

# The Writings of the Báb

## Combined Notes from Talks Delivered by Dr. Nader Saeidi at the Swedish and Norwegian Bahá'í Summer School 2019

*These are my personal and combined notes. These notes are not comprehensive, nor do they capture the order in which the main topics were elaborated. Naturally, given that these are personal notes, they cannot fully and accurately reflect all aspect presented during the sessions.*

### 1. Introduction

The Báb was the Forerunner and He performed this function through bringing a new culture, a new worldview, and a new consciousness that paved the way for Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í Faith. We generally know much more about the history and life of the Báb than we do about His worldview and philosophy. To better understand how He did pave the way, we need to understand the Writings of the Báb.

#### Magnitude of the Writings of the Báb

The Báb revealed Divine Texts for 6 years only. Yet, the volume of the His Writings exceeds that of all previously revealed Holy Texts. About 95% of the His Writings are in Arabic and 5% in Persian. The Texts revealed in Persian alone is more than that of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran combined. Bahá'u'lláh revealed more but bear in mind that Bahá'u'lláh revealed Holy Texts from 1852-1892.

The Writings of the Báb existing today are mostly from Isfahan and onwards. Most of the Writings prior to Isfahan has either been lost or destroyed. This is because it was punishable to possess the Writings of the Báb. Therefore, many, out of fear of punishment, destroyed the copies they had. They would not tear the papers but out of respect, wash the ink away with water.

#### Authenticity of the Writings of the Báb

Authenticity of past religious texts is a controversial matter. For instance, consider the following examples.

- It has been discussed if Zoroaster even existed, what then about the authenticity of His Writings?

- Sigmund Freud, the famous Jewish psychologist, wrote a piece questioning the existence of Moses.
- Scholarly work has been and is discussing if the Gospels are representative of the early Christian worldview or not? There are also discussions about the authenticity of the Gospels.

The Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh have high authenticity. One reason is because of the temporal proximity of Their Revelations. The authenticity of the Writings of the Báb can be described by the following hierarchy:

#### Highest Level of Authenticity – With His own Pen

- The Revelation of the Báb was many times with His own Pen. For instance, when the Báb was in Isfahan, a sojourn that lasted about 6 months, He did not have a secretary or amanuensis. All Revelation during this period was in His own handwriting. The Báb considered beauty as important. For instance, when He wanted to show His love to someone, he would write with very careful calligraphy and use different designs such as pentagrams. Such were His gifts and are very beautiful. He also had “Revelation Writings” where He Revealed and wrote down the Holy Texts. These Writings, although difficult to read, are fully readable. Manuscripts of these Writings are available in their original copy at the Bahá'í World Centre.

#### Second Level of Authenticity – In the handwriting of His Secretary

- The Báb had a secretary by the name of Siyyid Husayn-i-Yazdi (one of the Letters of the Living). He was the secretary of the Báb for about 3.5 years during the time the Báb was incarcerated in Azerbaijan. The writings of His secretary are more difficult to read but are also readable.

#### Next Level of Authenticity – Mulla Abdul-Karim Qazvini (also known as Mulla Ahmad)

- Mulla Ahmad was responsible for collecting and making copies of the Writings of the Báb. He was instructed to stay alive so as to protect and preserve the Writings of the Báb. This was his service. Tablets, often difficult to read, would be sent to Mulla Ahmad and he would transcribe a clean and readable copy.
- The Writings of the Báb available today that are from the time before Isfahan are mostly due to the careful and loving service of Mulla Ahmad. He was an “authoritative secretary” and therefore, these copies have high authenticity.
- After this, are the Writings of the Báb for which the original is not available but for which there are copies of the original. Most of these are the early Writings of the Báb. For example, the original commentary of the Surah of Joseph has been destroyed as confirmed by the Báb, but we have an authentic copy thanks to Mulla Ahmad who transcribed it.

### Writings of the Báb Important to Understand the Bahá'í Faith

The Mission of the Báb is the point of transition between Islam and the Bahá'í Faith. As we proceed, this will become clearer. To understand the Bahá'í Faith better, it is important to become more familiar with the Writing of the Báb. Let us take an example.

Bahá'u'lláh has enjoined Bahá'ís to repeat the Greatest Name (Allahu-Abha) 95 times per day. Why 95 times? The answer can be found in the Writings of the Báb. It has been discussed in the Writings of the Báb numerous times. Bahá'u'lláh's early followers, being acquainted with the Writings of the Báb, knew this and therefore, Bahá'u'lláh did not further elaborate on the reason. The reason for repeating the Greatest Name 95 times is central and prevalent in the Writings of the Báb. Ninety-five is the numerical value of the word "lillah" which means "for the sake of God". "L" equals 30 while "H" equals 5. Lillah has 3 "L"s and one "H" and thereby, the numerical value of lillah is 95. The moral philosophy behind lillah is that every action should be for the sake of God. The 95 times, representing lillah, is used to get us accustomed to and act as a reminder of the idea that all we do should be for the sake of God.

The word Allah-u-Abha also has a significant meaning. Bahá'u'lláh, on the first day of arrival to the Ridvan Garden, made three statements. The most important one was that God has reflected and enshrined the splendor of all His Names and attributes on all beings. Bahá'u'lláh said the following. *"Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Ridván, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes"* (*Kitab-i-Aqdas*). It is for this reason that Bahá'u'lláh says that everything is beautiful and sacred. The totality of those attributes is represented as "Bahá", so "Allah-u-Abhá" is a confirmation of this fact. In this day, nothing is impure (najjes). The followers of past religions divided people into believers and infidels. Traditionally, even nature was divided in two parts, one part is reflection of God while the other is a reflection of evil. Based on this conception, followers of other religions can be discriminated against, as they are considered impure. Bahá'u'lláh removes this distinction and says, on the first Day of Revelation, everything was made to reflect the Names of God.

The mystical consciousness and the fundamental concepts of the Bahá'í Faith are laid in the Writings of the Báb. How we can achieve manifesting this consciousness and these concepts to our reality, is not. That is in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

## Re-Creating All Things

The general way by which the Báb re-created and re-invented existing concepts of theology and spirituality was to take the old and give it a new meaning. He used the fundamental "pillars of Faith" as they were understood at the time (predominantly by Shia Muslims). He used these concepts for the purpose of re-casting them into a new light, to undermine them and give them a new meaning. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Bab uses these categories. What is important is that the Báb did not re-affirm them but used them to show that these concepts have been totally misunderstood in the past. The terminology is kept to that which is familiar, but completely new meanings are given to them. These concepts are familiar for Muslims and in particular, Shia Muslims. However, the Báb re-interprets these concepts to become relevant and applicable for all mankind, i.e., to non-Muslims as well.

There are five categories commonly considered as Pillars of Faith according to Shia Islam.

1. The idea or concept of God

2. The concept of Prophethood
3. Day of Resurrection and Judgement
4. The idea of Succession and Occultation
5. The concept of Divine Justice.

## Understanding the Writings of the Báb

The most important key to understanding and interpreting the Writings of the Báb is to understand the logic, laws, and rules of the interpretation. In the highest form of interpretation of the Word of God, it should be recognized that all the different words, paragraphs, and chapters, we see as one. Understanding the true meaning of Quran does not mean understanding this or that chapter but to see it as one, as unity, i.e., the Revelation of God. This means not to see the differences between Quran, Torah, and the Gospel, but view them as one, as the utter and pure Revelation of God.

*Shouldst thou abide in the land of Divinity and recite this blessed verse in the midst of the Ocean of absolute Unity... thou must know of a certainty that verily all the letters of this Surih are but one single letter, and that all the differences of its words and meanings turn unto the One Single Point. For verily this is the station of the heart and the sanctuary of unity. God hath created its elements out of the one and only crystal water of Kawthar. They are all fire, all air, all water, all dust, and all are the majestic identity, the everlasting bestowal and the effulgent Kawthar. (Commentary on the Súrih of Kawthar)*

One of the followers asked the Báb what the truth was. Before the Báb began to answer, He quoted the letter He received. Then the Báb addressed the person and said that you do not need to ask Me, the answer is within you, but you need to burn the veils to find it. The answer is within your question, even in the first letter of your name. The name of the person began with an “H” and the Báb continued to interpret the meaning of the letter “H”. The Báb created spiritual linguistics.

*... inasmuch as God hath commanded the people of the Bayán to elevate all things to their uttermost limit of perfection, therefore He hath granted them permission to call everything, through the letters of their names, by the Names of God, lauded and magnified be He, that none may see in anything aught but the Countenance of the Revelation of the Will, in Whom naught is seen but God. For example, the lowest rank in the mineral kingdom is that of the stone (sang, consisting of three Arabic letters s, n, and g). Then in its letter Sín (s) naught would be seen but the All-Glorious (subbúh), in its letter Nún (n), the Light (núr), and in the letter Káf (k, g) the All-Bountiful (karím)... (Persian Bayan 5:9)*

In this way, any object becomes a symbol of the Names of God. In common language, the name of an object does not describe anything about the object. The Báb introduces a new way of describing things that sees the essence of the objects. The stone becomes a reflection of God by representing the Names of God. The essence of everything is a reflection of God and this reflection is its true identity.

## Complexity of the Writings of the Báb

The Writings of the Báb are complex and have not been studied much. There are those who have tried but failed to understand their meaning. For instance, E.G. Brown tried but failed as it proved to be too difficult for him. An example is his translation of the Persian Bayan. It is a very insufficient translation with major errors in every paragraph. Brown knew both Persian and Arabic but did not manage to understand the Bayan.

The Báb uses his own linguistic style that is very creative. At that time, Arabic grammar was considered a science of its own in Muslim culture and in particular, in Iran as the official language was not Arabic. As the Báb came to change the culture, He intentionally deviated from grammatical rules.

The Báb, in His Writings, recreated all concepts. The style He used is that of oneness. For the Báb, all is symbolic and related to each other. Truth is one. The Writings of the Báb are very symbolic. He used a method that was partially available in the esoteric culture at the time, where each letter of the alphabet has a numerical value. For instance, H = 5, V = 6 etc.

If you remember, there is a story from the childhood of the Báb when the teacher asks Him to read the opening phrase from the Quran. The Báb refuses to read unless He understands, and the teacher asks the Báb to explain His understanding. The story does not tell how the Báb interpreted this phrase. However, reading His Writings, we can assume that He probably interpreted that verse as follows.

Note that the interpretation is within the context of the language and culture of that time. There is an important tradition that says that all the truths contained in all the Scriptures of God (Torah, Gospel etc.) are contained in the Quran. And then it says that all that is contained in the Quran, is contained in the first Surih of the Quran, which is very short. Then it says that all that is contained there, is contained in the phrase “Bismillah, al-Rahman, al-Rahim”. Then it continues to say that all that is included in this phrase is included in the first letter B. Therefore, all that is contained in all the Holy Scriptures are all present in the alphabetical letter of B. In Shia Islam, the sixth Imam says that “the B is Bahá’u’lláh”. What does this mean?

The Báb, in His Writings, wants to unveil the hidden meaning or secrets of these Scriptures. The phrase of “Bismillah, al-Rahman, al-Rahim” consists of 19 letters. It begins with a B followed by 18 letters. The Báb interprets that it refers to the first 19 realities of His own Dispensation. The B refers to Him and the subsequent 18 letters are the Letters of the Living. This is familiar to many Bahá’ís but there is more.

Bismillah, al-Rahman, al-Rahim consist of 19 letters, but it goes back to the first letter B which has a numerical value of one. Recall the style of numerical values to letters discussed previously. The Báb uses this style to discover various levels in the meanings of concepts. The Arabic word for one is “vahed” which has a numerical value of 19. The Báb uses this in an extremely skillful fashion to say that the 19 Letters of the Living, although they are 19, are actually one. This means that we should not look at the difference between them but that they are all the reflection of the Manifestation of God. The 19 figures of the Bábi Dispensation

are to be seen as one. None of the Letters of the Living are important individually. If they turn away from the Báb, they are nothing. If they had been important as individuals, they would have had importance before the Declaration of the Báb. That is not the case, they become important as they reflect the Báb. The 19 are one which is symbolized by the Manifestation of God. All Manifestations of God are symbols of the pure and utter Revelation of God. The truth of everything is one, everything is beautiful. In the Torah, it says, “and God looked at His creation and said, it is good”. This is the same meaning. As everything is a reflection of God, therefore it is all good.

From the point of the view of the Báb, what differentiates us i.e., what makes us different from each other, is not what our ultimate truth is. Our ultimate truth is what unites us, what is common in my reality, in your reality, and in the reality of all things. That which is present in everything and therefore, everything is an expression of that same truth. What is this ultimate truth of everything? This truth is the utter and pure Revelation of God. Everything is a mirror. Mirrors are different from each other— mine is in the form of circle, yours in the form of a square. From the point of the view the Báb, the truth is not in the attributes, but rather the image reflected in the mirror, the sun, the reflection of God, the Revelation of God. This is the ultimate truth of everything.

This means that everything is inter-connected, and everything is a reflection of God. Therefore, everything is beautiful, sacred, and has rights. This is the creation of a new spiritual consciousness where everything is divine and has rights. This spiritual consciousness means that you understand that all is one, the unity of all things, that all are reflections of one ultimate reality, namely God. The main purpose of the Writings of the Báb is to create this new spiritual consciousness.

The key to understanding the Writings of the Báb lies in the realization that everything is one and a reflection of God. Therefore, all things should be considered as divine. Everything, including nature, has a new meaning or reality. Nature is sacred. This is the foundation of the Bahá'í Faith. It is upon this new understanding, that the principle of the oneness of humanity is based.

## 2. The Concept of God

Historically, there has been two main conceptions of God, the anthropomorphic and transcendental conception of God.

- A. Anthropomorphic conception of God: In essence, God is like a human being. I, as a human, have power, God has it too, but He is the All-Powerful, Omnipotent. The same idea applies with other attributes such as knowledge, mercy, etc. This concept is of a more relatable God and is perhaps the most commonly held one.
- B. Transcendental conception of God: In this view, God is considered as above all, beyond any attributes, description or limitation. God transcends human-created attributes, such as “powerful”. The only description remotely accurate is that God is beyond description.

Marx and Engel both became atheist overnight after having read a book by Feuerbach. The book is called *The Essence of Christianity* and was published in the beginning of the 1840s. In this book, Feuerbach says that there cannot be a God as it is anthropomorphic. Why? Because the concept of God is nothing more than human nature that we have exaggerated and called God. The notion presented is that humans have knowledge but have given this attribute to God and made God as the All-Knowing. Due to this, we see ourselves as weak and void of knowledge and thus, have to beg God to receive that which already belonged to humans to begin with. It also followed that God requires worship and thereby, worship is a degrading act. Thus, we have created God in our image; it is not God that has created us in His image. Man becomes worthless and weak, as all good is with God. Worship is a way to get some of the good back. Worship becomes an ultimate act of degradation. The Báb revealed His Text at the same time but came to a completely different conclusion to this question.

### God as Transcendental Entity

The Báb categorically rejects the concept of an anthropomorphic God and affirms the concept of the transcendental God. The Báb states that there is an absolute reality of God and the only way that reality can be understood, is by concepts familiar to us. There is no other way. In short, God is transcendental, but the anthropomorphic God is not an illusion. For the Báb, we cannot understand God in any way. So, the only way is by the reflections (Tajjali) of God in our world. As such, God becomes defined through the characteristics of this world. The anthropomorphic God is the reflection of God for this world. So, the anthropomorphic God does exist, but it is not God but reflection of God in this world.

The Báb gives an example. The glass has characteristics that distinguishes it from other glasses, such as color, shape, roughness or smoothness. The image reflected in the glass is different from the sun. The image reflected is not the sun but an indication of the sun. God is the sun in heaven. What we can worship is the reflection of the sun in the glass or in the mirror. But naturally, the reflection is an indication, but in no way the sun itself. Not only is it a reflection of God, but a reflection on the basis of the characteristics of the mirror or the glass.

The Báb expresses this in another way as well. The Báb says that God has created everything in order that they attain to and recognize God but at the same time, that God is inaccessible. This seems to be a paradox but the Báb solves this dilemma. Because God is inaccessible, God defines Himself for humanity on the basis of the capacity and limitations of humanity. This self-description by God is a created entity, not the essence of God. It is a creation of God, not the essence of God. We understand, praise, and love God on the basis of how God has described Himself to us. This created reality becomes the truth of the Manifestations of God and the truth of ourselves. The highest/supreme reflection of God in this world is the Manifestation of God, it is the Manifestations of God that mankind has worshipped, and this is not an illusion. All of creation is also a reflection of God.

The Quran begins with the phrase “Bismillah, al-Rahman, al-Rahim”. The Báb, in the Persian Bayan, created another phrase which becomes the same as “Bismillah, al-Rahman, al-Rahim” but in a way that conveys a higher understanding of it. The Bayan begins with “Bismillah, al-Amnael, al-Aqdas”, which means “In the Name of God, the Most Inaccessible, the Most Holy”. In this context, the Most Holy refers to being sanctified beyond all things. Instead of defining God in an anthropomorphic fashion, God is described in a sanctified way that transcends all description. This phrase also consists of 19 letters, four words, and begins with a B.

*All praise and glory befit the sacred and glorious court of the sovereign Lord, Who from everlasting hath dwelt, and unto everlasting will continue to dwell within the mystery of His Own Inmost Reality... The sign of His matchless Revelation as created by Him and imprinted upon the realities of all beings, is none other but their powerlessness to know Him. And he hath not shed upon anything the splendour of His revelation, except through the inmost capacity of the thing itself. He Himself hath at all times been immeasurably exalted above any association with His creatures... (Persian Bayan 1:1)*

## Act of Worship

Mankind has defined identity based on what separates us, for example gender, skin color, and similar attributes. The Báb wants to destroy this conception. The Báb wants to create a consciousness where we see the reflection of God in all things. The characteristics of the glass are not who we truly are, rather it is the light reflected in the glass that is our true identity. In this way, everything is one, beautiful, and has rights.

An act of worship is not that I am nothing and therefore, I beg God. Rather, it is a dynamic journey or, expressed differently, transformation from my phenomenal self to my true self, i.e., my spiritual reality. The dynamics of prayer and worship is the act of moving towards my true inner self, my spiritual being. The point of acts of worship is, contrary to what Feuerbach says, my self-discovery, self-actualization, and connecting to my spiritual self which is a reflection of God. We worship the transcendental God but in reality, we do it through the Manifestation of God. So, we only believe in a transcendental God but so far mankind has worshipped the reflection of God (Manifestations of God).

In the last year of the life of the Báb, given the lunar calendar, Naw Ruz and the Declaration of the Báb fell on the same day. The Báb, in celebration of this, revealed the book of Panj Shan



in which He foretold His Martyrdom. The first chapter of this book was revealed on Naw Ruz. One of the chapters is about the question of who is more spiritual or closer to God. In elaborating this issue, the Báb uses the example of an ant. The ant would praise God according to its own characteristics. For an ant, having two antennae is perfection. So, the ant would praise God on this basis. What we do as humans, is no more different than what an ant does. It is not at the same level of understanding as we have, but nevertheless God accepts the praise of the ant.

*What is then the difference between him, and the ant, and the one above them? Both are created beings before God. It worshippeth God, its Lord; and he worshippeth God, his Lord. Likewise, it seeth the two antennae a mighty perfection for God and thus describeth God with them; and thou seest knowledge and power a mighty perfection for God and thus describest God with them. Then ... understand that there is here no difference between thee and the ant. For indeed the praise of God by the ant through the two antennae is not worthy of God; and thy description through knowledge and power is also unbefitting of Him. For verily how can that which thou comprehendest be adequate before God when thou and whatsoever thou comprehendest are creatures before God, and God hath created them by His Will? God is pleased with the ant that it praiseth God, its Lord, with two antennae, inasmuch as the ant is unable to find a higher description to praise God, its Lord. Verily God accepteth the ant by His grace and mercy... Likewise thou seest knowledge and power as attributes of perfection and independence. Therefore, thou describest God, thy Lord, with them. Verily God, glorified be He, is pleased with thee and thy praise, notwithstanding His knowledge that none besides Him knoweth His Knowledge, and naught but Him encompasseth His Power. He is assuredly sanctified, magnified, glorified and exalted above all that hath been created and all that is to be created.” (Panj Sha’n)*

The understanding I have of God is as wrong as that of the ant, but God accepts this praise. The main point is to show that no one should consider him or herself as superior, be it based on knowledge or anything else. All are so insignificant compared to God that there is no point in considering superiority. These statements are not only theological but have deep sociological messages and implications.

### 3. The Concept of Manifestation of God

The fact that we cannot understand God and that all is a reflection of God, is key to understanding the Writings of the Báb. Because God is transcendental and cannot be known, God, out of love, describes Himself for mankind. We praise God through His self-description. This self-description is not God but how we can know God. There is no other way to know God except through this self-description.

*Know thou that verily God is Pre-Existent, and the contingent being is originated. God is thus supremely exalted above any descent into the level of the contingent world; and it is utterly impossible for the contingent world to ascend to the court of Eternity. Therefore, it is necessary, according to true wisdom, that the Pre-Existent God describe Himself for His creatures, that they may recognize their Creator, and that the contingent beings may attain, out of the grace of the Pre-Existent, unto their supreme End. This divine self-description is itself a created being. It is unlike any other description, the sign of "He is the One Who hath no equal" (Commentary on Tradition of Truth)*

In short, God cannot be known, so He creates a self-description, but this is not God. What we can understand is the reflection of God and the highest reflection of God is the Manifestations of God. The Báb prefers to use the term "Manifestations of God" rather than Prophets of God. This is important because "manifestation" means reflection. Note that everything in the created world is a manifestation of God. The choice of terminology is not random.

#### The Point

The Báb sees the Manifestations of God as a point (nukhtih). The Báb uses the word "point" frequently to refer to the truth of the Manifestations of God. One reason is that a point is the unity of opposites. A point has no specific dimension, determination or characteristics and yet is the source of everything. It is nothing and it is everything. It is through the reflection of a point that alphabetical letters come into existence, and it is the combination of the letters that words and sentences are created. In the Dispensation of the Báb, He is the point. Out of reflection of this point, the first letters (Letters of the Living) came into existence. They are called letters because they are the first expressions or products of this point.

This Point has two stations (maqam), the stations of divinity and servitude. The point is like a perfect celestial mirror. One station is the mirror itself and the other the image which is reflected in the mirror. The true identity of the mirror is not the glass of the mirror but the image which is reflected in it. The mirror or the glass is the station of servitude whereas the reflected image is the station of divinity, i.e. the Divinity of God. Thus, the point is that of both servitude and divinity. The image is the Divinity, but this is not God. The transcendental God does not speak, so who reveals the Word of God? It is the light in the mirror that gives the Word of God.

Muslims view Muhammad as human because He would get sick, become tired and so on. They did not see Him as divine, so the understanding is that God sent Gabriel who recited the Word of God to Muhammad. Muhammad would then memorize what He had heard and convey it to the people. Muhammad, therefore, received the Word of God and has the station

of servitude. The idea is that He just happened to be chosen to receive of the Word of God. In this way of thinking, divinity is external to Muhammad. Christians define Christ as the Lord, i.e. divinity and not servitude. Muslims say that Jesus has the station of servitude and that divinity belongs to God. Christians believe that divinity is only for Jesus and others do not have it. For the Báb, both are correct, but neither understanding convey's the full picture.

The Báb's conception of the Manifestations of God reconciles these two differing points of views. The Báb sees all Manifestations as points with both servitude and divinity. This means that the divinity of Jesus is not the same as God. The Father is not the transcendental God but a reflection of that transcendental God. The Báb says that the transcendental God does not speak, as speaking is a human thing. The source of the Word of God is the Divinity of the point. It is not Gabriel who is bringing the Word of God but the Divinity of Muhammad. But because of the sacredness and sanctity of the Divinity, it is attributed to God, but it is not the transcendental God.

*The substance of this gate is this, that God hath fashioned for the Sun of Truth two stations. One is the station of His unseen Essence which is the Manifestation of Divinity. Thus, all the divine verses that He revealeth, are revealed on behalf of God... All other than this supreme Sign which is present in Him is His creation. (Persian Bayan 4:1)*

## The Two Stations Symbolized in the Name of the Báb

This central view of the point is also symbolized in the word "Báb". The Báb consists of two B's and one A. The first B represents divinity and the second, servitude. The A connects these, thereby linking them. The name of the Báb becomes the symbol for the two stations. This also reflects the truth of the trinity (the way it is written in Farsi resembles the cross). Furthermore, the name Báb means gate and a gate connects the space which is outside with that which is inside. The spaces that are connected here are the realms of divinity and servitude. The Báb also emphasizes that this representation is true for everyone. We are all different but have a common true identity i.e., the reflection of God. The Báb wants to connect our phenomenal self with our own divinity.

The name of the Báb is Ali Muhammad. Muhammad refers to the Prophet of God. Ali, one of the names of God, means the Most Exalted. In the Quran, God is constantly referred to as the Most Exalted, so Ali represents divinity and Muhammad represents the station of servitude. The name of Ali Muhammad symbolizes the unity of both divinity and servitude by combining these two stations. An interesting note is that Ali Muhammad has the numerical value of 202. The word Rab, which means Lord, is also 202. Persians often refer to the Báb as Rab-i-Ala (the Most Exalted Lord). These are all of course symbols and therefore are not really very important. However, the meaning they symbolize is very relevant and important.

## 4. The Concept of Religion

The Báb creates a new concept of religion. In the past, the main idea was that the Word of God or religion was an arbitrary Will of God imposed upon humanity. Because it is the Word of God, the Will of God, it is beyond a historical context and thereby, eternal. As such, religions are not historically connected. Rather, religions are absolute and as such, are as they are and the only religion. Therefore, the religious laws were viewed as binding and eternal. This is why Christians are awaiting the return of Jesus and not another Manifestation. Every new religion is rejected by the previous one because it is not the return of the same Prophet. This applies to all major religions. One might wonder how it is possible that people think laws can be eternally binding without consideration to changes in society. The answer lies in the concept of religion being from God and therefore pre-defined and separated from history.

The Báb redefines the concept of religion. From the viewpoint of the Báb, religion is the product of the interaction between God and humanity. Religion is not for God; it is for humanity. Humanity is a historical entity that changes, evolves, and develops. The Word of God, therefore, manifests itself depending on the maturity of mankind. As such, religion takes form and shape depending on the maturity of humanity. In this view, religion is something living. Although it is an absolute Reality, it is manifested in ways that are compatible for humanity. Therefore, religion is not the result of an arbitrary Divine Will but the Divine Will expressed for a specific context and for a specific purpose. Religion has to change and evolve. Religion, being an active dialogue, cannot have one passive recipient. A covenant assumes the existence of two conscious entities. A covenant is not a pact with a dead thing as a covenant implies the presence of consciousness. If religion is a dialogue between God and humanity, religion becomes something historical. God is living and active. Therefore, the Word of God is also living, takes different forms, affects the world, impacts history, and takes different shapes, depending on the context. Religion is a dialogue between God and humanity and therefore, it is not final and no religion claim finality. This concept is a fundamental truth in the worldview of the Báb.

The Báb expresses the dialogue between God and mankind in special way. The Báb knew about His Mission before the day He Declared His Mission. But did He declare His Mission on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May in 1844 at exactly 2 hours and 11 minutes after sunset? It is because it was at this very moment, that a human being (Mulla Husayn), symbolizing and representing mankind, became ready to understand and accept the Message of the God. The moment of Mulla Husayn recognized and accepted the Báb, was the moment that the new spiritual civilization came into being.

### The Concept of Progressive Revelation

One of the ways the Báb emphasizes this truth and the concept of progressive revelation is quite amazing. He creates a new word, the word “irtifa”, which simultaneously means cancellation, destruction, negation but also preservation, elevation, and exaltation. Bear in mind that the Báb is a merchant in Iran and He introduces this concept within a strong fundamental Muslim culture. In order to understand what The Báb meant, we need to understand the concept. Hegel used a German word, “aufhebung” to describe historical development. This word has two simultaneously opposite meanings. It means cancellation,

destruction, negation but also preservation, elevation, and exaltation. In Hegel's view, historical development is achieved through *aufhebung*. It is on one hand, the destruction of the previous order, but at the same time, the elevation of the old order into a new form.

Each spiritual revelation is the *irtifa'* of the previous one. For instance, Islam became the cancellation and abrogation of Christianity but at the same time, the spirit and purpose of Christianity is elevated into a new and higher form. The Word of God, expressed in the Torah, the Gospels, and the Quran, reflects the same truth but differ in appearance. Their inner and true truth is manifested in a higher and more evolved form. Perfection of one religion is the next religion. The Quran is the same as the Gospel, but the Gospel attained its next level of perfection with the Quran. The Báb says that there is nothing sadder than the Quran, because those who love the Quran are preventing it from achieving perfection in its higher level.

## 5. The Concept of Day of Judgement / Resurrection

Judaism, Zoroaster, Christianity, and Islam, all have the concept of the day of resurrection. The interpretation is often literal. In Islam, day of resurrection is when the world ends. All who died will be resurrected and judged by God. If they have been good, they enter heaven. If not, then they are sent to hell which is a place of fire and eternal torture. Heaven is beautiful garden with castles and mansions, where people constantly enjoy all kinds of pleasures. Incidentally, paradise is not cold, but it does not have a sun (Arabic countries are hot and sunny). With a few exceptions, these descriptions have been interpreted literally.

At the day of resurrection, the people are resurrected, gathered before God, and then are judged. This is important from the standpoint of the Báb. For the Báb, the day of resurrection, is the day when people are alive (resurrected) and judged. The most important event is that man encounters God, i.e. that he/she faces God. This is the ultimate joy and purpose of life. If I see God, what else matters? In Islamic understanding, this idea is not given due consideration, but the focus is on the details of heaven and hell. The Writings of the Báb redefines this. The day of resurrection is primarily defined in terms of attaining the presence of God, underscoring the ultimate spiritual potentiality of human beings. This is the purpose of our existence. All rewards and punishments are redefined in this light.

### Heaven and Hell

There is a strange paradox. The idea of religion is that it is supposed to spiritualize us i.e., move us away from materialism. However, paradise is purely material as it has food, sexual activity, and so on. In this world, work is spiritual and a commendable thing but in paradise, there is no work. The literal interpretation negates the spiritual destiny. The idea of hell, the idea of constant eternal torture with no second chance for learning or forgiveness, is very contradictory to concepts of justice, mercy, bounty and so on. The aspect of symbolic interpretation has been completely missed. The Báb re-interprets these concepts.

From the traditional standpoint, heaven and hell is only for human beings. For the Báb, everything experiences heaven and hell; it is not confined to only humans. Heaven or paradise is the state of realization of the fullest potentialities. If a thing attains/realizes/actualizes its

hidden potentialities, then it has attained its paradise. Hell is then interpreted as being deprived from attaining/realizing its potentialities.

For human beings, this realization of potentialities has a unique dimension, because we have consciousness. The ultimate heaven for human beings is to attain the presence of God. The day of resurrection is not the end of history, but the end of one of the stages of civilization. It means that the previous civilization is going to emerge in a new and higher form. Technically, the day of resurrection becomes the Day of the Manifestation of the Prophet of God; the period from the moment the Manifestation of God declares His Mission until He passes away. This is the time when one can attain the presence of God. This is the time one is judged. Going to heaven is to recognize the new spiritual truth being manifested and hell is depriving oneself from realizing the new truth.

Given that God is transcendental, what can be seen is the reflection of God. This reflection of God takes a physical form (flesh) which is the Manifestation of God when He appears to mankind. The Day of resurrection is therefore from the Declaration of the Báb until His death (23<sup>rd</sup> of May in 1844 until 9<sup>th</sup> of July in 1850). This period is referred to as “Day” and the period from the Martyrdom of the Báb until the Declaration of Bahá’u’lláh is referred to as “Night”.

*The substance of this chapter is this, that what is intended by the Day of Resurrection is the Day of the appearance of the Tree of divine Reality... that from the time of the appearance of Him Who is the Tree of divine Reality, at whatever period and under whatever name, until the moment of His disappearance, is the Day of Resurrection. (Persian Bayan 2:7)*

## Heaven and Hell for All Things

Immanuel Kant proposed that only humans have moral rights and nature is just for our consumption. The Báb says that everything is a reflection of God and as such, everything has rights and can reach the state of heaven or hell.

*It is forbidden that one bring anything into being in a state of imperfection, when he hath the power to manifest it in utter perfection. For example, should one build an edifice, and fail to elevate it to the utmost state of perfection that is possible for it, there would be no moment in the life of that edifice when angels would not beseech God to torment him, nay, rather, all the atoms of that edifice do the same. For each thing, within its own station, yearneth to attain unto the utmost height of excellence in its own level. Thus, when a man is in a position of power to realise its yearning, and faileth to do so, he will be held accountable therefore. (Persian Bayan 6:3)*

The Báb says that humans have a moral responsibility to help all things to reach its heaven. If a human has the power to do so but does not allow something to achieve its heaven, he/she is answerable to God.

*Rather, He hath commanded, in regard to each thing, that whoever possesseth power over anything must elevate it to its uttermost perfection that it would not be deprived of its own paradise. (Persian Bayan 4:11)*

## 6. The Concept of Occultation – 12<sup>th</sup> Imam

An important part of this concept of occultation is that of the return of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam, which is a metaphor for the human situation and not a historical reality.

Shia Muslims believe that there are 12 legitimate successors (Imams) to Muhammad. It is believed that the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam was a child when in the year of 260, the 11<sup>th</sup> Imam passed away. Out of fear for his safety, the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam went into hiding (occultation). Nobody knew much about him and it was kept that way for his own protection. Four gates, i.e., persons who claimed to be in contact with the hidden Imam, conveyed the messages of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam to the people. After 77 years, people became restless, thinking that the Imam was an old man, and no one had seen him. That is when it was believed that the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam had actually gone into a “major occultation” (disappeared in a way that no one could see him) and will return when the world is full of injustice to punish people.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Imam (Imam Jafar) revealed a prayer that is known as the “occultation prayer”, which consists of only 3 lines. The Báb was asked to reveal a commentary on this prayer. In this commentary, the Báb explains that God did not create anything that is not perfect. What God creates must be perfect for if it is not, then God is not perfect. Therefore, in its primordial form, that which God has created, there is no need for prayer. If it is perfection, then nothing is lacking and if nothing is lacking, there is no need to pray. However, humans often turn away from our spiritual destination and thereby, falsify our identity and become dependent on many things. We get preoccupied with the world. In other words, we are the Imam as we were perfect but due to becoming preoccupied with the world, we forgot our spiritual identity. Then we identified ourselves by means of material things, we forgot our true identity, and the Imam went into occultation. When we forget our spiritual identity, we self-alienate ourselves. This is the age of tyranny. If we remember our truth and discover our spiritual identity, we become conscious of our spiritual identity and this is the return of the Imam i.e., the age of justice.

In the Writings of the Báb, prayer is the process by which the phenomenal self, the selfish self, tries to connect to its spiritual truth in. It is through prayer that we become conscious of God, the spiritual reality of the world, and within ourselves. Through prayer, we can re-discover and regain spirituality consciousness. The spirit of prayer can make the Imam return.

*Chapter four on the description of the Prayer for the Days of Occultation: ... Know thou first of the truth, that verily God, glorified be He, hath not created anything save that He hath made it in the utmost perfection according to His power. Had it been otherwise, His artifact would not have been perfect and thus would not have been worthy of attribution by God to Himself. When thou recognizest this reality and beholdest its mystery by thy truth, thou wouldst recognize that, verily, in its primordial station of its existence, no being is in need of anything that it then may supplicate unto God its Lord for its sake. Nay rather, God hath created all beings as it behoveth His glory. But when one turneth away from one's true station, in such manner that one falsifieth one's identity, and suffereth dependence on all things, God then enjoineth upon him the duty of prayer for the sake of his emancipation. (Commentary on Occultation Prayer)*

In short, the interpretation of the occultation prayer states that the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam is not an actual historical event but a symbolic expression. The real meaning of this symbolic expression is that we are all created beautiful and perfect, but we forget our spiritual truth and become occupied with materialism. This is occultation. It is that we forget our spiritual reality, become material, and act on materialism. In this view, the age of justice is when we can re-connect with our spiritual reality, our true identity. Therefore, the spirit of prayer is to go beyond our phenomenal self and connect to our spiritual reality (spiritualization). This is the same as the return of the Imam. Bahá'u'lláh expresses this poetically in the following passage (Arabic Hidden Word no. 13).

*O SON OF SPIRIT! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.*

This passage explains that we forget our spiritual identity and come dependent on all other things. The remedy is to turn to God, the All-Sufficing. Then “turn thy sight unto thyself” which is to develop self-consciousness and find God standing there. In short, for the Báb, this concept is redefined to refer to human beings and our innate nobility.

The story of occultation and the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam going into hiding is paradoxical. The Imam was weak to go into hiding but then is to emerge with a sword and punish all who are bad. Furthermore, due to his hiding, the world is suffering from grave injustices but at the end of time, the Imam will restore justice. For what purpose is this justice restored in the world if it is the end of the world. In short, the story has its issues. The Báb takes this story and re-interprets it as the human condition; it becomes applicable to all, and a story of nobility and emancipation.

Let us not forget that at the time of the Báb, the dominant culture regarding occultation, the culture of awaiting, was that of religious intolerance, dogmatic and blind obedience to the clergy, and readiness to engage in violence against imposters. The Báb created a new culture of awaiting that is the complete opposite. In the culture of the Báb, if someone claims to be Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest and it is false, i.e., he cannot produce any proofs or arguments, he is to be treated well. The Báb says that because he has associated or attributed himself to Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest, he is to be loved, helped, and the state has to give him pension. It is a new culture that is being created.



## 7. The Concept of Divine Justice

### Human Freedom and Will of God

The concept of divine justice is really about the concept of human freedom. Traditionally, the concept of human freedom is contradictory to that of the Will of God. Either humans have free will and decide what actions to take or events take place due to the Will of God. If one of them is true, the other cannot be true. If things are determined by the Will of God, then humans are not making choices. Likewise, if humans have a choice and can decide on the actions they take, then it is not the Will of God. These two concepts have been seen as contradictory. The Báb states that every event is simultaneously an expression of human choice/freedom and at the same time, the Absolute Divine Will. Both are simultaneously true.

In the viewpoint of the Báb, divine causation is qualitatively different from human causation and actions. If you recall, God is transcendental and as such, does not operate the same way we do. If we consider God as a human, then human choice and divine will are contradictory. Divine causation is qualitatively different from what we perceive, and we don't know how it works. The Báb says that anything that happens, is the expression of both, i.e., human freedom and Will of God. For an event to take place, there needs to exist three things: existence, essence, and the link or unification of existence and essence. For there to be anything, you need existence, but this thing that exists, must also have a particular essence. Finally, you also need these two to come together, to be linked.

For anything to exist, it must have an essence. But the essence is not sufficient for the thing to be realized. In addition to essence it must also have existence. An imaginary horse with a hundred heads and ten wings, although it might be said to have an essence (which enables it to be conceptualized), nevertheless does not exist because the essence is not accompanied by existence. Nor, conversely, can there be existence without an existent entity. Yet neither essence nor existence can lead to the realization of a thing unless they are united together, just as the birth of a child is dependent on three elements: a father, a mother, and their union (From the Gate of the Heart page 202).

Existence is the divine effulgence or divine action. The essence becomes the human characteristics, i.e., human choice. The coming together of these two is called “qadar” in the Writings of the Báb. Qadar is what traditionally has been translated as predestination, which causes the contraction of human freedom and will of God. However, in the viewpoint of the Writings of the Báb, a better translation would be “destiny”.

There is a tradition within Islam that states the following. *The wicked is wicked in the womb of his mother, and the just is just in the womb of his mother.* Shia Muslims believe in some form freedom but this tradition, clearly states that there is no freedom. This tradition emphasizes total determinism and denies the identity of a human being as free. The Báb re-interprets this statement in a creative way. The Báb relates this tradition to the preconditions of everything, i.e., existence, essence, and the unification of these two. In His interpretation, the father represents existence, and the mother represents the essence. If these are not united, there is no child or in other words, the union of these two creates an entity in the womb of the mother. Had not the father and mother been united, nothing would have been

in the womb. The womb then, represents the union of existence and essence. Existence refers to the Will of God and essence refers to human choice/freedom. It is only when these are linked, i.e., after our freedom and choice has taken place and also, God's grace making it possible that we can act, and the distinction between the just and wicked can be made. We become just or wicked because we have chosen to be just or wicked.

## Human Beings as Free

Recall the viewpoint of the Báb regarding the concept of religion. Religion is a living thing, the product of dialogue between God and humanity. This concept requires a re-definition of human beings as noble who participate in the reconstruction of religion. The Báb states that humanity has developed and achieved a new stage in its maturation in which humans can experience themselves as spiritual beings. Therefore, this is the time when humans can and must think for themselves. As noble beings, humans can no longer renounce their reason and follow a certain clergy or celebrity.

This is reflected in the viewpoint of the Báb on miracles. Miracles, traditionally defined as strange and unnatural events, is redefined. The supreme miracle becomes the Word of God. Words should be read, heard, become subject of thinking, meditation, and understanding. This is justification for Faith, not miracles according to traditional understanding. Humans have the inherent capacity to think for themselves. It is our duty to think for ourselves. As such, everyone can engage in independent investigation of truth. In the Writings of the Báb, miracles are negated, and the supreme miracle becomes the Word of God. The implications of this stance is the creation of a new culture, a culture in which this consciousness cultivates equality and rights for all humans

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Iran, there were two main schools of theory within Shia Islam, the traditionalist and the principalist. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the traditionalist was utterly defeated and, more or less, disappeared. The basic idea of the principalist lies in that ordinary human beings cannot read and understand the Quran. This means that ordinary human beings cannot understand Islamic law and therefore, they do not know what the Islamic way is. This means that the clergy become the embodiment of reason and rationality. It means that the clergy has the duty to interpret Islamic law for the people who then have to follow and obey these clerics. In other words, the clerics would think for the people. The people would therefore become imitators and followers of the clergy. The clergy are the ones who can explain to the people what the Will of God is. The clergy began to outline what Islamic law means in many of the ordinary situations of life. As people cannot know what is right and wrong, they have to constantly seek the guidance of the clergy. These laws cover very detailed aspects of life, leading to the total enslavement of the Iranian people.

This view is in contrast to that of the Báb. In the Writings of the Báb, dependence on anyone else is rejected. For understanding the truth, the conception of detachment becomes essential. Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes this by stating that detachment is the precondition of knowledge. The most important form of detachment is not to hide in a cave and become separated from material world, but rather to learn and develop the habit of thinking for ourselves. We must not be dependent on the judgement of others. The emphasis on

independent thinking and the capacity of every individual to know truth is very important in the Writings of the Báb. This position is a total renunciation of the principalist school of Shia Islam.

## Nobility of Man

In the Kitabul-Asma, a book of about 3000 pages or roughly 8 times the volume of the Quran, the Báb defines and elaborates on 361 Names of God. Commonly, God is the King and the Sovereign, attributes that denote rank or strength. One of the names presented in this book is that of the “Zarih” (farmer, cultivator).

*Say: God verily cultivateth on earth, as He pleaseth, at His bidding. Will ye not behold? Think ye that ye are the sowers? Say: Glorified be God! We are, verily, the Cultivators. Say: Gaze then not upon any one save even as ye behold the most exalted of the renowned amongst you. Verily that which I attest with regard to both the rulers and the peasants amongst you, is the same thing: all have arisen at the bidding of God. (The Book of Divine Names)*

At the time in Iran, farmers were considered as the lowest rank in society. Now the Báb states that God is the Cultivator. He then elaborates that God is the Supreme Farmer, for God plants the seed of Revelation in the soil of our hearts. If the soil is pure, the seed will instantly give fruit. So, God is the Supreme Farmer. What is the implication of having Farmer as a name of God? This means you have to treat the farmer the same way as the King as both are reflecting the Names of God. This means that all are equal. This is within a culture where farmers are considered as of very low status, where religious leaders ascend on a pulpit while the others are sitting on the floor looking up to them. The social and political implications of this understanding are amazing.