SEND DOWN OF HIS BOUNTY ON WHOMSOEVER HE WILL OF HIS SERVANTS, AND THEY WERE LADEN WITH ANGER UPON ANGER; AND FOR UNBELIEVERS AWAITS A HUMBLING CHASTISEMENT. [Q 2:90]

Verily, those who desire the sign of the Inclusive Unity over the sign of the Exclusive Unity: EVIL IS THE THING THEY HAVE SOLD THEMSELVES FOR, namely, that sign of the Lord which is intended in the statement "He who knows it, knows God."¹⁰⁰ Namely, that THEIR polytheistic SOULS (*bi-anfusihim al-mushrikati*) are the [collective] sign of the Infernal Caliphs (*khulafā' al-nār*). They call upon the armies of Satan¹⁰¹ to disbelieve in WHAT GOD HAS SENT DOWN concerning the *walāya* of 'Alī, GRUDGING stubbornly that which GOD SENDS DOWN OUT OF HIS BOUNTY, that is, his ('Alī's) *walāya*,¹⁰² ON WHOMSOEVER HE WILL. And the Lord will only to send it down upon the Family of God [who are] HIS SERVANTS. As for the other one, if they want his *walāya*, they will be LADEN WITH ANGER that is the Second, UPON ANGER, that is the Third, AND FOR those who swerved from the *walāya* of 'Alī, THERE AWAITS A HUMBLING CHASTISEMENT. And that is the *walāya* of the First.¹⁰³

Abū Ja'far said: "Gabriel originally came down to the Messenger of God with this verse: 'Evil is the thing they have sold themselves for, that they disbelieve in what God has sent down concerning 'Alī grudgingly.'¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Or: "The believer in his *amr* recognizes them (the *qawā'id*) within these habitations." *Baqara* 228.

¹⁰⁰ *Baqara* 232: *man 'arafa-hā fa-qad 'arafa Allāha*. The feminine pronoun may refer either to *āya* or *nafs*. In the latter case this statement is an allusion to the 'He who knows his self knows his Lord' tradition.

¹⁰¹ *Wa hum yad'ūna junūda-l-shaytān*; cf. Q 62:95.

¹⁰² *Min faḍli-hi = walāyata-hi*.

¹⁰³ *Baqara* 232–3; *Baqara* crosses out a repeat of '*adhāb muhīn ilā*, 233.

¹⁰⁴ Also in al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 169, #2 (= al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 86, #286, cf. also #282). The *isnād* in *Kitāb al-burhān*: Kulaynī, Qummī, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Barqī, his father, Muḥammad ibn Sinān 'Ammār ibn Marwān, al-Munkhal, Jābir, Bāqir. *al-Nūr al-abhā* gives the *isnād* as: *fī uṣūl al-kāfi bi-isnādi-hi 'an Munkhal 'an Jābir 'an Abī Ja'far*. The variant #3 in *Kitāb al-burhān* relates the last half of the verse to the Umayyads. Cf. Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 28, where there is no trace of this tradition in the appropriate place. The tradition, however, is also acknowledged in Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi fī tafsīr kalām Allāh al-wāfi* 39.

[The Bāb:]

I testify that this is the intention (*al-maqṣūd*) of these verses according to the Merciful, and exalted is God above what the polytheists say.

CONCLUSION

Enough examples have now been examined to support the following conclusions.

- (1) *Walāya* is one of the major themes of the commentary.
- (2) The radical interpretation of Qur'ānic passages as speaking directly to the subject of *walāya* has its roots in traditional Shī'ī literature.
- (3) The nature of the commentary on this theme exhibits certain features in common with the so-called *ghulāt*. In this regard the following summary from the *Kitāb al-irjā'*, written by the former leader of the *Mukhtāriyya*, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya (99/717) is pertinent. Although the term *ghulāt* is not used, the group is condemned for holding the following views:
 1. The belief that religion meant allegiance to the house of 'Alī, so that people ought to be loved or hated inasmuch as they were loyal or disloyal to that house. To this could be added the excommunication (*barā'a*) of the opponents of 'Alī among the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), especially the first three caliphs;
 2. The belief that the Prophet hid (*katama*) nine tenths of the Qur'ān and that they were guided to a new revelation (i.e., the claim that prophecy was possible after Muḥammad);
 3. The hope for a state that would be established in their favor in the future, in a general resurrection preceding the Day of Judgment.¹⁰⁵

While the second item is never stated in these terms in the Bāb's *tafsīr*, the several references to the corruption of the Qur'ān, i.e., as when the Bāb quotes a tradition that says "Gabriel came down with this verse thus," would seem to offer a functional parallel. The last, number 3, figures in the eventual claims of the Bāb, but we have seen, particularly in the commentary on Q 2:51, that the establishment of the "sovereignty" (*salṭana*) of the Qā'im is one of the themes of the commentary, as it is in so-called "orthodox"

¹⁰⁵ Quoted from al-Qāḍī, *The Development of the Term* 297.

Shī'ism. It has been argued, however, that the belief in the return of the hidden Imām was adopted as an "orthodox" doctrine by leading Shī'ī scholars in the Abbasid period, precisely because of the feeling that the interests of the Shī'a as a whole had been betrayed¹⁰⁶ and as an emblem of non-Ismā'īli allegiance.

The Shaykhīs themselves were of course accused of *ghuluww* by their mostly Uṣūlī adversaries.¹⁰⁷ It is interesting to note here that Shaykh Aḥmad (d. 1241/1826) takes pains to disassociate his teaching on the subject of *walāya* from what the "hyperbolistes" (*ghulāt*) say.¹⁰⁸ That the Bāb himself was sensitive to such accusations may be seen in his citation of a *ḥadīth* from Bāqir, the fifth Imām, which runs as follows:

O company of the Shī'a! Be a middle position (*al-numruqat al-wuṣṭā*) so that the one who has gone beyond (*al-ghālī*) might return to you and the one who has lagged behind (*al-tālī*) might catch up with you.¹⁰⁹

That such beliefs as those described above (and which inform much of Akhbārī Qur'ān commentary) were susceptible of being demonized as "extremist" is supported by the long section in the *Mir'āt al-anwār* (a late Safavid glossary of Qur'ānic vocabulary in the key of Akhbārism) in which the charges of *tafwīd* and *ghuluww* (which might otherwise be leveled against the work) are discussed and explained.¹¹⁰ Here the author says that those who occupy a "middle position" (*al-numruqat al-wuṣṭā*) are those who are able to appreciate the subtleties (*daqā'iq*) of his doctrine of the Imāmate.¹¹¹ Appeal is made to the famous tradition in which the Prophet declared "The words of the family of Muḥammad are exceedingly abstruse (*ṣa'b mustaṣ'ab*). No one understands or believes them except those angels who have been brought near (*al-muqarrabūn*), a sent (or true) Prophet (*al-nabī al-mursal*), or a servant whose heart has been tested by God."¹¹² This idea of the knowledge of the Imāms being "exceedingly difficult" is found in a very long *ḥadīth* quoted by the Bāb in the course of his commentary on Q 2:27.¹¹³ It is important to acknowledge these

¹⁰⁶ al-Qāḍī, *The Development of the Term* 306.

¹⁰⁷ V. Rafatī, *The Development of Shaykhī Thought* 194–5 and 214.

¹⁰⁸ Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Ziyāra* 188.

¹⁰⁹ *Baqara* 20.

¹¹⁰ al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār* 59–69.

¹¹¹ al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār* 60.

¹¹² al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār* 61. Cf. also the discussion of this *ḥadīth* in Crow, *The Teaching of the Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq* 119–20 n. 86.

¹¹³ *Baqara* 97.

so-called *ghuluww* aspects of the Bāb's *tafsīr*, in order to better understand the kinds of conditions in which he wrote, conditions which ultimately led to his own claim to *imāma*. It would appear that the Bāb is more involved in an internal Shī'ī debate, namely the one between the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs, which by this time had become more of a *Shaykhī*/*Bālā-sarī* argument,¹¹⁴ than a direct criticism of Sunnī Islam, though this would not be absent from the discourse.

More pertinent to this study however, are the methods by which the Bāb radicalized the meaning of the Qur'ān on the issue of *walāya*. These include the exegetical tools of allegory and typology. A recent discussion of typology as a method of reading scripture appears to have implications for this study.¹¹⁵ Although the main subject in this work is the typological interpretation of the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the argument may be applied, with a few structural considerations, to general *Akhbārī* Shī'ī interpretation of the Qur'ān. At bottom, the argument in Shī'ī *tafsīr* is the vindication of the claim of the Shī'a against the Sunnīs, whereas in the case of the Bible, a similar argument was put forth by the authors of the New Testament against the Jews. The point to be made however would appear to be applicable in both cases:

Typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is as a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously.¹¹⁶

We have seen for example, how the Bāb interpreted the events of the primordial Day of the Covenant, to support the central belief of orthodox Shī'ism, namely that 'Alī's rightful position was usurped by Abū Bakr. In this and many other contexts, it might be argued that the Qur'ān fulfills the function of the Old Testament "as prophecy," while the *akhbār* of the

¹¹⁴ The term *Bālā-sarī*, "above the head," refers to the main body of the Shī'a because of the common method of performing ritual visitation to the holy shrines. It denotes to the practice of standing at the head of the tomb, a practice that the Shaykhīs' condemned as being disrespectful. Shaykhīs became known, therefore, also as "*Pusht-i sarīs*" for their distinctive habit of standing at the foot of a sacred tomb, rather than circumambulating it, while reciting prayers. See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ī Islam* 227.

¹¹⁵ Frye, *The Great Code*.

¹¹⁶ Frye, *The Great Code* 80–1.

Imāms represents the New Testament as “fulfillment.” This analogy is of course not perfect because of the many important differences between the respective elements. Given however, the course which future Bābism was to take as a result of acknowledging the return of the Qā’im in the person of the Bāb, Frye’s argument seems even more compelling:

Typology points to future events that are often thought of as transcending time, so that they contain a vertical lift as well as a horizontal move forward. The metaphorical kernel of this is the experience of waking up from a dream... When we wake up from sleep, one world is simply abolished and replaced by another. This suggests a clue to the origin of typology: it is essentially a revolutionary form of thought and rhetoric. We have revolutionary thought whenever the feeling “life is a dream” becomes geared to an impulse to waken from it.¹¹⁷

The similarities between the themes described above in the Bāb’s *tafsīr*, with those ascribed to the members of the *Mukhtariyya* or *Kaysaniyya* would support Frye’s insight. In addition, because the figure of the Qā’im is sometimes interpreted by the Bāb as an esoteric principle or reality, Frye’s allusion to a “vertical” dimension of typological exegesis is also apposite.

With this survey of the use of the term *walāya* in the Bāb’s commentary on the first *juz’* of the Qur’ān, it is possible to identify the Bāb’s thinking on this subject only partly with the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim, which in turn may be thought to represent a kind of Akhbārī synthesis of several intellectual and spiritual tendencies.¹¹⁸ But it is certainly not possible to say that the Bāb depended upon Shaykhī works for the main thrust of his argument, which would appear to be as old as Islam itself. It would be interesting to compare this view of *walāya* with that of Shaykh Aḥmad’s older Persian contemporary, Nūr ‘Alī-Shāh, whose writings on the subject seems to be much less “Shī’ī” than the former’s, although there are certain common features shared between the two.¹¹⁹ Such a comparison would probably further explain Shaykh Aḥmad’s great popularity in Iran.

The term *walī* may mean friend, helper, protector, superior or guardian; in basic legal theory it designates the primary heir. We see all of these

¹¹⁷ Frye, *The Great Code* 82–3.

¹¹⁸ For the views of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī see his, *Ziyāra* 187–9; or his short handbook of doctrine *Kitāb ḥayāt al-naḥs* 14–20. See also Rafati, *The Development of Shaykhī Thought* 191ff.

¹¹⁹ M. de Miras, *La méthode spirituelle*, q.v. “lexique”: *walāyat* & *walī*.

aspects of the word as it is applied by the Bāb to ‘Alī, and by extension, the other Imāms. The legal idea of primary heir is one of the more interesting in this regard, and may be seen reflected not only in statements made by the Bāb, but also in the *ḥadīth* literature itself. One of the more striking features of the above material is the delineating of False Walāya as a polar opposite of the True Walāya. As has been noted, this idea is not a creation of the Bāb and may be traced to the earliest *ḥadīth* collections and the Qur’ān itself (e.g., Q 4:76) where the world is divided into two major groups: those who do battle in the way of God, and those who do battle in the way or for the sake of Idols (*sabīl al-tāghūt*), the friends of Satan (*awliyā’ al-Shayṭān*).¹²⁰

The position of *walī* as a kind of “intercessor” for those too weak to act on their own behalf in matters of inheritance, and presumably other legal matters,¹²¹ is one which is also reflected in those traditions quoted by the Bāb in which, for example, Paradise is the reward of those whose *walī* is ‘Alī.

Walāya was the central fact of meaning in the Bāb’s universe, which was of course, a religious one. It is because of, or by means of *walāya*, that God communicates with creation, if not that principle because of which and by means of which creation is “creation.” Throughout this *tafsīr* it is clear that it is this same *walāya* that circulates as spiritual energy through all the various hierarchies of being and existence uniting them and “enchanted” them. In this work it is also *walāya* that is central to divine self-manifestation—*tajallī* and that is also the central fact of the Shī‘ī eschaton. Thus, it is without doubt the most important fact, idea and reality of the Bāb’s universe. For Shī‘ism, *walāya* provides a means for facing the otherwise imponderable problem: transcendence or immanence. In short the answer is “both.” But it is not a “mere” metaphysical accomplishment. Recent historical events have shown us the profound and powerful place of *walāya/wilāya/vilāyat* in the Iranian soul. Khomeini rose to popularity as the leader of one of the most surprisingly successful revolutions in history on the appeal of a religious work entitled *Vilāyat al-faqīh*, a title which triggered many of the associations and historical-religious themes encountered above. Through the Bāb’s prolonged contemplation of this most powerful of all spiritual realities it is as if he himself was

¹²⁰ Landolt, *Walāyah*.

¹²¹ Cf. Landolt, *Walāyah* 318.

somehow conditioned by it and, thus conditioned, continued to the next stage of his remarkable life.

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 C: Manuscript of *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*. Cambridge University Library, Browne Manuscript Collection, F10.
 I: Privately published text of *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* in *Majmū'ah-yi āthār haḍrat-i A'lā*, #69. Tehran, Badī' 133/1976, p.156–410.
 L: Manuscript (partial) of *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*. Leiden University Library, Arabic manuscript Or.4791, #8.

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