

GEORGE RONALD BAHÁ'Í STUDIES SERIES

## A MOST NOBLE PATTERN

Collected Essays on the Writings of the Báb, 'Alí Muhammad Shírází (1819–1850)  
edited by Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghami

**A General Introduction to the *Qayyúm al-Asmá'***  
Muhammad Afnan (translated by Omid Ghaemmaghami)

**The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph**  
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***Khutbat al iftikhár***  
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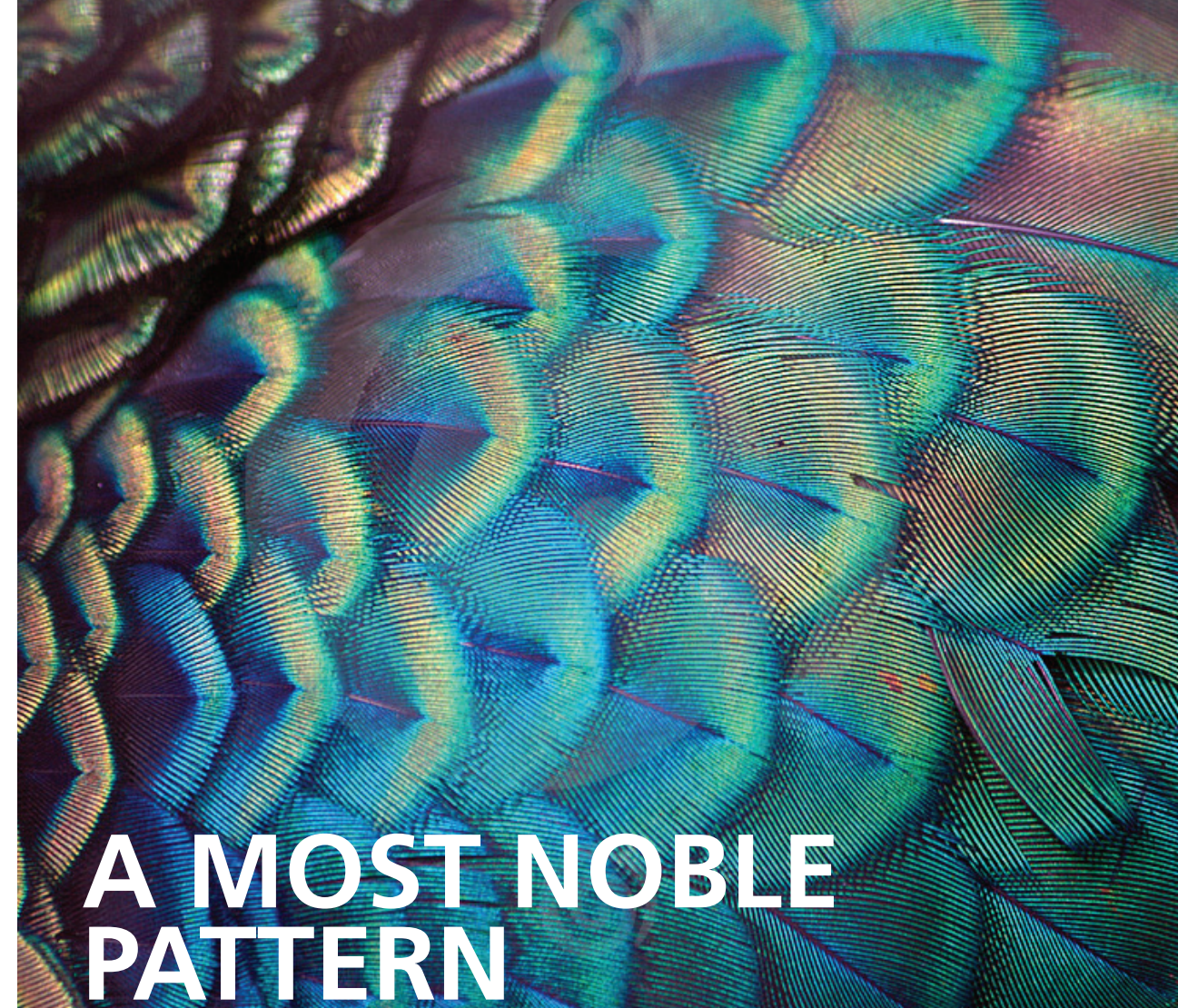
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GEORGE RONALD OXFORD



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LAWSON AND GHAEMMAGHAMII



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 يدعى الذي نزل الكتاب على عبدك بالحق ليكون للعالمين سراجاً وهاجاً طاب  
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 بن علي بن ابي طالب على عبدك ليكون حجة الله من عند الله على العالمين بليغاً اشهد الله  
 لنفسه انه الحق لا اله الا الله والمملكة والاولو العالم قوام حوالاً بكر بالقسط لا اله الا هو وهو  
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 لن يقبل الله عنه من اعماله في يوم القيمة من بعض الشيء على الحق بالحق شياً وحق على الله  
 ان يحرقه النار الله البديع محكم الكتاب من حكم الباب على الحق بالحق محتوماً الله الذي لا  
 اله الا هو وهو الله كان بالمؤمنين بعبادة الله الذي لا اله الا هو وهو الله كان بالمؤمنين  
 شهيداً الله الذي لا اله الا هو وهو الله كان بالمؤمنين علماً الله الذي لا اله الا هو وهو  
 الله كان بالعالمين محيطاً وان الله لن يقبل من احد من بعض العمل الا من ان الباب بالباب  
 ساجداً للقديم من حوالى الباب محموداً الله ما اذن للشيء الحق ما محمد بالرب فان النار  
 في قطرة الماء لله الحق ساجداً على الارض بالحق شهيداً يا معشر الملوك واليا الملوك واليا

محمد بن علي

عزك

Photocopy of the first page of the oldest extant manuscript of the Qayyúm al-Asma' bearing the beginning of the Surat al-Mulk which was revealed to Mullá Husayn Bushru'í on the evening of 5 Jumádá al-Awwal 1260 AH corresponding to 22 May 1844 CE, the date on which, according to the Persian Bayán, the new era is deemed to have begun. The scribe is one Muhammad ibn Karbalá'í Sháh Karam and the colophon gives the date of 28 Jumadá al-Awwal 1261 corresponding to 3 June 1845 as the date of transcription.

The vertical mark running from the top of the page to about the 11th line of the manuscript is said to be damage caused by the sword of a religious official to whom Mullá Husayn himself had presented the book on behalf of the Báb. The original is in the International Bahá'í Archives in Haifa.

George Ronald Bahá'í Studies Series

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*The translations of the sacred writings included in these various essays  
are provisional in character  
and their content the responsibility of those rendering them.*

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# Contents

|   |      |
|---|------|
| <i>Introduction</i> by Todd Lawson  | ix   |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>   | xvii |
| 1 A General Introduction to the Qayyúm al-Asmá'<br><i>Muhammad Afnan (translated by Omid Ghaemmaghami)</i>                                | 1    |
| 2 The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph<br><i>Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini</i>   | 6    |
| 3 <i>Khutbat al-iftikhár</i><br><i>Introduced and translated by Khazeh Fananapazir</i>  | 28   |
| 4 Colours in the Writings of the Báb<br><i>Vahid Rafati (translated by Omid Ghaemmaghami)</i>   | 33   |
| 5 A Grammar of the Divine: Solecisms in the Arabic Writings of the Báb<br>and His Thoughts on Arabic Grammar<br><i>William F. McCants</i> | 52   |
| 6 Secrets Concealed by Secrets: <i>Taqiyya</i> as Arcanization in the<br>Autobiographies of the Báb<br><i>J. Vahid Brown</i>              | 88   |
| 7 The Súrat adh-Dhikr of the Qayyúm al-Asmá' (chapter 108):<br>A Provisional Translation and Commentary<br><i>Moojan Momen</i>            | 105  |
| 8 The Súrat al-'Abd of the Qayyúm al-Asmá' (Chapter 109):<br>A Provisional Translation and Commentary<br><i>Todd Lawson</i>               | 116  |
| 9 The <i>Khutba al-Jidda</i> (The Literary Sermon at Jeddah) of the Báb<br><i>Stephen Lambden</i>   | 146  |
| 10 Muhammad Shah Qájár in Four Early Writings of the Báb<br><i>Sholeh A. Quinn</i>  | 160  |

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|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 11 A Youth of Medium Height: The Báb's Encounter with the Hidden Imam<br>in <i>Tafsír Súrat al-Kawthar</i><br><i>Omid Ghaemmaghami</i> | 175 |
| 12 Phenomenology of Occultation and Prayer in the Báb's<br><i>Sahifiy-i Ja'fariyyih</i><br><i>Nader Saiedi</i>                         | 196 |
| 13 The Báb's <i>Panj Sha'n</i> (Five Modes)<br><i>John Walbridge</i>   | 217 |
| 14 Undermining the Foundations of Orthodoxy: Some Notes on the Báb's<br>Sharia (Sacred Law)<br><i>Armin Eschraghi</i>                  | 223 |
| 15 Concealment and Burial of the Báb<br><i>Translated and annotated by Peter Terry</i>   | 248 |
| 16 Collusion and Re-creation: Dogen and the Báb as Interpreters of Scripture<br><i>Gary Fuhrman</i>                                    | 282 |
| <i>Biographical Notes</i>  | 289 |

*His heart lies not of what it saw*  
(Qur'an 53:11)

*This book is dedicated to  
the cause, vision and reality of peace*



## **Phenomenology of Occultation and Prayer in the Báb's *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih***

Nader Saiedi

Although *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* is frequently mentioned as one of the writings of the Báb, its conceptual framework is rarely, if ever, subject to scholarly analysis. Instead, when this work of the Báb is approached it is normally defined in terms of a chaotic list of fragmented issues that are addressed in the text. However, the overall logic, harmony or unity of the work is never investigated. In fact it appears that the readers of *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* assume that there is no overall logical order and conceptual unity present in the text. This assumption, however, is mistaken. In fact, one of the most amazing points about this text of the Báb is the incredible conceptual unity and harmony of the entire work. No issue discussed in the text is random, fragmented or accidental. All issues are interconnected in the context of a harmonious totality that defines the structure of the text. What I just mentioned about *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* is in reality applicable to all the writings of the Báb. Existing scholarship on the writings of the Báb usually misses the creative unity in his writings. I will not address other works of the Báb in this article but will treat *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* as an example of this phenomenon.

Before discussing the conceptual framework and message of *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih*, it is necessary to give basic information about the text and clear out some common mistakes in the literature.

### **Three titles of the text and the date of its revelation**

This text of the Báb is called by different names. Its given title is *Sharh-i Du'á'-i-Ghaybat* or Commentary on the Occultation Prayer. The entire text is an interpretation of a prayer that is attributed to Imam Sádiq, which is expected to be read by the believers during the time of the occultation of the Hidden Imam. The prayer is short and consists of three statements. The Báb's Commentary on the Occultation Prayer consists of 14 chapters but only chapters 11, 12 and 13 are devoted to a direct interpretation of each one of the three parts of the prayer. The reader who neglects the holistic conceptual framework of the tablet may be puzzled by this sequence. Why does it deal with its object of commentary only in those three



chapters? What is the relation between all the other issues discussed in the first ten chapters and those three chapters?

The other name of the text is Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih. In his work *Khutbiy-i-Dhikríyyih* (Recounting/Remembering Epistle), revealed on 15 Muharram 1262 (13 January 1846), the Báb presents a list of his works up to the day of the writing of that text. The Báb lists 14 works written during the years 1260 to 1262, comprising four major books (*kitáb*) and ten shorter ones, or epistles (*sahífih*). He implies that these 14 texts are written by the 14 sacred figures of Shi'i Islam (the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fátimih, and the 12 Imams). *Khutbiy-i-Dhikríyyih* (together with his earlier work *Kitábu'l-Fihrist*) is crucial for identifying the date of the writing of various early works of the Báb. The Báb first lists his four books and then his ten epistles. The fourth epistle is the Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih, the Epistle of Imam Ja'far-i-Sádiq, the sixth Imam. The Báb explains that this text is a commentary on the occultation prayer that is to be recited during the days of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. He mentions that it consists of 14 chapters: 'Eighth is the Sahífiy-Ja'faríyyih which consisteth of 14 chapters on the interpretation of his prayer concerning the days of occultation (The Báb, *Khutbiy-i-Dhikríyyih*, quoted in Mázandarání 1944, vol. 3, p. 290). The fact that the Báb identifies the commentary on the prayer revealed by the sixth Imam as the epistle of that same Imam points to a subtle mystical point that is present in much of his early writings: the interpreting text is the same as the interpreted text and the Báb is the same as the author of the prayer. This is a reference to the station of the heart, a transcendental epistemological perspective which goes beyond the apparent pluralities and focuses on the identical truth of all beings.

The other title of the text is the *Tafsír-i-Há'* or Commentary on the Letter *Há'*. This title is normally associated with two other works of the Báb. Denis MacEoin calls them *Tafsír al-Há' I* and *Tafsír al-Há' II* (MacEoin 1992, p. 72). Although these two texts are explicitly defined as interpretations of the letter *há'* (the second is in fact the interpretation of the Mystery of the Letter *Há'*), the same Persian or Arabic term is used for denoting Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih. This designation is made by Bahá'u'lláh, who quotes from Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih in his *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. This is what Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Likewise, in His interpretation of the letter 'Há', He craved martyrdom, saying: 'Methinks I heard a Voice calling in my inmost being: "Do thou sacrifice the thing which Thou lovest most in the path of God, even as Husayn, peace be upon him, hath offered up his life for My sake." And were I not regardful of this inevitable mystery, by Him, Who hath my being between His hands even if all the kings of the earth were to be leagued together they would be powerless to take from me a single letter, how much less can these servants who are worthy of no attention, and who verily are of the outcast . . . That all may know the degree of My patience, My resignation, and self-sacrifice in the path of God' (Bahá'u'lláh 1989, pp. 231–2).

It is a most interesting question why Bahá'u'lláh calls this text of the Báb *The Interpretation of the Letter Há'*. We will see that Bahá'u'lláh's description is related to the hidden essence of the text. However, there are many misunderstandings with

regard to Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih. One of these confusions is present in the work of the great scholar Ishraq Khavari. In his *Qámús-i Íqán*, volume one, under the title Tafsír al-Há' (in reference to the statement of Bahá'u'lláh quoted above), Ishraq Khavari describes the content of the text and quotes several pages from different chapters of Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih. He explains that this work of the Báb is called Interpretation of the Letter *Há'* because it is a response to a letter written by a questioner whose letter began with the words '*Hádhá Kitábi . . .*' (This is my letter . . .). Since the first word of this letter was the letter *há'*, therefore the Báb wrote this text as an interpretation of the letter *há'*. Ishraq Khavari adds that this point is mentioned in the text of the Báb itself (Ishraq Khavari 1972, vol. 1, pp. 439–44). However, nowhere in this text of the Báb is such a point mentioned. It seems that Ishraq Khavari has confused this text of the Báb with another of his works called by the same name, Commentary on the Letter *Há'* (what MacEoin calls Tafsír al-Há' I). But Ishraq Khavari's description is not even entirely correct in terms of that work. In that work the Báb explains that since the questioner begins his letter with the words *Huva'l-'Aziz* (He is the sovereign), therefore the Báb answers all the questions of the questioner by interpreting the first alphabetical letter in his missive (The Báb, Commentary on the Letter *Há'*, INBA 86, pp. 109–10). It is clear that Ishraq Khavari is referring to this text of the Báb, yet he has substituted the words '*Hádhá Kitábi*' for the words '*Huva'l-'Aziz*'. In any case these are two different works of the Báb but both are interpretations of the letter *há'*.

Other confusions in regard to Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih can be found in the works of Denis MacEoin. In discussing the Báb's Lawh-i Hurúfát (Tablet of Letters) or Kitáb al-Hayákil, MacEoin refers to a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh in which the Tablet of Hurúfát is called by the name Ja'fariyyih. Then MacEoin, referring to the other work of the Báb, Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih, writes:

The *Sahífa-yi Ja'fariyyah* mentioned (and treated as a different work to the *Lawh-i hurúfát*) by Shoghi Effendi in his rather spurious list of the Báb's 'best-known works' is not, as might at first sight appear, this same work under yet another title, but the treatise of that name already discussed in chapter two. How this piece comes to be regarded as one of the Báb's best-known works must remain a mystery (MacEoin 1992, pp. 89–90).

However, these statements need to be reexamined. First, it is not Risáliy-i Ja'fariyyih that is mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh in reference to Kitáb-i-Hayákil or the Book of 19 Temples (the Tablet of Letters), but Risáliy-i Jafriyyih, namely the Book of Numerology. The fact that the Tablet of 19 Temples discusses numerological constructions is well known but this same fact is also explicitly mentioned several times in the tablet itself.<sup>1</sup> Second, MacEoin criticizes Shoghi Effendi for considering Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih one of the well-known works of the Báb. But the reason why Shoghi Effendi has identified it as one of the Báb's best-known works is not a mystery. First, a number of pages of this particular tablet were translated, discussed and published in Nicolas's introduction to his French translation of the Persian Bayán (Nicolas 1908, pp. 17–25). This becomes even more relevant when we see that Shoghi Effendi quotes in *The Dawn-Breakers*, whose appendix lists the names

of the best-known works of the Báb, passages from Nicolas's French translation of that same text. Yet another reason for the assertion of Shoghi Effendi is, as we saw before, the reference of Bahá'u'lláh to this same Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih in his Book of Certitude when he quotes a well-known statement from that text.

A more direct discussion of Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih is found on pages 66 and 67 of MacEoin's *The Sources for Early Bábí Doctrine and History*. According to MacEoin, Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih was revealed during Muharram of the year 1261, while he was in Arabia. He argues that 'several passages are stated in the text to have been composed on various days in the month of Muharram, the year being given as 1261' (MacEoin 1992, p. 67). Yet MacEoin recognizes it as a problem that several parts of the text, including the very first chapter, explicitly discuss events that took place after the Báb's return to Shiraz. However, all these confusions are due to a simple error on the part of MacEoin. The date of the revelation of Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih is Muharram 1262, not 1261. The reason MacEoin has assumed that the text is written in 1261 is a number of references to Muharram 61 and Muharram 1261 in the Báb's work. Yet those passages deal with very different questions. The reference to Muharram 61 is not a reference to the date of the revelation of the text but is rather a reference to the date of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. Reference to the year 1261 is in the context of the discussion of the return of Husayn as the Báb, arguing that the spiritual martyrdom of the Báb *after* the year 1261 is the return of the physical martyrdom of Husayn. Thus the Báb says that after the completion of 12 centuries and the termination of the age of the outward meanings, it is in the year *after* the year 1261 – that is, in 1262 – that the tenth of Muharram, the time of the revelation of that passage, becomes also a Friday, a return of the martyrdom of Husayn in Muharram 61.

This is what the Báb says:

Verily the martyrdom of Husayn occurred not in this world save for the manifestation of the guardianship of the family of God, the certitude of their Shi'i followers regarding the pure truth of the Imams, and the enduring of the religion of Muhammad until the day when there is a blast on the trumpet and this mighty Cause. Thus it is necessary, according to divine wisdom, that Husayn's martyrdom would take place in the year 61 AH on Friday the tenth of the month of Muharram for many reasons . . .

Thus according to that subtle and snow-white cord it is necessary that the bearer of that Most Great Name, one of the Shi'i of the Imams, should be afflicted with their affliction within a year that is similar to the year of the martyrdom of Husayn in 61. Thus the 10th of Muharram, the day of the martyrdom of Husayn, became in this year [1262], after that year [1261], a Friday, that those endued with understanding may recognize that verily that which is there will not be known except through that which is here.

The secret of this matter is this: Verily after the completion of the letters 'There is none other God save God' in the perfect year which is 1200, and *after* the year 61, corresponding to the martyrdom of Husayn, it is necessary that the bearer of that Most Great Name of God would be wronged in this life by the oppression of the unjust . . .

Thus bear thou witness that *at this moment, alone by myself in this house, my abode*, I speak in the station of the inward of the inward that which was spoken by the prince of martyrs in this same day in the station of inward of the outward . . . Thus in regard to afflictions, I am inwardly as Husayn was outwardly. This is out of the covenant God made with me that my situation should resemble that of Husayn (The Báb, Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih, INBA 60, pp. 116–17; emphasis mine).

Thus as the Báb is sitting alone in his house in Shiraz, under house arrest, his heart is being martyred, just as the body of Husayn was martyred on that same day, the tenth of Muharram. The physical martyrdom of Husayn took place in the year 61. Thus when the 'age of outward' is ended and the 'age of the heart' begins, the martyrdom of the Báb as the return of the martyrdom of Husayn takes place *after* the year 1261. In 1262 the tenth of Muharram also happened to be a Friday, just as the tenth of Muharram of 61 was a Friday.

This is why MacEoin's other assertion that in Sahífiy-i-Ja'fariyyih the Báb refers to a dream he had on 12 Muharram 1261 is equally incorrect. That dream took place on the eve of the second of Muharram (and not 12) of the year 1262.

The Báb refers to Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih as one of his texts in his work Khutbiy-i Dhikriyyih. We know the exact date of the revelation of the latter text because it is referred to in the text itself: 15 Muharram 1262 (13 January 1846). Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih was revealed in the few days prior to the revelation of Khutbiy-i Dhikriyyih, during the first two weeks of the month of Muharram 1262. Likewise, in his Epistle of Justice, revealed in early 1262, the Báb refers the readers to his discussion of the question of resurrection in Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih (The Báb, The Epistle of Justice, p. 34). It is also necessary to note that in Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih the Báb affirms that he has revealed four books and ten epistles, a fact that shows that this text was revealed just before the revelation of Khutbiy-i Dhikriyyih, which lists those same 14 texts (The Báb, Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih, INBA 60, p. 119). Finally it is noteworthy that the text of Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih *begins* with a prayer in which the Báb complains of his house arrest in Shiraz and then recounts the story of his afflictions after his return from the trip to Arabia (*ibid.* pp. 59–60). None of these could have happened in Muharram of 1261 when the Báb was still in Arabia. There is absolutely no reason to assume that any part of the text was written in Muharram 1261. The entire text was revealed in the first two weeks within the month of Muharram 1262.

Aside from these confusions, it is a lack of attention to the overall conceptual framework of the text and the creative interpretation of occultation and prayer offered by the Báb that is missing in existing descriptions of the text. In what follows I try to address the central theme of the text.

### **The real meaning of occultation and prayer**

Both Nicolas and MacEoin find Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih of primary interest in relation to the early claims of the Báb, his apparent negation of any station for himself in some of his earlier writings and his reference to his expressing the 'word of negation after that of affirmation' for the sake of wisdom (*ibid.* p. 60). Yet neither of these

authors has noted the immense insights that are provided within that text in relation to this same question. In this short paper I will not address that specific question. Yet the Báb's interpretation of the twin concepts of the occultation of the Imam and prayer during the times of occultation is one of the ways that Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih clarifies the nature of the Báb's early claims, his use of wisdom and his true station.

The entire text, as we shall see, is an interpretation of the occultation prayer. It is evident that this issue is directly related to the apparent claim of the Báb in his early writings that he is the gate to the Hidden Imam during the latter's occultation. Thus the interpretation of the meaning of occultation and prayer, intended for realizing the advent of the Imam, is directly relevant for understanding the meaning of his own words regarding his true claims. In chapter 2 the Báb addresses the addressee of the tablet and mentions that he has read the book *Sanábarq* written by Mullá Ja'far Kashfí, the father of Siyyid Yahyá Dárabí, surnamed Vahíd. He refers to the interpretation offered by Mullá Ja'far concerning the 'prayer that hath dawned from the holy direction' and his discussion of the station of the Imams. I believe that it is likely that the prayer interpreted in *Sanábarq* is the same occultation prayer that is revealed by the sixth Imam (whose name is the same as that of Mullá Ja'far). It is probable that the questioner asked the Báb about this prayer and Mullá Ja'far's interpretation and had asked the Báb to interpret the prayer as well as to clarify his own station. However, I have not yet found a copy of *Sanábarq* and cannot be certain of this possibility. The Báb argues that what the author of *Sanábarq* has said with regard to the station of the Imams is simply inadequate to describe their lofty station and that all his descriptions are merely descriptions of the author's own self. Yet the Báb praises the attempt by Mullá Ja'far. The next chapter is an introduction to the interpretation of the occultation prayer, discussing the idea of prayer as *asking* a favour from God.

It is in chapter 4 that the Báb undertakes the discussion of the occultation prayer. He affirms that this prayer is found in *Kitáb-i Káfí* and quotes the tradition. According to this tradition Imam Ja'far speaks about the Hidden Imam who will undergo occultation. The Báb then reveals a prayer that is supposed to be read by the believers during the time of the occultation of the awaited Imam. The prayer has three parts and is as follows:

O my God! Make known to me thy self, for shouldst thou enable me not to recognize thy self, I would not be able to recognize thy Prophet.

O my God! Make known to me thine Apostle, for shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize thine Apostle, I would not be able to recognize thy testimony.

O my God! Make known to me thy testimony, for shouldst thou enable me not to recognize thy testimony I would stray from my religion.

It is necessary to mention that in the last chapter of the text, the Báb himself adds a fourth part to the above prayer and argues that the previous parts would not be acceptable without it. This fourth part affirms the station of gatehood. This is the fourth part:

O my God! Make known to me the gate to thy testimony, for shouldst thou enable

me not to recognize the gate to thy testimony I would stray from my religion (ibid. p. 148).

Although it is only in chapters 11, 12 and 13 that the three parts of the prayer are directly interpreted, all the chapters following chapter 4 are systematic discourses on the interpretation of the prayer. Before discussing how this is the case we need to investigate the essence of such interpretation that is already offered in chapter 4.

In dealing with the prayer, the Báb engages in a radical reinterpretation of the concept of occultation and prayer. Thus the occultation of the Hidden Imam refers not to a specific historical event, rather it is an existential description of the human situation. Similarly, the prayer that is to be read during the time of occultation is a description of the universal dynamics of the process of a spiritual journey. The Báb explains that in his primordial act of creation God has created humans perfect and self-sufficient. This perfection is the result of the fact that God has enshrined the sign of his own revelation within the heart of humans. This sign of divinity is nothing other than human ‘existence’ (*vujúd*), which is the direction of divine revelation in the created world. In addition to this existence, humans possess a specific ‘essence’, quidity, or determination (*máhíyyat*). This unity of essence and existence defines the station of perfect servitude, where one’s essence is annihilated and only the direction of the divine sign within one’s heart is manifest. Thus in their original station, humans are defined by the direction of divinity within their own being and nothing is seen in them except the revelation of God and his attributes. In such a situation humans are not alienated from their true reality and origin, which is the sign of divinity enshrined within their hearts. According to the Báb in this primordial situation humans transcend any dependence on others and have no need to ask from anyone anything. In this station of divinity ‘prayer’, namely calling unto one other than oneself, is meaningless and unnecessary. Prayer pertains to the situation of remoteness, imperfection and need. Yet in the original situation, where it is the divinity of humans that is sovereign, none of these categories are allowed. Thus in this primordial station of the human situation asking questions or calling to anyone is absolutely forbidden. In fact, asking for anything is an unforgivable sin. That is why chapter 3 of the text, which is an introductory preparation for an interpretation of the occultation prayer, is entirely devoted to an analysis of such a sin. The same point is again emphasized in chapter 4 in the context of a substantive interpretation of the prayer. In chapter 3, discussing the issue of asking questions in general, the Báb writes:

Chapter 3 on a divine and sublime introduction: Verily I seek in this chapter to discuss the principles of all knowledge . . . The path to God through knowledge of his eternity is barred, and he, in his truth, is not known by anyone save himself. Thus it is mentioned in the tradition that verily all sins committed by the faithful may be forgiven by God except the sin of asking, which shall never be forgiven. For God, glorified be he, hath made the faithful a partner with his own self, as in his words: ‘Glory is for God and for his Apostle and for the faithful’ (ibid. p. 66; the verse quoted is Q 63:8).



In chapter 3 the Báb emphasizes that for the people of inner truth there is no interest in any question that concerns anything other than the essence of God and such questioning is an unforgivable transgression since there is no path to such knowledge. Furthermore, since the essence of God is inaccessible, any such question would be directed to the created realm. But no such dependence and debasement is allowed. But in chapter 4 the Báb discusses the same point in a more specific way. He tells us that because humans in their primordial station of existence are created partners with God there can be no question and no calling (prayer) addressed to either God or any created being. He writes:

Chapter 4 on the description of the Prayer for the Days of Occultation: I now seek to interpret the prayer that Imam Sádiq commanded to be recited during the days of occultation . . .

O thou who gazest on the effects of glory! Know thou first of the truth, that verily God, glorified be he, hath not created anything save he hath made it with 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 the 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 (ibid. pp. 68–70).

Thus at this stage there can be no 'prayer' since there is no 'absence' and no 'occultation'. Yet the concept of prayer becomes possible and a duty when there is alienation of one's true reality. This means that the truth of one's being, the direction of divinity, is forgotten and one is revolving around one's own essence or specific determination. In this situation one needs to return to one's original true existence and thus needs to call to God, to engage in prayer and supplication and beseech the Lord for attainment of the truth of one's self. At this time, therefore, reciting prayer becomes a duty of human beings. Thus in chapter 4 the Báb explains:

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. Thus it is revealed in his book: 'but those who are too proud for my worship shall soon enter hell abased' (Q 40:60). And it is forbidden unto him in this station to ask from anyone save God (The Báb, *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih*, INBA 60, p. 70).

Thus the concept of prayer – calling and making a request – becomes meaningful within the existential station of self-alienation and enslavement to one's particularistic self or essence. In this station of occultation of the Imam it is necessary to engage in a relation of request addressed to a being other than one's self. But this other must only be God and such asking should only be directed to the Lord. Thus recitation of the occultation prayer becomes a duty of the faithful in the days of occultation. It is clear that occultation or absence of the Imam is in fact the state of forgetfulness of one's original truth, the alienation from one's true self, which



is nothing other than one's existence. This true self is the state of the divinity of human beings, the sign of divinity that is enshrined within their hearts. Thus the Báb is speaking of the dialectics of self-consciousness that has to be attained after one's alienation from one's true self and station. The truth of one's being is ultimately a spiritual reality, the revelation of God within one's being. But it is the fall from this state of perfection and unity that separates humans from all others and imprisons them within the realm of pluralities and phenomenal selves. It is thus necessary that such state of unconsciousness and unfreedom be overcome through a spiritual journey which attempts to realize one's true reality. Prayer to God becomes the dynamics of such journey.

The verse of the Qur'an that is quoted by the Báb in the above passage follows the divine command for prayer: 'And thy Lord sayest: "Call on me; I will answer your prayer."' The real meaning of hell and paradise is also obvious from this same Quranic verse. First God commands humans to pray to him and then he says that those who are too proud to worship him will enter hell abased. One can see that in the interpretation of the Báb, hell is the station of self-alienation and non-recognition of one's true reality while heaven is the realization of one's true self. This point is emphasized in various writings of the Báb, both earlier and later.

The Báb explains why calling to any one save God is forbidden. In chapter 4 he again refers to the Islamic tradition which states that all sins may be forgiven except asking, since according to the Qur'an, glory belongs to God, his Apostle and the believers (Q 63:8). Then he writes:

Verily the faithful is far more exalted than can be described and he is far more glorious than to have to beg and ask, and it is not worthy of his station to be debased and humiliated. Nay rather, he hath ever been and will continue forever to be glorious by virtue of the glory of God. Therefore what sin could be more grievous for him than asking, and what transgression could exceed that debasement? He who beholdeth the mystery of the highest end will indeed cast into oblivion his existence by virtue of such asking . . . Verily among the humans, with all their poverty and weakness, should one's slave asketh anyone other than his master for anything, this, in the sight of people, would hurt his honour and bring shame to him. Then how much more disgraceful such asking would be for God, glorified be he, with his absolute might, wealth, glory and generosity! (The Báb, *Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih*, INBA 60, p. 71)

Thus prayer and asking is forbidden to be directed to anyone except God. The purpose of this prayer is to return man to his true reality, his existence, the direction of divine revelation within his heart. Asking anyone else results in the opposite, where one is further alienated from his existence and glory. The purpose of prayer, therefore, is to realize the true station of servitude when nothing is seen in oneself except the divinity of the Lord. This is the stage of true self-realization and self-consciousness. At this stage man is God, except that man is man and God is God. Such prayer, therefore, is qualitatively different from any other prayer. As we can see, already in chapter 4 the Báb is interpreting the idea of occultation of the Imam and the need for prayer at such time in terms of the dialectics of the arc of descent

and the arc of ascent. It is the universal human condition that is symbolized by the twin concepts of the Imam's occultation and the duty to engage in prayer at such times. As we will see, the fundamental claim of the Báb is directly related to this inner meaning of occultation and prayer. He is the objective realization of such a stage of true servitude, the integration of servitude and divinity, the station of absolute and universal gatehood. Attaining true self-recognition is identical with recognition of the Báb. He is the fulfilment of all recognitions: the recognition of God and the recognition of the sign of divinity within one's heart. Although the station of the Báb can also be expressed in terms of the story of the occultation of the Hidden Imam, such description is only a token expression of his true station.

Yet one does not call on God to receive material possessions or various worldly favours. This prayer requires a particular mode of orientation of human being to God, which presupposes a specific gaze of unity. This is a prayer for recognition of one's true self, which is the recognition of God and his revelation. This principle defines the harmonious order of the text of the Báb.

### **The order of the text**

Although the Báb identifies the essence of his interpretation of the occultation prayer in chapter 4, the entire text is the elaboration of such interpretation. Readers of *Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih* are usually bewildered by the fact that it is only in chapters 11, 12 and 13 that the Báb addresses the three parts of the prayer. In between chapter 4 and chapter 11 are six chapters in which apparently no direct discussion of the occultation prayer takes place. In addition, the reader is usually puzzled by the relationship of these discussions. The truth, however, is that all the chapters of the text are direct interpretations of the occultation prayer. Given the mystical interpretation that the Báb offers for the concepts of both occultation and prayer, it is evident that such prayer could not be a mere ritualistic attempt to influence divine Will for various utilitarian favours. This is a prayer in the station of the heart, with the gaze of unity, and aims to recognize God and his signs within. At the end of chapter 4, therefore, the Báb states that for such prayer and request to be granted it is necessary that the one who engages in such prayer recognize various spiritual principles, without which his prayer will not be granted. But if one fulfils all these conditions then God will definitely grant his prayer. The next six chapters are in fact a detailed discussion of these principles. Therefore, chapters 5 to 10 are devoted to the discussion of these prerequisites of the prayer. It is only after such a discussion that the Báb then directly discusses the content of the occultation prayer in the subsequent three chapters. The concluding chapter is a mirror expression of the previous ones. Thus chapter 14 is devoted to negation of the letters of negation, an affirmation of the fact that prayer and asking should only be directed to God and to none other than God. Thus at the end of chapter 4 the Báb writes:

Know thou that it is incumbent upon one who engageth in prayer, first recognition of his Lord, then recognition of his attributes, then recognition of the names of his self, then of his object of search, then of his end . . . When thou hast attained these stations it is irrevocable that God shall grant thy prayer (ibid. pp. 71–2).

One reason for the bewilderment of the readers is that the apparent titles of chapters 5 and 6 do not relate to the first two preconditions that are listed in chapter 4. Yet chapters 5 and 6 are explicitly devoted to those two preconditions. Hence chapter 5 pertains to the question of recognition of God and his essence while chapter 6 is a discussion of God's attributes. Chapter 7 discusses God's names, chapter 8 the divine signs, chapter 9 one's true objects of desire, and chapter 10 one's true end and return. In this short paper I will not address the details of these chapters. But they are all an affirmation of the true meaning of both occultation and prayer as the binary oppositions of the human situation. For example, the entirety of chapter 9 is an affirmation of the fact that in the act of prayer the favour sought and the object desired are none other than the attainment of self-consciousness and regaining one's true reality, the mystical union with the sign of God within.

It is noteworthy that the essence of the interpretation of the concepts of occultation and prayer is also the essence of the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

O SON OF BEING! With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof.<sup>2</sup>

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 moulded 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.<sup>3</sup>

O SON OF MAN! Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not; wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished; why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory.<sup>4</sup>

O SON OF UTTERANCE! Turn thy face unto Mine and renounce all save Me; for My sovereignty endureth and My dominion perisheth not. If thou seekest another than Me, yea, if thou searchest the universe for evermore, thy quest will be in vain.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih as the interpretation of the letter *há'***

As we saw, Bahá'u'lláh calls Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih by the title The Interpretation of the letter *Há'*. It is time to see how this title relates to this work of the Báb.

In the beginning of this discussion I referred to a confusion in Ishraq Khavari's description of Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih. Since Bahá'u'lláh has called this text The Interpretation of the Letter *Há'*, Ishraq Khavari seems to have confused this work of the Báb with the other work that is called by that same Persian title. However, I will

call the other tablet (called by MacEoin Tafsir al-Ha' I) by the name Commentary on the Letter *Há'*.

The reason the Báb engages in interpretation of the letter *há'* in the Commentary on the Letter *Há'* is directly relevant for understanding the fact that Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih is also an interpretation of the letter *há'*. The Commentary on the Letter *Há'*, a work of about 45 pages revealed a few months after the revelation of Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih, is universally believed to have been written in honour of Siyyid Yahyá Dárábí, surnamed Vahíd. But this is certainly inaccurate. The addressee is Abu'l-Hasani'l-Husayní, a prominent notable of Shiraz. In his letter to the Báb, Husayní wrote: 'He is the sovereign. O my master! Favour me by lifting the veil from the countenance of the Cause, as you will.' The Báb grants his wish. He pierces the veils and reveals the truth through a medium of his choice. He finds the words of Husayní similar to the words of Kumayl, who asked for the unveiling of the truth. Thus the Báb begins his work by referring to Kumayl's tradition (The Báb, Commentary on the Letter *Há'*, INBA 86, p. 101). The Báb argues that one who has attained the vision of the heart can see the divine truth shining in all things. Then such a person can unveil the mystery of all reality through anything he chooses. As a demonstration of this fact, he chooses the first letter of the words of Husayní and shows that it, like everything else, contains the entire reflection of the truth. Husayní's letter began with the word 'He' (*Huva*), commencing with the Arabic letter *há'*. The rest of the work is an unveiling of truth through a discourse on the letter *há'* (ibid. pp. 109–10).

The reason that the Báb chooses to unveil the truth by interpreting the first letter of Husayní's missive is not random. He is affirming a profound spiritual truth through his choice. Referring to Kumayl's tradition, the Báb argues that the recognition of truth is the recognition of God. But recognition of God is impossible. He therefore discusses the transcendence of the divine Essence beyond any attribute, any association with any contingent being and any relation of causation. Thus the recognition of truth becomes the recognition not of the Essence of God but of the revelation of God within the world. The truth of all beings, including the truth of one's own true self, is none other than the divine revelation enshrined within. Thus true recognition of the countenance of the beloved is the same as the recognition of the sign of God within one's own being. The Báb wants Husayní to recognize that within his own being he can see the answer to his question. Therefore, even in the very first letter of the word uttered by Husayní the answer to all his questions is present. The Báb writes:

Verily the mystery of truth that is mentioned in the sacred traditions, whose knowledge distinguishes the truly learned, is an originated and created sign. God hath shed upon it, and through it, the splendours of his revelation and hath ordained it to be a sign of his own self, that all that is possible to exist out of the grace of God may vibrate, by its aid, towards his recognition and attain, by its aid, unto his truth. It is an originated sign . . . the sign of thy truth, the truth of thy being . . . Verily the first letter of thy letter is the letter *há'* and I now refer unto its true meaning that which God hath ordained for me to reveal (ibid. pp. 108–9).

This same point, as we have seen, is the essence of the interpretation offered by the Báb in his *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih*. The interpretation of the letter *há'* in the *Commentary on the Letter Há'* affirms the mystical nature of human reality. Similarly, according to *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih*, humans are the sign of divinity and they contain within themselves the ultimate truth, namely the revelation of God within their hearts. A state of self-alienation results from forgetting this fundamental truth. The answer to all questions is already present within the reality of the questioner. Truth is the nearest thing to humans, though humans are not aware of it. This state of forgetfulness is the same as the state of occultation. The reality of the Hidden Imam is present but is unseen by the people. This Imam is the 'existence' of humans that is present in the heart of humans but is apparently absent owing to the forgetfulness of humans and their fall into the state of particularistic 'essence'. Discourse on the first letter of the word of the questioner is an affirmation of the truth of one's being and the presence of truth within one's own reality.

Just as the *Commentary on the Letter Há'* identifies the question with the answer, the *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* refers to the same situation within the realm of the heart. In the primordial station of one's existence there is no need for any questions. Here too the question is the same as the answer and the two are not yet differentiated. However, in a state of occultation and forgetfulness, questions appear to be different from their answers. Yet finding true answers, at this stage, requires asking God alone. Thus one has to engage in a spiritual process through the vision of the heart. In this situation one discovers the answer to all his questions within his own being. Here the question contains within itself the answer. Thus in chapter 3 the Báb writes:

When thou attainest certitude that the way to recognition of the Essence of God is barred, tie then thy cord to God's good pleasure . . . and know of a certainty that the reality of divine good pleasure is thy love for thyself insofar as thyself is 'he is he', which is the sign of thy Lord within thee, and it is that around which revolve all divine names and attributes and all duties and laws. When thou attainest unto such a station, thou wouldst find all the divine descriptions as thy own self-description and thou wouldst understand the true mystery of the tradition 'Verily the faithful is above any description' . . . When one attaineth such a station one would know all things and would not need to ask any question from anyone save God (The Báb, *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih*, INBA 60, pp. 67–8).

In addition to the common epistemological approach of the two texts, we can recognize various substantive commonalities between *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* and the *Commentary on the Letter Há'*. The Báb wrote the latter text in response to an enquirer who asked him to unveil both the truth of being and the truth of the station of the Báb himself. But the letter *há'* is an answer to both questions, or rather, is an affirmation of the identity of both answers. This is the essence and the heart of the *Commentary on the Letter Há'*. The letter *há'* is a reference to the word 'he' (*huva*, which consists of two letters *há'* and *váv*) and thus a reference to God. Analysis of the letter *há'* is an attempt to recognize the ultimate truth, that is, God. Thus interpretation of the letter *há'* is a discussion of the ways to recognize God – and

this is precisely the topic of Sahífy-i Ja'fariyyih. Remember that while this text is an analysis of the occultation prayer, the entire content of that prayer is a discourse on the recognition of God. As mentioned above, the prayer consists of three parts which speak of the recognition of God, recognition of the Apostle and recognition of testimony. This prayer, which begins 'O my God! Make known to me thy self, for shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize thy self, I would not be able to recognize Thy Prophet', is thus a direct discourse on God, the letter *há'*.

Thus both texts are discourses on recognition of ultimate truth, which is recognition of God. But both texts affirm that recognition of the essence of God is impossible. Thus recognition of God becomes recognition of divine revelation within the created world. This revelation becomes ultimately the unity of two realities. One is the true reality of one's own self, the aspect of existence, the divine revelation within and the sign of divinity in one's heart. The other is the realization of the sovereign source of this sign, the realm of divine revelation, the Primal Will, the Manifestation of God, and the objective realization of divine Will. The latter, however, is best described as the letter *há'*. In interpreting the tradition of Kumayl, the Báb set out the two primordial meanings of truth: the truth of one's being, which is the divine sign within the human heart, and the truth of 'Alí, who is the one who was being asked about truth by Kumayl. One's true self is a reflection of the truth of 'Alí in one's heart. Thus self-recognition and recognition of 'Alí are identical. Both the Commentary on the Letter *Há'* and Sahífy-i Ja'fariyyih affirm the same idea. Although both texts use a language of wisdom and allusion, both emphasize the indistinguishability of recognizing one's true self and recognizing the Báb. This is the heart of the interpretation of the letter *há'*.

The letter *há'* is numerically equal to five and is a reference to the word '*báb*' (which is also five). Thus the Báb as the Remembrance and the Word of God becomes the truth of all reality, the manifestation of divine unity and the fulfilment of the tradition of truth. In his Commentary on the Letter *Há'* the Báb explains that the letter *há'* refers to the word '*báb*'. The word '*báb*' is the 'lightest word', the Quranic 'good word' and the secret of divine unity:

Verily the letter *há'* is the spirit of all the letters and the utmost remembrance of servitude for the Best Beloved . . . It is by virtue of this letter that the divine unity is affirmed and the realm of pluralities is negated. Verily, those endued with true understanding recognize the truth of all the worlds through the symbolism of this letter, for that which is there cannot be known except through that which is here.

The letter *há'* is the number of that word which is the lightest word revealed by God in the Qur'an.

That letter is identical with that word in all its outward manifestations and inward meanings . . . Verily that word is naught but the upright *alif* between the two *bás*. That referreth unto the Cause of God between the twin names . . . Thus God hath not ordained for this word, unlike other words, any half, third or fourth, for it is the manifestation of the everlasting light and thus naught proceedeth from it (The Báb, Commentary on the Letter *Há'*, INBA 14, pp. 279–80).

In this passage, the Báb explains that the word *báb* represents the inner and outer



truth of divine unity. The word consists of the most simple letters – an A between two Bs. The A, or upright *alif*, refers to the creative divine command, the divine Cause which is manifested through the twin names of ‘Alí and Muhammad. The Arabic letter A is written as a vertical line, while B is written as a horizontal line. Since the Báb is the manifestation of divine unity, and since nothing else proceeds out of the divine Essence, the word ‘*báb*’ also represents an indivisible unity.

It is important to note that various writings of the Báb, both earlier and later, offer complex interpretations of the word ‘*báb*’. In fact, according to his writings the entire spiritual reality is present within the mystery of this word, the mystery of the letter *há*. Later writings of the Báb argue that the ‘*báb*’ (equal to five) is the difference between light (*núr* = 256) and hellish fire (*nár* = 251). Thus the term ‘*báb*’ indicates the concept of light since it is equivalent to the difference between fire and light. The Báb is the supreme standard of truth and the day of Resurrection. Throughout the writings of the Báb, the word ‘*báb*’ represents an upright vertical line (the letter A) which unites two horizontal lines (two letter Bs). The Báb is the middle path that unites the two extreme opposites. The most important realization of this station is the unity of divinity and servitude in the being of the Báb. This is ultimately the reality of the point that is defined by the two stations of divinity and servitude, or divinity and prophethood. The name of the Báb, ‘Alí Muhammad, is primarily a reference to this station of the Báb. Muhammad refers to the station of servitude of the point, whereas ‘Alí, one of the names of God, symbolizes divinity of the point. Simultaneously ‘Alí Muhammad represents the unity of prophethood and vicegerency. The Báb is the reality that unites in his being the two stations of servitude and divinity, as well as prophethood and vicegerency.

Yet the word ‘*báb*’ also refers to the first three stages of divine creative action. Will (*mashíyyat*) is the first divine creative action, corresponding to the concept of existence. Determination (*irádih*) is the second station of divine creative action, corresponding to the essence of things. Destiny (*qadar*), the third stage of divine action, is the link and unity between the previous two. It corresponds to the linking of existence and essence. This unity is the very idea of justice, the middle path between absolute determinism and absolute freedom. These three stages are the conditions of the possibility of all reality. The Báb is the embodiment of these three stages.

In *Sahífiy-i Ja‘faríyyih* the Báb discusses the letter *há* in this way. As we have seen, *há* refers simultaneously to the word *huva* (he) and to the Báb, while the word *huva* consists of two Arabic letters *há* and *váv*. The first is equal to five and the second to six. Thus the word *huva* is equal to 11. An interesting point frequently emphasized by the Báb is the identification of this word with the name of the Báb, that is ‘Alí. Numerically ‘Alí is equal to 110, which is in reality a higher expression of 11. In this complex symbolic structure we can see the identity of the Báb = 5 = *há* = *Huva* = 11 = ‘Alí = 110. Yet ‘*huva*’, which is equal to 11, is also defined as the twin upright *alifs* (the first letter of the Arabic alphabet which is both equal to one and is written like the numeral 1). Thus *huva* is the twin *alifs* or 11, which is nothing but the truth of the letter *há*.

The interpretation offered by the Báb of *huva* as the twin *alifs* is most fascinating. It refers to the unity of the two stations of divinity (higher) and servitude (lower). It simultaneously refers to the word *huva* and the word ‘Alí, 11 and 110, the



stations of the point and the vicegerency. Discussing the fifth of the five stations of divine action and revelation in the world, the Báb writes:

The fifth station testifieth unto God in the mirror of the letter *há'*, and it is the word that consisteth of twin *alifs*, that is 11. It is by virtue of the first *alif* that it surgeth unto the supreme cloud of the Essence, the station of 'There is none other God than he (*huva*)', while through the other *alif* it falleth down unto the heaven of vicegerency, the station of 'he is the most great *'Ali*. (The Báb, *Sahífiy-i-Ja'fariyyih*, INBA 60, pp. 103–4).

It is crucial to note that the letter *há'* or *huva* is defined as a reference to the unity of both existence and essence. This theme is central to the Báb's interpretation of the concepts of occultation and prayer. The stage of perfect servitude is one in which the defining feature of being is negation of one's particularistic essence so that nothing except existence, the divine revelation within, is seen. This is both a moral and epistemological principle in the writings of the Báb. The essence of knowledge and morality is defined by the vision of the heart where the truth of one's reality is witnessed and nothing except the sign of divinity is mentioned. The essence of morality is defined as revolving around or circumambulating one's heart, one's existence, one's true existence. The essence of immorality is described as circling around one's particularistic essence, selfish desires and self-alienation. In *Sahífiy-i-Ja'fariyyih* and other writings of the Báb both these points are emphatically emphasized. Hence in the first chapter of *Sahífiy-i-Ja'fariyyih* the Báb writes: 'Thus beware, beware . . . lest thou gaze upon thy essence (*máhíyyatika*), and take heed, take heed to focus thy gaze upon thy heart and its command' (ibid. p. 62). As we saw above, the station of occultation is the station of falling into the abyss of particularistic essence and forgetting one's existence, the true spiritual reality of human beings.

Given the identification of the letter *há'* with the word '*báb*', one can note a fundamental truth that is discussed in the *Sahífiy-i-Ja'fariyyih*. Referring to those writings of the Báb in which he apparently denies having any specific station of gatehood, as the appointed gate to the Hidden Imam, the Báb affirms the Quranic point that although the enemies of God used their best tricks to plot against God, it is God who has the best tricks of all (Q 3:54). The trick used by the Báb is explained by him: what he denied in fact was the station of specific gatehood as the appointed gate to the Imam. The Báb explains that although his station is one of gatehood (he is the Báb), this is the station of absolute gatehood, the universal concept of the Báb, a station that is not limited to any particular specification. Rather, he is the Báb in the universal sense of the term. In chapter 1 of *Sahífiy-i-Ja'fariyyih* he writes:

Then thou (God) brought me in the utmost state of degradation to the place of the oppressors and revealed unto me the word of negation after that of affirmation . . . But I verily intended not in that which I wrote except the specific station of appointed gatehood, yet gatehood is in reality an absolute word that falleth into limitation by such specification. By thy glory! They failed to plot against me. Nay, rather, I was the swiftest in such planning (The Báb, *Sahífiy-i-Ja'fariyyih*, INBA 60, pp. 60–1).

One of the most perplexing issues to me in this regard is that Nicolas discusses Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih in his preface to the French translation of the Persian Bayán in order to prove that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's account of the Báb's announcement in the mosque of Vakíl in Shiraz is inaccurate. Nicolas quotes from *A Traveler's Narrative* and then argues that this description of the event does not fit with the words of the Báb himself who has explicitly mentioned in Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih that he has used the word of negation in relation to his claims (Nicolas 1908, pp. xvii–xxv). Yet when Nicolas quotes the above passage in Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih in which the Báb explains what he actually meant by the word of negation, he comes to the same conclusion that is offered in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Traveler's Narrative*. Nicolas argues that the Báb's account in Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih – that his denial of specific gatehood was in fact accurate since he was the manifestation of absolute gatehood – is compatible with his true claim because he was the Qá'im and a new prophet and not the specific gate to the Imam (ibid. p. xix). But this is exactly the point that is raised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He contends that the words of the Báb were perceived differently by the audience in the mosque, who assumed that he was denying being the gate to the Imam (and thus they became 'quiet and tranquil') from the spiritual elect, who concluded that the Báb claimed a higher station and a more exalted meaning of gatehood.<sup>6</sup> I should acknowledge that the hasty judgement of Nicolas may be a result of seeing Browne's translation and not the original. The original words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly imply that the audience became silent and tranquil because they *assumed* that an actual recantation had taken place but Browne's translation does not convey this point clearly.

It is interesting that even when the Báb appears to be using a language of wisdom and denies specific claims for himself, he is in fact arguing that the truth of his station cannot be described by any linguistic category, including prophethood, vicegerency or appointed gatehood. Those categories can be equally attributed to him or denied with regard to his station. The truth of his station is in fact beyond any description but the closest is the perfect station of servitude to God, the station in which nothing except God can be seen. The point emphasized by the Báb in these discussions is this: regardless of the title and description of his claim, he represents the supreme divine testimony and therefore he should be obeyed even if he calls the day night and the night day. This is also applicable to the definition of his station: his possession of supreme testimony requires perfect obedience to his command whether he calls himself the supreme sign of God on earth or the most abased atom of existence. For example, in the second chapter of Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih the Báb refers to the doubts of the questioner concerning the truth of the Báb and then guides him on the path of truth. The Báb argues that the Cause of God is most manifest and there is no doubt about it. Then he asks the questioner to ponder the truth of the Báb. He argues that if you see that the Báb has appeared with an incontrovertible testimony and proof the like of which no one else can produce, then it is your duty to obey his words and not to ask why or wherefore:

Behold the one who calleth thee unto God. Should he possess an incontrovertible testimony from his Lord in such manner that none is able to produce the like thereof, his cause would then be proven to be true and there would be no doubt

about it. Obey then his words and ask not why or wherefore . . . Shouldst thou acknowledge his testimony thou wouldst have no place to flee to save to obey him, even if he calleth night day, poison sugar, false true, and knowledge ignorance (The Báb, *Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih*, INBA 60, pp. 62–3).

One of the main discussions of the truth of the letter *há'* is undertaken in chapter 7 of *Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih*. As we have seen, the Báb argued that achieving true prayer presupposes six forms of recognition. The third requirement is recognition of the names of God, which is the topic of chapter 7. An adequate discussion of this chapter is not possible here.

The essence of the Báb's discourse is to define the Most Great Name of God, the true realization of such recognition. The Báb defines the Most Great Name of God as the letter *há'*, namely *huva*, as well as the name 'Alí (which is the name of the Báb and a reflection of *huva*) and the twin names 'Alí Muhammad (his own name). At the same time he identifies the Most Great Name of God with the station of the perfect Shi'a, the station of gatehood. Yet the Báb appears in the arc of ascent. Thus contrary to the station of the specific gate in the arc of descent, the Báb's station precedes that of other figures of the hierarchy of spiritual recognition, namely Muhammad and the Imams. Explaining the Most Great Name of God he writes:

He who prayeth unto God by the mystery of the name Muhammad and 'Alí, God shall never reject his call, even if he is amongst those who join partners with God. For that is the Most Great Name of God – when they are joined together and not separately . . . Verily the first name that God hath assumed for himself is the name 'Alí, the Great . . . Thus is it manifest to one who knoweth how to think the grandeur of the name *huva*, after detaching oneself from *váv* and focusing one's gaze on the letter *alif* that is present within the letter *há'*. Its numerical value is 11, which correspondeth to the name 'Alí, that is 110 . . . Take heed, O thou who prayest, and cling thou unto that most mighty name and the most great attribute . . .

But now I allude to the inward truth of this station by discussing a tradition and a related one that thou mayest attain certitude that, verily, the Most Great Name is outwardly present within the phrase 'O God! Bless Muhammad and the Family of Muhammad', and inwardly in the name of guardianship ('Alí) before prophethood (Muhammad), apparent in the station of the true Shi'a.

A most exciting aspect of this section is again affirmation of the two types of recognition: recognition of the Báb and recognition of the mystical truth enshrined within the hearts of humans. Thus recognition of the Báb and self-recognition are identical. This point is discussed in chapter 7 in an exciting interpretation of the phenomenology of the concept of the Most Great Name of God. Here the Báb argues that all names are names of God, and all names when mentioned at the station of the heart and stripped of all limitations and references to the particular essence of things, point to the unity and divinity of all things and are, therefore, the Most Great Name of God. Thus, although the objective realization of this approach is the manifest station of the Báb himself, this is identical with the truth

of all beings. In other words, all things in their primordial station of existence are named the Most Great Name of God. It is only when they are alienated from their true reality and forget their existence, falling into the abyss of particularistic selves, that their names are no longer the Most Great Name of God. Thus recognition of the Báb, the letter *há'*, is the path to achieve the Most Great Name of God within one's reality as well. Hence the Báb writes: 'Belittle not any name in the contingent world, for verily all names of God are great, and when they are purified from reference to aught save God they become the Most Great (ibid. p. 92).

Yet there are other significant reasons why *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* is an interpretation of the letter *há'*. One of the most important of these is the centrality of the station of the Imam Husayn in this text. The Báb wrote his work sometime around the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn on the tenth Muharram. Various chapters of the text identify the date as the second, fourth and tenth of Muharram. That is why the entire text is a discourse on the station of the Báb through a discussion and remembrance of the station of the Imam Husayn. Various chapters are devoted to discussing Husayn's martyrdom as well as the similarity of the present situation of the Báb to the day of his martyrdom. As we know, according to the Báb, Imam Husayn is the letter *há'* in the Islamic dispensation. He is the fifth sacred figure within the hierarchy of the 14 immaculate souls, listed after Muhammad, 'Alí, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn. In fact among the works of the Báb, *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* is most pronounced in the centrality of such discussion on the letter *há'*. It is also noteworthy that in the Book of Certitude, where Bahá'u'lláh quotes from *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* and describes the text as the Interpretation of the Letter *Há'*, he is quoting the statement of the Báb in which he directly identified his present situation with the martyrdom of Imám Husayn.

As noted above, a central message of *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* is the idea that the martyrdom of Imam Husayn took place in the age of appearance and outward meaning and thus his martyrdom was a physical one. With the inception of the new Cause, the arc of ascent, the age of inward meaning has commenced and therefore it is the divine decree that the martyrdom of the Báb is to take place in an inward sense on that very day, the tenth of Muharram. If the body of Husayn were subjected to 950 blows from the swords his enemies, the heart of the Báb is now torn into pieces by thousands of blows from the swords of accusations and denials. To respond to his enemies' letters of refutation, particularly those from people such as Javád-i-Baraghání, is the height of affliction and martyrdom.

It is in this same regard that the Báb speaks in *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* as Husayn spoke on the day of his martyrdom. The Báb, like Husayn, engages in a lengthy 'champion's call for battle'. Here, however, it is the revelation of the divine verses that is offered as the matchless and subduing force of the champion. I cannot, however, pursue this issue here, as it needs a whole paper on its own.

Finally, perhaps the most important way that *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* is both an interpretation of the letter *há'* and an affirmation of the truth of the Báb's station is the very interpretation of the occultation prayer offered by the Báb. Chapters 11, 12 and 13 are devoted to a discussion of each of the three parts of the prayer. Yet the essence of all these interpretations is one and the same: the prayer affirms that recognition of God and his sacred representatives is only possible through God's act of self-description

and self-unveiling. It is God who has made himself known to humans, otherwise no human could ever recognize God. This, however, is the essence of the Báb's principle that the standard of recognition of God is solely what God has defined as his testimony; that is, that, ultimately, the very revelation of divine verses is the very act of divine self-description. Thus the essence of the occultation prayer is an affirmation of the absolute sovereignty of the truth of the Báb by virtue of his revelation of divine words, the like of which cannot be produced by anyone.

Sahífiy-i Ja'faríyyih is an extensive discussion of this same fact. It is a discourse on the letter *há'*, that is, a discourse on the recognition of God and his gate. Various chapters of the text elaborate this theme and it is this fact that is ultimately the answer to all accusations against and attacks on the Báb. Chapter 2 is the chapter on methodology. Here the Báb *counsels* the questioner to focus his gaze on the standard of truth and the incontrovertible testimony of his truth. Chapters 11 to 13 extend this principle. Those familiar with the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh know that this same principle is defined as the principle of the heart, the sanctuary of unity and the gaze of God. In other words, this is the same as the return to the truth of one's self and the true realization of prayer in order to overcome the alienation of separation and occultation.<sup>7</sup>

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## Notes

1. The reason MacEoin has made such a mistake is the error in transcription of the tablet as printed in Ishraq Khavari 1950, vol. 7, p. 60. That it is a mistake, all the other copies of the tablet make clear; see, for example, Bahá'u'lláh INBA 35, p. 233, and INBA 76, p. 90. See also Mohammadhosseini 1995, pp. 952–3.
2. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 12.
3. *ibid.* Arabic no. 13.
4. *ibid.* Arabic no. 14.
5. *ibid.* Arabic no. 15.
6. This is Browne's translation:

One day they summoned Him to the mosque urging and constraining Him to recant, but He discoursed from the pulpit in such wise as to silence and subdue those present and to establish and strengthen His followers. It was then supposed that He claimed to be the medium of grace from His Highness the Lord of the Age (upon Him be peace); but afterwards it became known and evident that His meaning was the Gatehood [*Bábíyyat*] of another city and the mediumship of the graces of another Person Whose qualities and attributes were contained in His books and treatises ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1980, pp. 6–7).

7. *Sahífiy-i Ja'fariyyih* is truly filled with spiritual wonders and miracles. In this short article I have tried to outline the structure of the text. However, any detailed discussion of the issues raised in the text needs independent work.