

George Ronald Bahá'í Studies Series

The Bahá'í Faith  
and  
the World's Religions

edited by  
Moojan Momen

Papers presented at the Irfan Colloquia

Published in collaboration with the  
Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund



George Ronald

## Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	v
The God of Bahá'u'lláh <i>Moojan Momen</i>	1
Seeing Double: The Covenant and the Tablet of Ahmad <i>Todd Lawson</i>	39
The Sufi Stages of the Soul in Bahá'u'lláh's The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys <i>Julio Savi</i>	89
The Bahá'í Faith and Higher Biblical Criticism <i>Robert Stockman</i>	107
African Traditional Religion – A Bahá'í View <i>Akwasi O. Osei</i>	115
African Traditional Religion and the Bahá'í Faith <i>Enoch Tanyi</i>	129
Monotheistic Religion in Africa: The Example of the Swazi People <i>Margaret and Crispin Pemberton-Pigott</i>	147
The Bahá'í Approach to Other Religions: The Example of Buddhism <i>Moojan Momen</i>	167
Common Teachings in Chinese Culture and the Bahá'í Faith – From Material Civilization to Spiritual Civilization <i>Albert K. Cheung</i>	189
The New Age Movement and the Bahá'í Faith <i>Zaid Lundberg</i>	213
The Báb's Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God <i>Todd Lawson</i>	231

“The *Risala fi al-Suluk*, text, translation and commentary,” Bahai Studies: vol 1 *The Bahai Faith and World Religions*, ed M. Momen, George Ronald: Oxford, 2003[2004], pp. 231-47.

## The Báb's Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God

A Provisional Translation by Todd Lawson

1. In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
2. Be steadfast, O seeker of piety, in the station of affirming the divine unity. As God, exalted be He, has said:
3. 'As for those who say "our Lord is God" then continue steadfast, the angels descend upon them saying "fear not, nor be grieved, and receive good news of the garden which ye were promised!"'
4. Know ye that 'the paths to God are as numerous as the breaths of the creatures' yet, there is no soul but one and there is no religion but the one religion, and it is the Cause of God. And our command is but a single act.
5. So set thou thy face steadily to the true faith – the nature made by God – in which He has made men. There is no altering God's creation.
6. Verily, Religion is supported by four pillars:
  - 1) Affirming Divine Unity
  - 2) Prophethood
  - 3) Guardianship, and
  - 4) The community of true believers

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

7. And all of this is the Face of God which will never perish. And this is the love of the Family of God which is the same as the love of God. This is the Hidden Treasure to which the Prophet, upon him and his family be peace, openly alluded when he said: 'Above each good is another good until one loves us, and when one loves us there is no higher good.'
8. So love, beloved, lover, and Beloved are four divine signs appearing from the radiant self-manifestation of the family of God in you and in your soul. Whenever these four signs are remembered within you and your heart is illumined, and your soul stirred, and your spirit moved and your body quakes with longing, then you are truly among the people of paradise and the companions of the Commander of the Faithful, upon him be peace.

9. At such a time you are indeed in conformity with the true religion and the true balance and the obvious and clear path. Above this station there is no higher good.
10. Thus one ascends unto the abode of the permanence of God.  
  
There is no end to the love of God and no finish.  
  
This is the guiding principle of the search.
11. There can be no question, the Shari'a in its entirety is one method in the quest of the servant for his Lord, but by proceeding according to the guiding principle as We have indicated.
12. As for the method of attaining the guiding principle – know that attainment to the station of your sign is attainment to your Lord. And this is the station of pure piety towards God, exalted be He, as when one of the prophets asked of God, praised be He, 'How can we attain to Thee?' God, may he be exalted, said, 'Cast away thyself and rise to Me.'
13. This is why the station of the novices is conditional upon denying the self what it passionately desires and forcing upon it what it detests because there is no veil more base for the servant than his own self.
14. By God! If you struggle against your self you will by and by send it to the station of nearness and remembrance and intimacy in the shade of your Beloved and adore Him above all else, to the extent that even if you were cut to shreds you would not be negligent of His station. Because, the knower is he whose heart is with God and he has no speech, thought, nor act except in, by, with and about God, exalted be He.
15. Neglect not your personal struggle thereby forfeiting thy portion in this world but do thou good as God has been good to thee.
16. And if you are neglectful it will be your great loss on the Day of the Return and you will say: 'Ah! Woe is me! – in that I neglected my duty towards God.'
17. So pass on whither We have been commanded and fear not the reproaches of those who find fault. This is the grace of God which He will bestow on whom He pleaseth and God is the owner of all Grace and the All-Knowing.
18. Flee from whatever distracts you from God. Indeed such is a deadly poison which will consume you in flames while you are unaware.

19. N  
ce20. It  
is  
a  
pe  
th21. In  
G  
se  
an  
al  
th22. A  
o  
th23. F  
T  
v  
u  
c  
e  
t  
g  
r  
a24. B  
F  
b  
n  
C  
y  
c  
c

19. Nay, were you to know with certainty of mind you would be aware. You shall certainly see hellfire. Again you shall see it with certainty of sight.
20. It is incumbent upon you to abandon the world and all that is in it. Indeed, it is the chief of all evils. And in your quest do not linger in any one station. Thus a dog of the Jews is better than the people of the marketplace because the people of the marketplace are the people of lingering. Verily, such lingering is the source of that negligence which bars access to God.
21. Indeed, the world and the hereafter are two spiritual states. If you turn towards God, exalted be He, then you are in paradise and if you are occupied with your self then you are in hell and in the world. Therefore understand these allusions and sever thyself from all unworthy habits and lusts. Endure patiently the alienation of people and the blame of the companion and the malicious joy of the enemy from among family and offspring.
22. And when you have begun your quest along this path of search, then the gate of God will open to your soul and you will request entrance into the realm of the Holy One.
23. For the people of insight these subtle allusions will suffice:
- ‘Rend the veils of glory and allusions and efface the idle fancies and rend the veils and be attracted to the exclusive unity through affirming the divine unity until the light of dawn shines forth from the sun of thy reality and you enter the city of unity while its people are unaware “and extinguish the lamp” of everything that has veiled you from God, exalted be He. Thus will you attain to the praised station that God, exalted be He, has promised the people who glorify God at night – that is: turning towards the absolute divine unity in the midst of intense darkness. And so, it may be that thy Lord will raise thee up to a praiseworthy station.’
24. Finally, this book, on the proper method of search, is kept brief for those possessed of insight. In it is that which will suffice for the pure amongst the believers in the divine unity. The particulars have been fully written about by my master, my support, my teacher, the pilgrim Sayyid Kázim al-Rashtí, may God lengthen his life and bring forth from it good results. So seek the way of your Lord made smooth for thee. ‘There cometh forth from their bellies a drink diverse of hues, wherein is healing for mankind’ and a mercy; ‘while the oppressors increase only in ruin’.

The provisional translation offered here is of one of the Báb's earliest extant writings (perhaps the earliest) known as the *Risála fi's-sulúk*.<sup>1</sup> MacEoin lists five privately published 'editions' for the *Risála* and correctly observes that the original work 'appears to have been written during the later years of the life of Sayyid Kazim Rashti (and thus before the commencement of the Báb's own dispensation)'.<sup>2</sup> MacEoin has chosen to translate *sulúk* as 'right behaviour' but the contents and concerns of this brief piece strongly suggest that a more accurate rendering would be 'journey', 'spiritual search' or even 'mystic quest'. The above translation of the text is offered without the encumbrances of copious notes and references, except as indicated by quotation marks and other minor punctuation (Arabic has no punctuation system analogous to English usage). Also, in some cases the above translation violates strict literalness in the interest of readability.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the Quranic and Hadith material in this work will continue to figure prominently in later writings of the Báb. For example, the relatively lengthy quotation with commentary from the Hadith Kumayl (begins: 'Rend the veils of glory' and ends 'raise thee up to a praiseworthy station (QWM)' in the above translation and slightly differently in the one below) in this short work is noteworthy because it shows the importance the Báb attached – from the beginning – to this celebrated and widely-commented short sermon of 'Alí ibn Abí Tálíb, the first Imam of the Shi'a and prime bearer of post-prophetic spiritual authority and charisma (*waláya*). This Hadith is also known as the *Hadith má 'l-haqíqa*, that is to say the sacred words in answer to the question 'What is divine reality?'. It should be noted, also, that this very important Hadith is not found in the canonical *Nahj al-balágha* (the standard compilation of the writings and sermons of the Imam 'Alí). Reference to this hadith by the Báb is significant because it shows that he was clearly engaged in the long, venerable and exceedingly rich Shi'i mystical – or gnostic – discourse. Indeed, the Báb also wrote a separate commentary devoted solely to this sermon.<sup>4</sup> In the Bábí/Bahá'í tradition, interest in the Hadith did not stop with the Báb, one of whose more prominent followers eventually adopted one of its distinctive formulations, *subh-i azal*, as an honorific title. Bahá'u'lláh also makes repeated reference to this sermon throughout his writings as when, in referring to another one of the sermon's distinctive ideas, he speaks of the 'veils of glory' (*subuhát al-jalál*). The literal meaning, 'lofty praises of divine glory', suggests that one must rigorously avoid equating one's understanding (and therefore one's 'self') of sublime divine qualities with the absolute unknowable essence of God (hence 'veils of glory' could be translated as 'delusions of grandeur'). 'Veils of glory' is a symptom of spiritual disease diagnosed originally by 'Alí.

The translation offered here also demonstrates, if such were necessary, how important the Qur'an was for the Báb. It is essential to point out that while many of the Quranic quotations or references are very brief, their appearance in this text is also meant to stimulate in the mind of the reader the immediate scriptural context that they represent in addition to the relevant distinctive Shi'i understanding of the verse or exegetical tradition. Therefore, in the notes accompanying the second translation below, some of the unquoted Quranic context is supplied.

T  
ment  
ment  
Shayk  
Shi'i  
numb  
'doctr  
the p  
exam  
world  
One s  
writin  
Baqa  
attrib  
numb  
There  
tracea  
work  
Tawh  
ments  
the sy  
passag  
mode  
Whet  
tial w  
establ  
T  
tions,  
Shayk  
A goo  
the Sh  
but by  
idea is  
the sp  
gious  
is des  
is sym  
stand  
to col  
'ultim  
high  
such a  
three  
freque

This *Risála* also shows quite clearly the interest the Báb had in and his attachment to the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kázim. Apart from the explicit mention of the latter, the basic quaternary structure of the discourse reflects Shaykhi teachings. Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í introduced certain changes in Twelver Shi'í belief and practice. Among the more prominent of these was to reduce the number of the traditional pillars of faith from five to four. Far from being a merely 'doctrinal' matter, the Shaykhiya held that this number was more in harmony with the profound laws of creation and the cosmos. According to the Shaykhis, for example, the realms of *láhút*, *jabarút*, *malakút* and *násút* are, among other things, four worlds which individual souls must traverse in order to reach their ultimate destiny. One sees this concern with the fourness of things, or quaternity, throughout the writings of the Báb. His earliest sustained Qur'an commentary on the Súrat al-Baqara (Chapter of the Cow) is full of tetradic structures of various spiritual attributes and qualities. The *Qayyúm al-asmá* itself is structured around the number four as far as each of the separate chapters of that work are concerned. There is little doubt that these quaternary structures in the writings of the Báb are traceable to the teachings of the first two masters of the Shaykhi school.<sup>5</sup> In the work at hand, the four Shaykhi pillars of belief are explicitly mentioned (viz: Tawḥíd, Nubuwwa, Imáma, Shi'a) and tacitly correlated with four spiritual 'movements' of love, beloved, lover and Beloved. One may also see the continuation of the symbolic importance of four in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, the passage in the Seven Valleys that speaks of the four kinds of love and the four modes of time<sup>6</sup> or the structure itself of the entire work entitled the Four Valleys. Whether this preoccupation with quaternity is directly connected with the influential work of Mullá Šadrá (namely his magnum opus, *The Four Journeys*) has not been established.

The understanding of the 'next world' (paradise or hellfire) as spiritual conditions, rather than places, is also a distinctive Shaykhi teaching and shows how Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kázim combined the languages of Sufism and Shi'ism. A good example of the way which the Báb continued this is his statement: 'Indeed the Sharí'a in its entirety is one method for the quest of the servant for his Lord, but by proceeding according to the guiding principle as We have indicated . . .' This idea is in line with the traditional Sufi motto: Sharí'a, Ṭaríqa, Ḥaqíqa. According to the spiritual masters of the Islamic tradition, the Sharí'a, or obedience to the religious law, is absolutely essential for the spiritual life of the believer. This obedience is destined to lead that believer to a fuller knowledge or awareness. This awareness is symbolized by the word *ṭaríqa* which literally means 'way' or 'path' and is the standard technical term for a mystical order. The Sufi orders of Islam are referred to collectively as the *ṭuruq* or *ṭaríqát*, plurals of the singular *ṭaríqa*. Finally, *ḥaqíqa* 'ultimate' or 'divine' Reality is the word used by these same masters to indicate the highest possible limit of human aspiration. Indeed, *ḥaqíqa* generally remains beyond such aspiration (see, for example, the Báb's allusions to this in this *Risála*). These three traditional stages of the quest (all of which are addressed here by the Báb) are frequently coordinated in the mystical literature with three modes of being: *muṣlím*,

*mu'min*, *muhsin*. The *muslim* is the one who submits to the law or Sharí'a, even if he does not fully 'understand' why he should. The *mu'min*, or secure (or faithful) believer, has through his submission acquired a fuller understanding of obedience and the law. The *muhsin*, one made pleasing to God, 'automatically' reflects in his actions and deeds the transformative beauty of this faith and understanding. These three stages are also frequently correlated with the three modes of perception referred to in the Qur'an as *'ilm al-yaqín* (Qur'an 102:5), *'ayn al-yaqín* (Qur'an 102:7), *haqq al-yaqín* (Qur'an 56:95, 69:51): the knowledge of certitude, the perception of certitude, the reality of certitude. Note that the Báb also refers to this triad towards the end of the *Risála*. These three modes of certitude are also associated with the three modes of soul mentioned in the Qur'an: *al-nafs al-'ammára bi'l-sú'* (Qur'an 12:53), *al-nafs al-lawwáma* (Qur'an 75:2), *al-nafs al-mutma'inna* (Qur'an 89:27): the erring soul, the guiding soul, the soul at peace.<sup>7</sup>

For those who would like to pursue a more detailed study of the *Risála*, I offer below a second translation. This one is more technical in general, does have some explanations scattered throughout the text and in the accompanying notes there are references to some pertinent scholarly literature. Before proceeding to this second translation, it is necessary to mention an essential feature of the manner in which the Báb expresses his ideas. He does this not only by citing words of scripture – Qur'an and Hadith, or through demonstrating his knowledge of Shaykhi philosophy. A striking feature of the Báb's style – and one that would continue to characterize it throughout his ministry, is the poetic and 'musical' use of the Arabic language. In the brief work at hand, the most frequent Arabic roots used are *Q-W-M* (straightness, rising, standing), *B-W-B* (gate), *W-H-D* (oneness). These have been indicated below in this second translation to attempt to give some idea, however self-defeating, of the Báb's artistry. Also, in the following translation those words that are taken from the Qur'an are indicated in italics, while in one paragraph words from the Hadith Kumayl are in small capital letters. Qur'an translations are based upon those of Yusuf Ali.

## Epistle on the Spiritual Discipline Required for the Journey towards God

### *The Báb's Risálah fi's-Sulúk ilá Alláh*

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE <sup>8</sup> (QUR'AN PASSIM)

Be steadfast (*QWM*)<sup>9</sup>, O seeker of piety (*TQW*)<sup>10</sup>, in the station (*QWM*) of affirming the divine unity (*WHD*).<sup>11</sup> God, exalted be He, said:

*As for those who say 'our Lord is God' then continue steadfast (QWM), the angels descend upon them saying 'fear not, nor be grieved, and receive good news of the garden which ye were promised!'* (Qur'an 41:30; cf. also 46:13)



Know ye that 'the paths to God are as numerous as the breaths (*anfás*) of the creatures',<sup>12</sup> while there is *no soul* but *one* (*nafs wáhida*; *WHD*; cf. Qur'an 4:1; 31:28; 39:6), and that there is no religion but the one religion (*dín wáhid*; *WHD*), and it is the *Cause of God* (*amr Alláh*; Qur'an 33:37; 49:9 and *passim*). *And our command* (*amruná*) *is but a single* (*act*) (*wa má amruná illá wáhida*; *WHD*; Qur'an 54:50; the second half of the verse, not quoted here by the Báb, continues: *as the twinkling of an eye*).

*So set thou* (*fa-'aqim*; *QWM*) *thy face steadily to the true faith – the nature made by God* (*fiṭrat Alláh*) *in which He has made men. There is no altering of God's creation.* (Qur'an 30:30; cf. the end of this verse and Qur'an 30:31–2 alluded to here but not explicitly quoted by the Báb: *That is the right religion* [*al-dín al-qayyim*; *QWM*], *but most people do not know. 31: turn ye back in repentance to him and fear him* [*ittaḡúhu*; *TQW*], *establish regular prayers* [*wa'agimú al-salát*; *QWM*], *and be not of those who join gods with god* [*wa lá takúnú min al-mushrikín*]. *32: those who split up their religion and became mere sects* [*shí'an*], *each party rejoicing in what they had with them.*)

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

- 1) *Tawhid* (affirming the divine unity)
- 2) *Nubuwwa* (prophethood)
- 3) *Waláya* (guardianship), and
- 4) *Shi'a* (the community of true believers)

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

And all of this is the *face of God* (*wajh alláh*) *which will never perish* (cf. Qur'an 28:88).<sup>13</sup> And it (i.e. this 'face of God') is the love of the Family of God (*ḥubb ál Alláh*)<sup>14</sup> which is the same as the love of God (*wa huwa nafs ḥubb Alláh*). This is the Hidden Treasure<sup>15</sup> to which the Prophet, upon him and his family be peace, openly alluded when he said: 'Above each good is another good until one loves us, and when one loves us there is no higher good.'<sup>16</sup>

So love (*ḥubb*), beloved (*ḥabíb*), lover (*muhíbb*), and Beloved (*mahbúb*) are four divine signs (*áyat*) appearing from the self-manifestation of the family of God (*tajallí ál Alláh*) in you and they constitute your spiritual reality.<sup>17</sup>

Whenever these four signs are remembered within you and your heart is illumined, and your soul stirred, and your spirit moved and your body quakes with longing (*shawq*), then you are truly (*ḥaqqan*) among the people of paradise and the companions of the Commander of the Faithful,<sup>18</sup> upon him be peace.

At such a time you are indeed upon the *True Religion* (*al-dín al-qayyim*, Qur'an 30:30; *QWM*) and the *True Balance* (*al-qisṭás al-mustaqím*, Qur'an 17:35, 26:182; *QWM*) and

the obvious and clear Path (*al-ṣirát al-wáḍiḥ al-mubín*). Above this station (*QWM*) there is no [other conceivable] good (*ḥasana*).

Thus one ascends unto the abode of the permanence of God (*baqá' Alláh*).<sup>19</sup>

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

This is the guiding principle (*qutb*) of the search.<sup>20</sup>

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

As for the road to attaining the guiding principle (*qutb*) – know that attainment to the station (*QWM*) of your sign is attainment to your Lord.<sup>21</sup> And this is the station of pure piety (*TQM*) towards God, exalted be He, as when one of the prophets asked of God, praised be He, 'How can we attain to Thee?' God, may He be exalted, said, 'Throw down thyself and rise to Me.'<sup>22</sup>

And this is why the station (*QWM*) of the novices (*al-mubtadi'in*) is conditional upon denying the self what it passionately desires and forcing upon it what it detests because there is no veil more base (*awḥash*) for the servant than his own self.

By God! If you struggle against your self and thereby send it to the station of nearness and remembrance and intimacy in the shade of your Beloved and adore Him above all else, you would not be negligent of His station even as you were being cut to shreds, because the knower is he whose heart is with God and he has no speech, allusion nor act except in, by, with and about God, exalted be He.<sup>23</sup>

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

And if you are neglectful it will be your great loss on the Day of the Return and you will say: 'Ah! Woe is me! – in that I neglected my duty towards God' (Qur'an 39:56).<sup>25</sup>

So pass on whither we have been ordered<sup>26</sup> and fear not<sup>27</sup> *the reproaches of those who find fault. That is the grace of God which He will bestow on whom He pleaseth and God is the owner of all Grace and the All-Knowing*. (Qur'an 5:54)<sup>28</sup>

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

*Nay, were you to know with certainty of mind ('ilm al-yaqín) (you would be aware). You shall certainly see hellfire. Again you shall see it with certainty of sight ('ayn al-yaqín)*. (Qur'an 102:5-7)

It is incumbent upon you to abandon the world and all that is in it. Indeed, it is the chief of all evils. And in your quest do not linger in any station. Verily, a dog of the Jews is better than the people of the marketplace because the people of the marketplace are the people of lingering (*ahl al-wuqúf*). Verily, such is the source of that negligence which bars access to God.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the world and the hereafter are two spiritual states.<sup>30</sup> If you turn towards God, exalted be He, then you are in paradise and if you are occupied with your self then you are in hell and in the world. Therefore understand these allusions (*isháráat*) and sever thyself from all habits and lusts. And endure patiently the alienation of people and the blame of the companion<sup>31</sup> and the malicious joy<sup>32</sup> of the enemy from among family and offspring.

And when you have begun your quest along this path of search, then the gate of God (*Báb Alláh; BWB*) will open to your soul and you will request entrance into the realm of the Most Generous (*mulk al-karím*).

For the people of insight<sup>33</sup> [the following] subtle allusions [will suffice]:<sup>34</sup>

PIERCE THE VEILS OF GLORY unto [?all] ALLUSION and EFFACE THE IDLE FANCIES and REND THE VEILS and ATTRACT THE ABILITY OF [PROPERLY] AFFIRMING DIVINE UNITY THROUGH [?BESEECHING] THE DIVINE EXCLUSIVE UNITY until the LIGHT OF DAWN SHINES FORTH from the sun of thy REALITY and *you enter the city of unity while your [!] people are unaware*<sup>35</sup> and EXTINGUISH THE LAMP of everything that has veiled you from God, exalted be He.<sup>36</sup> Thus will you attain to a *praised station (QWM)*<sup>37</sup> such as God, exalted be He, has promised the people who glorify God at night (*ahl al-tahajjud fi'l-layl*) that is to say the turning towards the absolute divine unity in the midst of intense darkness,<sup>38</sup> *soon thy Lord will raise thee up to a praiseworthy station (QWM)*.<sup>39</sup>

And *this book*,<sup>40</sup> on the *way (sabil)* of search, is kept brief for those possessed of insight and in it is that which will be sufficient for the pure amongst the affirmers of the divine unity. The particulars have been fully written about by my master, my support, my teacher, the pilgrim Sayyid Kázim al-Rashdí, may God lengthen his life and bring forth from it good results. So seek the *way*.<sup>41</sup>

*Of your lord made smooth for thee. There cometh forth from their bellies a drink diverse of hues, wherein is healing for mankind. (Qur'an 16:69)*<sup>42</sup>

and a mercy;

*While the oppressors increase only in ruin (Qur'an 17:82).*

### Appendix 1: Translation of the Hadith Kumayl<sup>43</sup>

Kumayl bin Ziyád asked 'Alí: 'What is Reality?'<sup>44</sup>

'Alí replied: 'What are you compared to Reality?'<sup>45</sup>

Kumayl said: 'Are you not the master of your own secret knowledge?'<sup>46</sup>

'Alí replied: 'Most certainly!<sup>47</sup> But you will receive only a few drops of the ocean of knowledge that overflows from the abundance of my own knowledge.'<sup>48</sup>

Kumayl: 'Is it like you to disappoint a questioner?'

'Alí responded: 'Reality is dispersing the clouds of glory without allusion.'<sup>49</sup>

Kumayl said: 'Explain this further!'

'Alí said: 'It is the effacement of vain imaginings with clear consciousness of that which is known.'

Kumayl said: 'Explain this further!'

'Alí said: 'It is the rending of the curtain for the conquest of the divine secret.'

Kumayl said: 'Explain this further!'

'Alí said: 'It is the irresistible attraction of the exclusive divine unity [achieved] by means of the quality of affirming of the divine unity.'

Kumayl said: 'Explain this further!'

'Alí said: 'A light shines forth from the dawn of eternity<sup>50</sup> and it radiates its effects upon the temples consecrated to the affirming of the divine unity.'

Kumayl said: 'Explain this further!'

'Alí said: 'When the dawn breaks, extinguish the lamp.'

## Appendix 2: Text of the Báb's *Risálah fi's-Sulúk ilá Alláh* (Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God)

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

في السُّلُوكِ إِلَى اللَّهِ  
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
اسْتَقِم يَا سَائِلَ التَّقَى فِي مَقَامِ التَّوْحِيدِ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا  
تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشُرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ وَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّ الطَّرِيقَ إِلَى اللَّهِ بَعْدَ انْفَاسِ الْخَلَائِقِ وَمَا النَّفْسُ الْأَوَّاحِدَةُ  
وَمَا الدِّينُ الْأَدِينُ وَاحِدٌ وَهُوَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَمْرُ اللَّهِ وَاحِدَةٌ فَاقْمِ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا  
تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَارِكٌ أَرْبَعَةُ التَّوْحِيدِ وَالنَّبُوَّةُ وَالْوَلَايَةُ وَالشَّيْعَةُ أَبْوَابُ أَرْبَعَةٌ لَا يَصِلُحُ أَوْكُهَا إِلَّا بِآخِرِهَا  
وَكَوْنِ ذَلِكَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَهْلِكُ وَهُوَ حَبِيبُ اللَّهِ الَّذِي هُوَ نَفْسُ حَبِيبِ اللَّهِ وَهُوَ الْكَتْمُ الْخَفِيُّ وَقَدْ أَشَارَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ  
وَالِهِ إِلَى هَذَا الْمَقَامِ تَلْوِيحًا حَيْثُ يَقُولُ فَوْقَ كُلِّ حَسَنَةٍ حَسَنَةٌ حَتَّىٰ حَبْنًا فَإِذَا حَبْنًا لَيْسَتْ فَوْقَهَا حَسَنَةٌ وَالْحَبُّ وَالْحَبِيبُ  
وَالْمَحَبُّ وَالْمَحْبُوبُ أَرْبَعُ آيَاتٍ مِنْ تَجَلَّى آلِ اللَّهِ فِيكَ وَهِيَ نَفْسُكَ فَإِذَا ذَكَرْتَ آيَاتِ الْأَرْبَعِ فِيكَ وَجَلِي قَلْبِكَ وَوَلِهْتَ أَفْئِدَتَكَ  
وَتَرَوَحْتَ رُوحَكَ وَتَرْتَلِزُ مِنَ الشَّوْقِ جِسْمَكَ فَانْتَ أَهْلُ الْجَنَّةِ وَأَصْحَابُ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ حَقًّا وَحِينَئِذٍ أَنْتَ عَلَى الدِّينِ  
الْقَوِيمِ وَالْقِسْطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ وَالصَّرَاطِ الْوَاضِعِ الْمَيِّينِ مَا فَوْقَ ذَلِكَ الْمَقَامِ حَسَنَةٌ وَذَلِكَ يَتَرَفَّقَى بِبَقَاءِ اللَّهِ وَمَا لِمَجِيَّةِ اللَّهِ غَايَةً  
وَلَا نِهَايَةً وَذَلِكَ قَطْبُ السُّلُوكِ وَإِنَّ الشَّرِيْعَةَ كُلَّهَا سَبِيلُ سُلُوكِ الْعَبْدِ لِمَوْلَاهُ. وَلَكِنْ بِالْحَرَكَةِ عَلَى الْقَطْبِ الَّذِي أَشْرَفْنَا إِلَيْهِ وَأَمَّا  
بِتَبَيُّنِ الْوُضُوعِ إِلَى الْقَطْبِ فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ الْوُضُوعَ إِلَى مَقَامِ آيَتِكَ الْوُضُوعَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ وَهُوَ مَقَامُ تَقَرُّبِ الْخَالِصِ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى كَمَا سَأَلَ  
سَيِّدِي مِنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ عَنِ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ كَيْفَ الْوُضُوعُ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى إِنَّ نَفْسَكَ تَعَالَى وَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ الْمَقَامَ لِلْمُسْتَدِينِ مُشْرُوطٌ  
بِسَمِيِّ النَّفْسِ عَمَّا تَهْوَى وَحَمَلِهَا عَلَى مَا تَكْرَهُ لِأَنَّهُ لَيْسَ حِجَابٌ لِلْعَبْدِ أَوْحَشَ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ إِلَيْهِ وَاللَّهُ لَوْ جَعَلَتْ لِنَفْسِكَ  
وَرُوضَةً إِلَى مَقَامِ الْقُرْبِ وَالذِّكْرِ وَاسْتَأْنَسَتْ فِي ظِلَالِ مَحْبُوبِكَ وَأَثَرَتْهُ عَلَى مَا سِوَاهُ لَوْ قَطَعْتَ أَرْبَابًا لِمَا تَغْفَلُ عَنْ مَقَامِهِ  
لَأَنَّ الْعَارِفَ قَلْبُهُ مَعَ اللَّهِ وَلَا نَطْقَ وَلَا إِشَارَةَ وَلَا فِعْلَ لَهُ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَلَا تَغْفَلُ عَنِ الْاجْتِهَادِ وَلَا تَحْرَمُ نَصِيْبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا  
وَاجْتَنِبْ كَمَا اجْتَنَبَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ لَوْ تَغْفَلُ كَانَتْ حَسْرَتِكَ يَوْمَ الْمَعَادِ طَوِيلًا وَكَانَتْ أَنْتَ الْقَائِلُ يَا حَسْرَتِي عَلَى مَا فَرَطْتَ فِي  
جَنَّتِ اللَّهُ فَاْمُضْ حَيْثُ تُؤْمَرُ وَلَا تَخَفْ لَوْمَةً لِأَنَّ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مِنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ وَفَرِّ كُلَّ الْفِرَارِ عَنْ  
كُلِّ مَا يَشْتَغَلُكَ عَنِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهُ سَمٌّ قَاتِلٌ يَحْرُقُكَ وَلَا تَشْعُرُ كُلًّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ لِتَرَوْنَ الْجَحِيمَ ثُمَّ لِتَرَوْنَهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ  
عَلَيْكَ بِرِضَى الدُّنْيَا وَمَا فِيهَا فَانْهَارْ وَأَسْ كُلَّ خَطِيئَةٍ وَلَا تَقِفْ فِي سَيْرِكَ فِي مَقَامٍ لِأَنَّ كَلْبَ الْيَهُودِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ السُّوقِ  
وَأَهْلُ السُّوقِ أَهْلُ الْوُقُوفِ وَأَصْلُ الْمَانِعِ التَّغْفَلُ عَنِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ حَالَتَانِ إِنْ كَانَ تَوَجُّهَكَ بِاللَّهِ تَعَالَى قَانَتْ فِي  
الْحَقِّ وَإِنْ كَانَ نَظْرَكَ إِلَى نَفْسِكَ فَانْتَ فِي النَّارِ وَفِي الدُّنْيَا فَافْهَمْ الْإِشَارَاتِ وَأَقْطَعْ عَنِ نَفْسِكَ الْعَادَاتِ وَالشَّهَوَاتِ  
وَاجْتَنِبْ حَقًّا الْخَلْقَ وَمَلَامَةَ الْعَرِينِ وَشِمَاتَةَ الْعَدُوِّ مِنَ الْأَهْلِ وَالْوَلَدِ فَإِذَا سَلَكْتَ هَذَا الْمَسْلَكَ فَقَدْ فَتَحْتَ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ بَابَ  
الْمَوْهُمَاتِ وَاهْتَكِ الْأَسْتَارَ وَاجْزِبْ بِالْإِحْدِيَّةِ صِفَةَ التَّوْحِيدِ حَتَّىٰ طَلَعَ نُورَ الصَّبْحِ مِنْ شَمْسِ حَقِيقَتِكَ وَادْخُلْ مَدِينَةَ الْوَحْدَةِ  
وَالضَّغْلِ أَهْلِكَ وَأَطْفِ سِرَاجَ كُلِّ مَنْ حَجَبَكَ عَنِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى فَإِذَا وَصَلْتَ إِلَى مَقَامِ مُحَمَّدٍ حَيْثُ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى أَهْلَ التَّهَجُّدِ  
فِي الْبَيْتِ اعْنَى التَّوَجُّهَ بِالْوَحْدَةِ الْحَقِيقَةِ فِي ظِلْمَةِ الْكُثْرَاتِ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَحْمُودًا وَذَلِكَ الْكِتَابَةُ سَبِيلُ سُلُوكِ  
الْإِحْتِصَارِ الْأُولَى الْأَبْصَارِ وَفِيهِ كِفَايَةُ الْمَخْصَصِينَ الْمُوَحِّدِينَ وَعَلَى التَّفْصِيلِ قَدْ كَتَبَهَا سَيِّدِي وَمَعْتَدِي وَمَعْلَى الْحَاجِّ سَيِّدِ  
كَاطِمِ الرِّشْتَنِ أَطَالَ اللَّهُ بِقَاءِ فَحْصَلٍ وَأَسْأَلَ سَبِيلَ رَبِّكَ ذَلَالًا يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُخْتَلَفٌ الْوَانَهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِلنَّاسِ  
وَرَحْمَةٌ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خُسَارًا

## Bibliography

- 'Abdur Rabb, Muhammad. *The Life, Thought and Historical Importance of Abu Yazid al-Bistami*. Dacca: Academy for Pakistan Affairs, 1971.
- Aḥsá'í, Shaykh Aḥmad (al-). 'al-Risála al-'ilmíya', in *al-'Alláma al-Jakíl Aḥmad bin Zayn al-Dín al-Aḥsá'í fi Dá'irat al-Daw'* (ed. Muḥammad 'Alí Isbir). Beirut: Dár al-Iṣála, 1993, pp. 149ff.
- Algar, Hamid. 'Silent and Vocal *dhikr* in the Naqshbandí Order'. *Akten des VII Kongresses für Arabistik und Islam wissenschaft*, 15 bis. (ed. Albert Dietrich). 22 August 1974. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976, pp. 39-46.
- 'Alí ibn Abí Ṭálib (ascribed). *Nahj al-balágha* (ed. Muḥammad 'Abduh). 4 vols. in 1. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lámí li'l-Maṭbú'át, n.d.
- Ámulí, Sayyid Ḥaydar. *Jámí' al-asrár wa manba' al-asrár* (ed. H. Corbin and O. I. Yahyá). Bibliotheque iranienne, vol. 16. Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1989 [first published 1969].
- The Báb. *Risála fi'l-subúk ilá Alláh*. Tehran Bahá'í Archives MS. 6006. C., pp. 73-4.  
— *Tafsír súrát al-baqara*. MS.
- Badawi, 'Abd al-Raḥmán. *Shatáḥát al-Ṣúfiyya, Abú Yazid al-Bisṭámí*. Cairo, 1949.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* (trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan). Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991 [reprint].
- Corbin, Henry. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (trans. Nancy Pearson). Shambhala: Boulder and London, 1978 [first published as *L'homme de lumière dans le sufisme iranien*. Sisteron, France: Henri Viaud, 1971].
- *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*. 4 vols. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971-2.
- Izutsu, Toshihiko. 'The Paradox of Light and Darkness', in *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy*. Foreword by William C. Chittick. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1994, pp. 38-65 [first published as a chapter in *Anagogic Qualities of Literature* (ed. Joseph P. Strelka). University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, pp. 288-307].
- Reza, Sayed Ali. *Nahjul Balagha, Peak of Eloquence: Sermons, Letters and Sayings of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib*. Introduction by Syed M. A. Jafery. Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 5th edn. 1986.
- Lambden, Stephen N. 'An Early Poem of Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí Bahá'u'lláh: The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing (*Rashḥ-i 'amâ*)'. *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1984), pp. 4-114.
- Lawson, B. Todd. *The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad, the Báb*. A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, July 1987.
- MacEoin, Denis. *The Sources for Early Bábí Doctrine and History: A Survey*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.
- Momen, Moojan. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: "I Was a Hidden Treasure . . ." (a provisional translation)'. *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 4

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

Qur'an (The). Yusuf Ali translation, many editions.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

### Notes

1. Tehran Bahá'í Archives MS. 6006. C., pp. 73–4, 23 lines per page. The *Risála* begins on the 7th line of page 73. I am grateful to Stephen Lambden who years ago supplied me with a xerox of this privately published 'edition'. I have no knowledge of its manuscript base. An earlier version of this translation was posted on H-Bahai a few years ago. It is available, along with the unedited Arabic text, at: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/trans/vol2/suluk/suluktr.htm>
2. MacEoin, *Sources*, p. 44, also p. 196 (n.b. under, *Risálat at-tasáid*).
3. I should like to record my debt to Dr Muhammad Afnan who years ago kindly agreed to look over a preliminary edition of the Arabic text and offered several valuable suggestions based upon his precious and intimate knowledge of the Báb's writings and manuscripts of the *Risála* not available to me. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr Hermann Landolt for valuable suggestions and comments on an earlier draft of the translation. I am also grateful to Mr Abu Haydar Aqíqi who kindly looked over the Arabic typescript and made crucially important suggestions. Thanks also to Dr Moojan Momen for his critical reading of the text and especially the suggestion to arrange the translation in verse form. All errors in the translation are mine and mine alone.
4. MacEoin, *Sources*, p. 199.
5. Lawson, 'The Qur'án Commentary of Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad, the Báb (1819–1850)', part 1, ch. 2: Hierarchies – 1 (Tetrads), pp. 115–44.
6. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 25.
7. For a fuller discussion of these topics see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, for the greater Islamic tradition and Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, for the cross fertilization between Sufism and Shi'ism.
8. Invocation at the beginning of every Quranic sura but one: *Bismillahir-rahmánir-rahím*. It is widely used throughout the length and breadth of Islamic written culture to begin a piece of writing or speech. The Báb would continue to employ the symbolism of this phrase, known as the Basmala, throughout his ministry. The Letters of the Living are understood to be 18 living manifestations of its holy letters.
9. *'istaqim* – This imperative of the eighth form of the verb *QJM* is noticed here to demonstrate two features of the *Risála*. First, this usage shows that the Báb is directly addressing an anonymous male, probably the same person who asked the Báb about *sulúk* in the first place (see next note). Second, this also is the first instance of the several appearances of the root *QJM* in the *Risála*. Among the various words that are derived from this root, two would gain greater and greater prominence as the Báb's ministry unfolded: 1) *qiyáma*: Resurrection, the Shi'i eschaton; and 2) *qá'im*: Resurrector, One Who Arises, according to Shi'i tradition, in order to replace the injustice of the world with justice. Note, in this regard, the closing Quranic quotation of the *Risála*.
10. *yá sá'il al-tuqá* – Note that the root from which the word for piety is derived *TQW'* recurs throughout the text.
11. *maqám al-tawḥíd* – Traditional Sufi terminology: *maqám* is usually translated as 'station'. Depending upon the schema, there may be 4, 7, 8 or any number of 'stations' that a seeker might expect to achieve and master in the quest or journey towards God. In each station, it should be noted, the seeker may also expect to

- encounter various spiritual changes referred to as 'states' – *ahwál*, singular *hál* (see below, note 21). *Tawhíd* is frequently mistranslated as 'unity'. It is important to stress here that it is an act, not a noun. The perfect performance of this act is the goal of all believers in the divine unity. See below the references to the Hadith Kumayl (and the appendix where this Hadith is translated). Here the central subject is precisely guidance, from the Imam 'Alí to another questioner, Kumayl ibn Ziyád, on how to properly affirm or 'believe in' divine unity.
12. Hadith, also quoted in the Báb's *Tafsír sūrat al-baqara ad 2:38*, frequently quoted in the Sufi tradition. For a discussion of this Hadith in the Naqshbandi Sufi tradition, see Algar, 'Silent and Vocal *dhikr*'.
  13. The 'face of God' is mentioned several times in the Qur'an. Its interpretation, like many other important Quranic words and phrases, is highly controversial. One of the more frequently quoted verses in which the 'face of God' is mentioned is in the context of the story of the changing of the Qiblah from Jerusalem to Mecca. This caused a stir in the young community and several of Muhammad's followers questioned this action. In response to these challenges, this verse was revealed: *Unto God belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of God. Lo! God is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.* (Qur'an 2:115) 'Face of God' has been interpreted a number of ways. The Manifestation is the 'face' of God in the sense that he represents the visible aspect of the divine, the *Deus Revelatus* as distinct from the eternally hidden aspect of God, the Divine Essence or the *Deus Absconditus*. There is another sense in which 'face' can be understood. The root *WJH* denotes surface and direction. The derivative *jihā* means aspect or sense (cf. the French *sens* 'direction' as in the word for 'one way [street]': *sens unique*). Looked at this way, then the 'face' of God, far from denoting or even connoting any crude anthropomorphism, means 'God's direction'. Thus, the above verse says all directions lead to God. This is in accord with the partial Hadith quoted above by the Báb. The direction in which God may be sought is therefore a perfect topic in an epistle devoted to the best way of journeying towards God. Cf. also *jihāt*, *wajh/wajūh* as technical terms in commentary literature, *tafsír*. A verse may be said to have several *wajūh* 'approaches': several different meanings or intentions.
  14. *ál Allāh* – 'Family of God' is most immediately understood as the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima and the twelve Imams. There is also a feature of this usage that indicates '*ál*' (as distinct from '*ahl*') can also include faithful followers whether related or not. The epithet is frequently used by the Báb throughout his writings.
  15. Cf. the Hadith Qudsi known as *kuntu kanẓan makḥfiyan* 'I was a Hidden Treasure' and the commentary on this important Hadith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá translated and commented on in Momen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: "I was a Hidden Treasure . . .".
  16. I have not found a source for this Hadith. Note here, however, that the Báb, in the course of his epistle on the topic of the mystic quest also provides an interpretation of two key Islamic 'problems': 1) the 'face of God' and 2) the identity of the 'Hidden Treasure'.
  17. The text is difficult to read here. Previously, I saw it as: *fika wa fi nafsika*. Now I think it is really *fika wa hiya nafsika*. One awaits other MSS, with which to compare this reading. It is useful to recall that the Arabic word *nafs* means both 'soul' and 'self', and in certain grammatical constructions, 'the same as'. This, then, could also be translated 'and they are the same as your soul'. The key to this problematic formulation most probably lies in seeing it as an allusion to the famous Hadith *man 'arafa*, the Hadith of self knowledge. 'Who knows himself knows his Lord' (*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*). Although it is not quoted in this *Risála*, its 'presence' is nonetheless felt in a number of passages. See below.
  18. 'Alí ibn Abí Tālib, the first Imam of the Shi'a.



19. Traditional Sufi technical term, usually seen paired with its conceptual opposite 'annihilation' *faná*. See, for example, Bahá'u'lláh, The Seven Valleys, 'the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness'. The basic idea is that one seeks to annihilate (*faná*) the self, ego (*nafs*) so that nothing remains (*baqá*) except divinity.
20. *Qutb* is another traditional Sufi technical term. It typically refers to an individual who is the bearer of spiritual authority (*waláya*). It means 'axis', 'pivot' and 'centre'. Although it is generally thought that the word acquired its meaning of central spiritual authority in a more or less purely Sufi context, it is important to note that in one of the most widely celebrated sermons from the *Nahj al-balágha* 'Alí refers to himself as the 'pivot of the community' (*qutb al-raḥá*). The Báb's use of this term demonstrates one of the more important features of the Shaykhi-Bábi-Bahá'í tradition, namely that it continued a process of using mystical terminology in a Shi'í context. The idea of 'centre' figures prominently in the later *Qayyúm al-asmá*. See Lawson, 'The Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyúm al-asmá'.
21. A paraphrase of the Hadith *man 'arafa* (mentioned above): 'He who knows himself knows his Lord.'
22. *alqi nafsaka wa ta'ála*. In the Sufi tradition, this Hadith is ascribed to Abú Yazíd al-Bistámí, the important 9th-century mystic, Malámati hero and composer of the famous (or infamous) *shatáḥát*: divine paradoxes such as 'Glory be to me! How great is my majesty', 'I am the Well-preserved Tablet' or 'I saw the Ka'ba walking around me'. It occurs in several variants. See 'Abdur Rabb, *Life*, p. 93. None of the variants referred to there, however, perfectly matches the vocabulary here. In the most important recension of Báyazid's 'scandalous sayings' the phrase occurs as follows: 'I [i.e. al-Bistámí] saw the Lord of Power in a dream [and I said] "O God! What is the way to thee?" He responded: "Cast away thyself and rise [to Me] / *di' nafsaka wa ta'ála*.'" *Shatáḥát*, p. 96. In the Sufi tradition, this Hadith is ascribed to Abú Sa'íd al-Kharráz, the important 9th-century mystic of Baghdad.
23. The 'self' referred to here in the first instance would correspond to the 'erring soul' or *nafs ammára* mentioned above in the introduction. In reality, the three souls are one. It is transformed through the proper spiritual discipline (*sulúk*) from erring against God (and paradoxically itself) through acquiring its own awareness or conscience (*nafs lawwáma*) to guide itself, until finally it is at peace and pleasing to both God and itself (*muṭma'inna*).
24. Qur'an 28:77 is part of the story of Qárún, corresponding to Korah of the Bible (Num. 16: 1-35) whose boundless wealth made him and his followers proud and arrogant towards Moses and Aaron. He thought his great wealth had been bestowed upon him because of some innate 'divine' knowledge. This reference may be a clue to the social class of the addressee of the tablet. This verse continues: *and seek not occasions for mischief in the land. For God loves not those who do mischief*. The exhortation to a personal *ijtihád* (*ijtiháduka*) or 'independent reasoning in religious matters' – as distinct from a clerical *ijtihád*, is very much in line with the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad. See Aḥsá'í, 'al-Risála al-'ilmíya', p. 152.
25. Qur'an 39:56 *má farrattu fi janb alláh (janb* is a metaphor implying threshold and by extension door or gate, that is to say Báb). The verse continues: *and was but among those who mocked!*
26. Paraphrase of Qur'an 15:65.
27. Quranic diction
28. The Báb deviates, with remarkable deftness, from the Qur'an in this citation. Again, it is important to note the mention of the *true friend* (*walí*, corresponding to *imáma*) as well as the other elements of the Shaykhi four supports in the verse of the Qur'an immediately following (but unquoted by the Báb): *your real friends are no less than God* (corresponds to the first pillar, *tawḥíd*), *His messenger* (corresponds to the second pillar, *nubuwwa*) and *the fellowship of the believers* (corresponds to the fourth

- pillar, *shí'a*) . . . (Qur'an 5:55)
29. That is 'lingering/loitering/hesitation' -- *wuqif* -- is 'the source of that negligence which bars access to God'. The root meaning of *WQF* is the diametric opposite of the root meaning of *SLK* from which comes *sulūk*.
  30. *Hál* -- Traditional Sufi technical term transformed here by the distinctive Shaykhi teachings mentioned above in the introduction.
  31. *malámat al-qarín*, cf. Qur'an 37:51; 43:36; 43:38; 4:38 where *qarín* is frequently an evil companion.
  32. Ar. *shamáta*. German has a perfect word for this: *Schadenfreude*: the 'destructive happiness' one feels at another's misfortune, destructive both to the one who feels it and to the one experiencing the misfortune.
  33. People of insight = *ahl al-basíra*
  34. This introduces a brief running improvisatory paraphrase of the famous Hadith Kumayl and two verses of the Qur'an, beginning with the word 'Pierce' and ending with the word 'station'. The Hadith Kumayl, upon which the Báb also wrote a commentary (MacEoin, *Sources*, p. 199), is translated below in the appendix. The following text is problematic as it stands and seems to misquote the Hadith. This is no doubt due to the copyist. Such problems are not unusual in the manuscript transmission of texts. In the English translation, words and phrases taken from the Hadith Kumayl are underlined.
  35. Reference to Qur'an 28:15 and the story of Moses' act of murder. This verse is also noteworthy for the occurrence in it of the Arabic word *shí'a*. Moses killed a man who was not of his own group or party, this 'stranger' was fighting with someone who was of the *shí'a* of Moses. Presently, at 28:18, there is a mention of *Dawn* or *Morning* (*subh*), an important word in the Hadith Kumayl. Such skilful terminological coordinations, even if tacit, demonstrate the Báb's astonishing knowledge and 'scriptural fluency'.
  36. The Arabic runs: *fa'akshif subháta al-jaláli hattá al-ishára wa'umhu 'l-mawhímát wa'ihdik al-astár wa'ijdhíb bi'l-ahadíya sifát al-tawhíd hattá tala'a núr al-subh min haqíqatika wa'adkhl madínat al-wahda wa aghfil ahluka wa atíf siráj kullu man haqabaka 'an alláh ta'ála*.
  37. *maqám mahmúd*, cf. Qur'an 17:79 and the later use of this epithet by Bahá'u'lláh in the Four Valleys.
  38. On spiritual or luminous darkness, see Corbin, *Man of Light*, pp. 110-20; see also Izutsu, 'Paradox'.
  39. Qur'an 17:79. NB the uncited previous verse: *establish worship at the going down of the sun until the dark of night, and the recital of the qur'an at dawn. Lo! The recital of the qur'an at dawn is ever witnessed. And some part of the night awake for it (fa-tahajjad bihi), a largess for thee.* (Qur'an 17:178) which connects the Báb's language mentioned in the previous note to the Qur'an. His reader was expected to grasp the allusion without his having to explicitly cite the precise language. Perhaps, though, the most important allusion his interlocutor was expected to understand was the one to the following verse (17:80): Say 'O my Lord! Let my entry be by the gate of truth and honour, and grant me from thy presence an authority (sultán) to aid me.
  40. Qur'an 2:2: *dhálika al-kitáb* may also be translated as *This is the book {in which there is no doubt}*. Here the Báb shows an early instance of putting his writings in the same category as the Qur'an. This would become one of the most prominent features of his work as represented, for example, in the later *Qayyúm al-asmá*.
  41. *way* = Arabic *sabíl*. This imperative phrase has different grammar from the beginning of the following verse in the Qur'an on which it is patterned but it can have the same meaning.
  42. This is a quotation from the Qur'an, *Sírat al-Nahl*: The Bees. This particular verse is extremely important in Shi'i Qur'an interpretation (*ta'wíl*) because of the occurrence of the word 'revelation' (*wahy*). In standard Islamic theory, *wahy* is used

to refer to the inspiration given only to the prophets of God. In contrast, the inspiration given to the Imams of the Shi'a is usually referred to by the word *ilhām*, thought to represent a lesser degree of divine interpretation. It is highly significant that the Báb concluded his epistle with this verse. Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, to whom the Báb refers above, had taught a characteristic *ta'wíl* of this verse in which he said that the esoteric meaning of the word Bees (*nahl*) was actually the Imams. Thus, the Imams are seen as receiving revelation as well as *ilhām*. Later, the Báb would return to this important verse, devoting an entire chapter to its interpretation in the *Qayyúm al-asmá*. Notes to Rashtí's commentary, a complete translation of the chapter (93) of the *Qayyúm al-asmá* is in Lawson, 'Reading Reading Itself'.

43. From the Arabic text appearing in Amulí, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 170.
44. 'Reality' is a translation of the Arabic word *ḥaqíqa*.
45. or 'How dare the likes of you ask such a question!'
46. or 'What is the matter, can't you answer my question?'
47. *balá*
48. *wa lakin yarshahu 'alayka má ya'fahu minní*. Note here the verb *yarshahu* from *rashah* 'to filter, perspire'. From this verb is derived the noun *rashh* 'droplets, sprinkling, filtration, perspiration'. It is interesting to note that Bahá'u'lláh's earliest extant work is a poem entitled *Rashh-i 'amá*, 'Dew drops from the cloud of unknowing'. It deals, among other things, with the problem of the communication of divine reality to those of limited capacity, the problem indicated in the words of the Persian mystic poem quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in his Seven Valleys: 'How can feeble reason encompass the Qur'án, / Or the spider snare a phoenix in her web?' See Lambden, 'An Early Poem' for a provisional translation of this poem.
49. *al-ḥaqíqat kashf subuhát al-jalál min ghayr ishára* = 'The perception of reality is achieved only in dispelling one's delusions of grandeur in vain attempts to compare that reality with anything whatsoever.'
50. *subḥ al-azal*