

Declaration or Deflection? An Exploration of the Intent of the
Súrih-i-Sabr, or *Lawh-i-Ayyúb*

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(This article began its life as a student assignment from the *Gems of Divine Mysteries* Class offered by the Wilmette Institute during the spring and summer of 2017. Reading and analyzing this tablet along with reading the accompanying material provided by the class revolutionized the author's thinking about the actual form Bahá'u'lláh's public disclosure of His station took. The provisional translation being used is that of Khazeh Fananapazir and is used with his kind permission. In-line numbers refer to the paragraph number of the tablet, which is attached.)

The date is April, 22, 1863. The setting is an island in the Tigris River near Baghdad. Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of the great religions of the past, has just verbally declared His Station to a small cadre of those closest to Him, who crossed to the island with Him earlier on that blessed day. In the face of the joy being expressed by these new "Bahá'ís," the Blessed Beauty goes apart and sets pen to paper. What He writes is not a short declaration of intent like the Báb's verbal "I am, I am, I am the Promised One..."¹ Adib Taherzadeh² estimates that the document He penned is not only not brief but is one-fourth the length of Bahá'u'lláh's *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*.³

¹ Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, fifth edition, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) 315. The Báb made this statement to the assembled Muslim divines when He was examined in Tabríz in 1848. He continued, "I am the One whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word and to pledge allegiance to My person." The author wishes she could say that any of them obeyed.

² Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, Baghdad, 1853-1863* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1974) 263. In a comment on Bahá'u'lláh's exile to Baghdad, Taherzadeh (p. 141) states "...Hájí Muhammad-Taqi set out on foot on a journey of no less than 1500 kilometres to Baghdad, where he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and received His abundant blessings. The momentous *Súrih-i-Sabr* was revealed to his imperishable memory."

³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, second printing, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, 1950). The English edition exclusive of notes and index contains 257 pages.

The document Bahá'u'lláh penned on that occasion is called the *Súrih-i-Sabr*, or *Lawh-i-Ayyúb* (English *Tablet of Patience*, or *Book of Job*). In stirring language, Bahá'u'lláh recounts the stories of the heroes and heroines of Nayríz of a decade before, specifically the story of Hájí Muhammad-Taqi, and the ancient story of the trials of Job. The question is, is there within these stories a written declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's mission, or, despite His having verbally revealed His Station bare hours before, is this document a deflection to still the venom of His enemies?

The Case for Deflection

The easy answer is that, in whatever words Bahá'u'lláh verbally proclaimed His mission to those closest to Him, His written word in the *Surah of Patience* proclaims no mission specific to Himself at all. In fact, in paragraph 70 (of 72), Bahá'u'lláh reveals a reticence to proclaim His mission, holding back because the revelation is so powerful it will make the earth quake: "My fear is that the limbs of Thy command may fall apart in this great revelation as these envious ones have created divisions on the day that Thou seated thyself upon the throne of existence with thine all embracing mercy." Therefore, it does not constitute a declaration of His Station.

For comparison, here is a passage from the *Suriy-i-Ashab* (*Tablet of the Companions*), which Bahá'u'lláh penned in the early Adrianople period:

Wherefore did the Crier (al-munad) cry out at my right-hand side, while from my left hand-side did the One Articulate (al-natiq) make pronouncement. Then way beyond Me did One Veracious (al-salih) indicate soundness while the Spirit (al-ruh) did likewise in front of Me! The very Tongue of God (lisan Allah) cried out from above My head [saying] :

`By God!

This is indeed the Desired One (al-maqsud) [confirmed] from the Beginning which hath no beginning!

This is indeed the Divine Countenance (al-wajh) towards which all faces hath been oriented, though many, at this moment, fail to be numbered among such as are endowed with insight (al-sha`irin)!

By God! Whomsoever rejects this Manifest (al-zahir), Brilliant (al-bahir), Transcendent (al-muta`aliyy) and Luminous (al-munir) Divine Bounty (al-fadl), it shall prove necessary for him to enquire regarding his state (hal) from his own mother (umm)! So shall he be returned to the nethermost abyss of Gehenna (asfal al-jahim).⁴

In both the *Surah of Patience* and the *Surah of the Companions*, Bahá'u'lláh instructed those souls who bore these tablets back to Persia to utilize the utmost circumspection in disseminating them. However, it is apparent from the above passage that in the latter, He is using extremely clear, if poetic, language to indicate His exalted Station. One might ask the question, if Bahá'u'lláh *could* declare His role as the Supreme Manifestation—if the time were now right for Him to disclose His true mission—why did He make no overt claim in the *Surah of Patience*?

If one looks at the state of the Bábi community, especially in Persia, at the time of that first Riḍván, one could well understand why circumspection would be necessary. Foad Seddigh, who has published extensively on this tablet, describes the matter succinctly: “...the Faith of the Báb was on the verge of extinction as a result of the heavy blows dealt by the combined forces of the government and clerics.”⁵

⁴ Stephen Lambden, personal email communication, February 9, 2018, also posted at <http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/577>

⁵ Foad Seddigh, “Tablet of Patience (Surih Sabr): Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh and Selected Topics,” *Lights of 'Irfān: Papers Presented at the 'Irfān Colloquia and Seminars*. Book XV: 360.

Could anyone blame Bahá'u'lláh for being cautious? Certainly He would not want to lay on the shoulders of one of the dwindling company of Persian Believers, with whom He must communicate remotely, the onus of learning that He had unequivocally declared His station. They had gotten into enough trouble being Bábis! Would He want to risk their lives by pointing them out as people who not only believed the Qaim had arisen but that the Qayyum Himself had appeared? And what of those who were being left behind in Baghdad, and those who would soon begin with Him the arduous trek to Adrianople? Seen in such a light, this lengthy treatise must be no more than an attempt to buoy the spirits of the beleaguered Bábi community with some lovely poetic passages about patience, the continuity of religion, the Day of Resurrection in the general sense, the wayward divines who have misled the people on past Days of Resurrection, and Job and the heroes of Nayríz and the way they exemplified patience. On the surface, this assuredly appears to be the case.

But what if this tablet is something altogether different?

The Case for Declaration

The *Surah of Patience* has several traits in common with another work of Bahá'u'lláh's: the "Rashh-i-'Amá" (rough English translation "Sprinkling from a Cloud of Unknowing"). The "Rashh-i-'Amá" was the first written emanation of the Supreme Pen after the Maid of Heaven appeared to Him in the Síyáh-Chál, thus vesting Him with His Revelation. In parallel fashion, the *Surah of Patience* was the first written emanation following Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His Station to His followers. Both use highly metaphorical language. To see that the "Rashh-i-'Amá," encapsulates the entirety of

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in a few short, poetic phrases requires a little care and thought. Is it possible that the puzzle of the *Surah of Patience* can be solved by the same care and attention to detail?

The language of religion has always been that of metaphor: it ensures that the spiritually insightful will grasp the verities of their own faiths and that truths that must be kept from the ignorant can still be divulged. In another Ridván tablet, His *Tablet of the Lover and the Beloved*, Bahá'u'lláh tells us, "For whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his Beloved, it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is inviting them to attain His presence."⁶ The *Surah of Patience* is full of metaphor, but is it possible that Bahá'u'lláh is using metaphor in a new way? Is He in fact, fully declaring His Revelation within the stories and themes that inhabit this weighty text?

The *Surah of Patience* unfolds around the stories of Job, Haji Muhammad-Taqi, and (as author) Bahá'u'lláh. Job is a figure common to both the *Hebrew Bible* and the *Holy Qur'an*. In his translation of the *Holy Qur'an*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali notes that "Job is the pattern of humility, patience, and faith in Allah. It was with these weapons that he fought and conquered evil."⁷ From a biography found at Nayriz.org, Haji Muhammad-Taqi "stands as one of the great Bábi heroes of the upheavals in Nayriz in 1850 and 1852-3. His suffering was so great and his patience in adversity so remarkable that Bahá'u'lláh, whose presence he attained later in life, said of him that his suffering and patience "had

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, 1971 [fifth printing]), 319-22

⁷ *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, translator (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, USA 1989 [sixth edition]), 21: 84, note 2740 813.

surpassed the ‘patience of Job’ since Job had often complained about his pain and difficulties, but Hájí Muhammad Taqiy had always been thankful in adversity.”⁸

Job, Hájí Muhammad-Taqi, and Bahá’u’lláh had a number of things in common. All three were possessed of great wealth, all lost it in the Cause of God, and all were magnificently steadfast under the most horrifying trials and tribulations. An early section of the story of Job (paragraph 4) in the tablet reads as follows:

Job was amongst His people many years, counseling them with the hidden gems of the knowledge We taught Him, and He reminded His people of the Days of God that were truly to come. He said, "O my people! In truth, oceans of knowledge are contained within the Self of God Who hath arisen to establish justice. Hasten ye therefore that ye may find a way unto it. Verily, the Sun of God's loving kindness continues to shine forth from the midmost zenith and the beauty of the Countenance of God hath appeared from behind the Holy Tabernacles... O my people! Before Me Messengers came with the divine Word and They all announced unto you that which will turn you towards the exalted and glorious shore. The divinely appointed time hath come upon you and the Lights of God's justice have⁹ shone forth, the Immortal Bird hath sung, the Dove of Revelation has warbled, the clouds of God's illumination have become uplifted, and the oceans of divine bounty have poured forth. O people of the earth! Ye are deprived of all this. Fear ye God, corrupt not the earth of God's wisdom, and hearken unto these words which are descending from the heaven of God's nearness.

In this passage, might Bahá’u’lláh not be using the tale of Job to advance His own claims in a kind, gentle, subtle manner? Just within this one paragraph, Bahá’u’lláh gives the reader multiple grammatical or linguistic clues that He is making a weighty announcement.

- Where He begins the tablet using the language of that of supplicant before God (paragraph 2, “In His name, the Exalted One, He Who is the Most Exalted”), He

⁸ From a biography of Hájí Muhammad-Taqi at Nayriz.org, <http://nayriz.org/template.php?pageName=bioXHajiMuhammadTaqiy&menuStates=0000100000000000>. This biography gives details that paint Muhammad-Taqi as being not only patient under duress but self-sacrificing when it came to sparing his fellow captives pain and suffering.

⁹ Syntax changed with permission of the translator.

quickly changes voice not only to the royal “We,” signifying He is speaking *as* God, but switches to the third person, so is speaking as a Revelator discussing other Revelators/Messengers as if they were equals.

- Also in this text, He identifies Himself with the “self of God,” which Lamden¹⁰ in his article about this tablet indicates alludes to the promised meeting with God on the Day of Resurrection (Lamden translation “He said: `O People! The Ocean of knowledge hath surged in the Self of God, upright in justice”).
- In order to get the sentence beginning “The divinely appointed time hath come...” in the above text to be relevant to April 22, 1863, all one needs do is look a little beyond the surface. The words coming out of Job’s mouth are the ones Bahá’u’lláh put there.
- The sentence “...He reminded His people of the Days of God that were truly to come” in this text indicates the theology detailed in the *Kitab-i-Iqan* and refers to Lamden’s other expectation of the time of the Resurrection: the continuity of revelation (see paragraph 14 for development of this theme).

Taking these linguistic cues a step farther and expanding on them just a little demonstrates that perhaps Bahá’u’lláh is not deflecting to the extent it first appears. Over the course of the entire tablet, one can identify multiple “signals” by which Bahá’u’lláh is cuing the reader in that the whole tablet constitutes a written declaration of His mission.

1) Bahá’u’lláh’s comment on His own station is either too subtle to be caught by most, or seems to be an outright deflection from the subject. The following extract of paragraph

¹⁰Stephen Lamden, “Job and the Surat-al-Sabr,” accessed January 28, 2019, hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/1751.

14 follows 4 paragraphs that extol the virtue of patience—but that may contain a little more content if the reader pays attention (see item 2c. below) :

Anticipate ye therefore the Day when the clouds of patience shall be uplifted and the immortal Bird shall warble, and the Peacock of holiness shall be made manifest with the ornament of Revelation in the kingdom of His reunion, and the stammering tongues shall be freed singing the accents of the Nightingale, and the Dove of paradise shall sing betwixt earth and heaven and the Trumpet shall be sounded and bodies of existence shall all be renewed, and the Divine Fire shall be ignited, and God in His transcendent and glorious Beauty shall come in the clouds of the Spirit.

The obvious intent of this paragraph might be to uplift the spirits of the Bábí community, who, with exile on the one hand and the loss of their Beloved on the other, were moving from anguish to anguish. That Bahá'u'lláh says “Anticipate ye therefore the Day...,” however, doesn't necessarily mean that Day hasn't arrived!

2) He infers Station by subtle use of the language.

a). multiple changes of “Voice,” including the deific as in the quote above recounting the story of Job

b). subtle tweaking of tense (paragraph 20):

Verily God is sanctified from coming and descent. For He is Single, Transcendent Whose knowledge encompasses all the heavens and the earth. For He never comes in His Essence nor can He be seen in His Innermost Being and cannot be recognized in His Divine Ipseity and He cannot be comprehended with all His attributes. Thus He that *cometh* [author's italics] is the Manifestation of His own Self...

The verb tense for “cometh,” the very simple present, matches that of the description of the Creator in the earlier sentences of the passage. So, the “Manifestation of His own Self” does not come in a nebulous future, soon or distant: He is here already.

c). He weaves in references that would be known by Muslims and Bábís of 1863 that suggest they are living in their own end times. An example is the caller/crier in the

sky, one of the few signs of the Judgment Day in the *Bihar-al-Anwar*¹¹ that appeared in multiple collections of hadiths. Wikipedia's entry on Islamic eschatology, speaking of the Muslim prophetic figure by whichever name, states that "Though the duration of his rule differs, hadiths are consistent in describing that God will perfect him in a single night with inspiration and wisdom, and his name will be announced from the sky."¹² The following passage from the *Surah of Patience* (paragraph 11) is even noted by Seddigh¹³ (p. 388):

I swear by God! Soon will God cause him to be manifested within the canopy of grandeur with a luminous garment which will scintillate like unto the scintillation of light above the spiritual horizon and eyes will be dazzled upon beholding him and above his head there will be a caller from God saying, "This is verily the one who was long suffering for God in this vain and futile world and in all that the unbelievers did unto him. The concourse on high will seek blessings from him and the occupiers of God's pavilions will seek to meet him as well as the holy maidens in the sacred and beautiful tabernacles."

Does this paragraph not call to mind the appearance of the Maid of Heaven and the words Bahá'u'lláh heard in the *Síyáh-Chál*?

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt Earth and Heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants.

¹¹ Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, trans Sayyid Athar Husain S.H. Rizvi (Mumbai, India: Ja'fari Propagation Center, no date listed on electronic scan), 364 as "crier," 20 and many other places "caller."

¹² "Islamic eschatology," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_eschatology (accessed January 30, 2019).

¹³ Foad Seddigh, "Tablet of Patience (Surih Sabr): Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh and Selected Topics," *Lights of 'Irfán: Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*. Book XV: 388. Although the work in this document is my own, it was reading this paper that pointed me in the right direction to begin my analysis. Seddigh has since written an entire book about this tablet, *Seyri Dar Bustan-i Madinat-us-Sabr*, published by Bahá'í-Verlag and available through the online Bahá'í Bookstore. The work is in Persian.

Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in Heaven and all who are on Earth saying: "By God! This is the best beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand."¹⁴

d). The style of the *Surah of Patience* follows the style and phrasing of the *Holy Qur'an* very closely. Not a determinant in itself, but when breaking such staggering news, perhaps Bahá'u'lláh wanted to soften the blow a little by speaking in religious language that would be as familiar as possible, e.g., "Then make mention in the Book [of] the servant of God, Taqi..."(paragraph 39)

3) Bahá'u'lláh just comes out and says it (paragraph 22)!

Say: O People of the Qur'an! Ponder ye in the Book that was revealed in truth unto Muhammad in which he sealed Prophethood with the coming of His beloved Prophet until the day of resurrection. *But this day is the day of Resurrection whereon God has risen in the Manifestation of His Self* [author's emphasis] but you have become veiled from it just as the peoples before have become veiled on the advent of Muhammad and you have become drowned in the depths of an ocean of ignorance and denial.

Say: Were ye not promised 'attaining the presence of God' in the 'Days of God?' But when the Promise did come and the Beauty shone above the Horizon of Glory you turned your gaze away and were resurrected blind in the Plain of resurrection.

In this slightly longer section, Bahá'u'lláh explains that many faiths have had the feeling that their Prophet was the "Seal of the Prophets," and so they arose to persecute the light when it appeared in a new physical body and in a way other than the one they were expecting (paragraphs 25 ff.):

Tell them then the story of Muhammad when aforesaid He came with clear sovereignty. Said He, "These are the verses of God that have been revealed in truth." Do not have discord in the Cause of God but gather on around this glorious and transcendent shore. O people! Look at Me with the eye of God and follow not your desires and be not like those who call God in their days and night but when He came to them they turned away and denied him and were found prostrate upon the idols of their own selves.

¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, "Súriy-i-Haykal," in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, this passage trans. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (Bundoora, Victoria: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2002) 5-6.

The Jews said, “By God! This is He who has fabricated a falsehood against God, or He is possessed or He is under a spell.” They said, “God has sealed Prophethood with Moses and this command of God is decreed in the Torah. Further the Law of the Torah shall never be abrogated as long as God exists and the One that is to be raised after Moses will arise under the auspices of the Mosaic Law so that he may spread its ordinances amongst all the peoples of the earth and thus has the command of God been revealed from the firmament His Revelation brought down.”

The people of the Gospel spoke like unto them and are waiting from that Day till this. And their position was rejected by God in that which He revealed upon Muhammad in the Arabic tongue in the Sura of the Jinn: “They came to think as ye thought that God would not raise up any one (to Prophethood).”

I swear by God! This verse and what is treasured within it suffices all the peoples of the earth should they tread the goodly and honorable path. Say: God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed to Moses and Jesus, and He will continue to do so till “the end that hath no end;” so that His grace may, from the heaven of Divine Bounty be continually vouchsafed to mankind. He doeth what He willeth and He shall not be asked of what He does. Rather all will be asked of all things in the court of divine Justice.

Hearken then unto what these objectors say and how they have come to think as the servants who were before have thought. Say: I swear by God! Ye are guilty of a misapprehension in this matter. For verily the “Hour” has passed in truth and the “Resurrection” has risen despite you and despite those who are deafened unto divine melodies. Say: Ye speak as the peoples of bygone ages spoke at the time of the Apostle of God and ye are expectant as they were expectant and your footsteps have slipped upon this path which has been outstretched for truth. Ponder ye therefore on the significance of this verse that ye may be nourished from the nourishment of knowledge that is descending from the heaven of holiness in a preordained measure.

4) Bahá’u’lláh refers (paragraph 70) to His visit from the Maid of Heaven, which also fulfills the second part of the above hadith, that God would perfect His Messenger in a single night (much as God, through Gabriel, “perfected” Muhammad on a single night, still celebrated by the Muslim community as the Laylat al-Qadr)¹⁵:

Thou knowest that I have no fear for Myself rather I have sacrificed Myself, My soul and My spirit on the day that Thou graciously honored Me with Thy presence, the day that Thou made me recognize Thy new beauty and inspired me with the gems of Thy revelation which are shed upon everyone that entereth the shade of thy cause.

¹⁵ The author is making the assumption that in a sense, the Maid of Heaven communicated the entirety of His revelation to Him when she appeared or He could not have written the *Rashh-i-'Amá*

5. Bahá'u'lláh makes a logical argument, although one may have to isolate the individual elements of His argument and assemble them the way one might assemble the pieces of a puzzle into a finished, coherent whole. Here (paragraph 31) we have not only a lucid explication of the term “Seal of the Prophets” but a reference to the Imam Ali (and possibly to the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as well, as both their personal names included the name “Ali”):

Reveal unto them what the Dove of the Spirit has sung in the holy and beloved Ridván haply they may follow the interpretation of the term “Seal” as was uttered by the Tongue of the Name of God ‘Ali, He Who was *firmly grounded in knowledge* [author’s emphasis], in His Visitation of the Prophet. He said in truth, “Muhammad the Sealer of what preceded Him and the Initiator of that which was to come.” In this was uttered the significance of the term of Seal from that unapproachably holy tongue. Thus did God ordain Him to be the Seal of those Prophets that preceded Him and an Initiator [Ghaemmaghani “harbinger”¹⁶] of a series of Messengers to come after Him.^{17,18,19}

This passage has God reprimanding the idolaters or, once in Yathrib, the *munafiqun*/dissemblers for rejecting Muhammad and interpreting the Divine Writings themselves when this was a skill beyond one their station allowed. It carries an undertone of what Daniel is told by the angel after he had completed his trials: “Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end (Daniel 12:9, *English Revised Version*).” “Until the time of the end” in Daniel points to a time when God would raise up

¹⁶ Ghaemmaghani, Omid, personal communication

¹⁷ The author’s understanding is that many Shi’ih commentators translate the latter half of this passage as “the Initiator of all that would come after Him,” referring to the advances in sciences and the arts as the world embraced Islam.

¹⁸ The reference here is to a work called the *Kamil al-Ziyarat* (also *Kámilu’z-Ziyárát*), and a prayer of visitation contained within it to be said at the grave of the Imam Ali. The prayer itself is attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja‘far-i-Šádiq, or the tenth Imam, ‘Alí-i-Naqí.

¹⁸ The author attempted a little video illustrating this concept. It may be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZMIAzgH0sE>

a Prophet suited to, once again, not only reveal Holy Verses but to interpret the words of Muhammad “and those prophets that preceded Him” pertaining to the end times.²⁰

A little earlier (paragraph 24), Bahá’u’lláh indicates who is able to interpret scripture accurately

But you have interpreted this verse according to your desires although at all times you admitted what was also revealed is truth: None knoweth the interpretation thereof except God and they that are *firmly grounded in knowledge* [author’s emphasis]. Although you are certain of this verse and although you were prevented, yet you have interpreted and expounded the words of God. But you have risen to object to and to deny those “firmly grounded in knowledge.”

Here God reveals a way for those who err to make amends (paragraph 32):

In this wise, ponder ye in what We have revealed unto you in all truth that ye find a way to the precinct of God’s Revelation on the shore of holiness. Be not veiled therefore because of what ye have heard from your divines and ask the questions of religion from him whom God has ordained to be “firmly grounded in knowledge” and from whose countenance resplendent lights are shed.

A further puzzle piece—a sign on the path to unraveling this mystery, if you will— that figures into this argument concerns mention in this tablet of the “blood-soaked Garment.” Fananapazir, in his notes, indicates that this imagery of the blood-soaked Garment refers to the Imam Husayn and the heinous way in which he was betrayed and murdered/martyred, but beyond any parallels between the suffering and trials both the Imam Husayn and Bahá’u’lláh endured with such gracious patience, Bahá’u’lláh, according to one of Fananapazir’s notes, is regarded by the Baha’is as the spiritual return of the Imam Husayn (paragraph 71):

O Thou blood soaked Garment! Do not heed the misgivings of mankind rather burn asunder their veils and appear with thy divine ornament amongst earth and

²⁰ One might question why *Qur’an* 33:40 is so often interpreted to mean that Muhammad would be the last Prophet when a major theme of the *Qur’an* is continuity of revelation and four verses later, at 33:44, He is discussing the Meeting with God, an important expectation of the Day of Judgment. Again, we see the conundrum that only the Revelator can reveal and interpret verses, but that one must have faith to accept the Revelator’s station and thus His explanations.

heaven and chant of thy hidden and treasured melodies born of Thy spirit in these days whereon there has befallen upon the Manifestation of the self of God what the eyes of creation have not seen.

So, fitting the puzzle pieces together, the logical argument runs this way:

1. The Muslim divines try to make sense of holy writ and fail. God chastises them and tells them the only one who can interpret these verses is the man “wholly grounded in knowledge.”
2. Where the “Seal of the Prophets” station is discussed, the Imam Ali is proclaimed to be an example of “a man firmly grounded in knowledge.” Is it possible this means all of the Imams, including Husayn, were “men firmly grounded in knowledge?” The author thinks that’s not too far to press this point. Allowing this argument, the Twelfth or Hidden Imam, whose return Shi’ih Muslims await, is also a man “firmly grounded in knowledge.”
3. In the same section, we have the term “Seal of the Prophets” put into perspective: Muhammad is the Seal of all the prophets that preceded Him as well as the Initiator/Harbinger of the Messengers Who will come after Him, which would include the return of the Twelfth Imam.
4. Baha’is acknowledge Bahá’u’lláh to be the return of the Twelfth Imam.
5. The reference to the Crimson/Blood-soaked Garment refers not only to Husayn but to the Joseph of the *Hebrew Bible*, whose story became the twelfth surah of the *Holy Qur’an* and the backbone of the Báb’s *Qayyum ’ul-Asma*.²¹ By bringing in the concept of the blood-soaked Garment, Bahá’u’lláh calls to mind the belief that He was the spiritual return of the Imam Husayn.

²¹ The author is not sure one can’t work in the fabled Robe of Christ here to get in representatives from all Western religions.

6. By all these measures, Bahá'u'lláh is another “man well-grounded in knowledge.” Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh is one (or One) Who is equal to the task of interpreting scripture, therefore one in Whom God has vested complete trust. It is not a difficult leap to go from one who can interpret scripture to one who can reveal verses, which are the great miracles only a Revelator can produce. Hence Bahá'u'lláh is a new Revelator and Promised One and the Báb's “Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest.”

Final Comments

The *Surah of Patience*, like many of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets, is a complex and multi-layered work. The author can lay claim to having done no more than touched the surface of its deeper, hidden meanings. Another reader will perhaps find different interpretations of the material she has covered or find other passages entirely that will support (or negate) the argument that this tablet does constitute a written declaration by Bahá'u'lláh of His station.

Many other passages might be added to the collection the author has made above. There are, for example, wording changes in the narration of the story of the martyrs of Nayríz, that suggest Bahá'u'lláh is speaking not *to* or *of* those holy souls of the past, but, for several paragraphs, *about* His close followers in the present.²² Voicing changes, as described above in the account of Job, continue to appear throughout the work. Also throughout the work, and especially in the last few pages, Bahá'u'lláh speaks with nearly every “voice” He is known to employ in His other works: man, Pen, relay of the words of God directly, Revelator. Often, late in the tablet, He uses multiple voices in one paragraph, or even in one sentence (paragraph 69):

²² One of whom was, at this point and miraculously, Hájí Muhammad-Taqi!

O Thou most holy Beauty! The unbelievers do not respite Thee that a breath should be exhaled from Thy chest for as My voice wishes to leave My mouth, they place the hand of hatred over My mouth and yet with all your knowledge of this matter you command Me to raise My call in this atmosphere for Thou art the doer in truth, Thou art the commander in justice. Thou does what Thou wishes and Thou art wise over all things. If Thou hearkenest to the call of Thy servant, if Thou fulfilllest his wish then forgive them with the utmost kind word and delicate utterance that those handmaidens of eternity may return to their seats in the crimson and ruby laden chambers.[29] Thou knowest that I have now become afflicted between the unbelievers from two parties and Thou commandest in both Revelations and overseest both Dispensations and Thou art manifest in the Twin garments and Thou art resplendent through the Two Suns and have been mentioned with the Twin Names, possessest the Twin Dawning-places, commandest the secret of the Twin Mysteries in these Two Lines and God is fully aware beyond all this.[30]

Every word in this tablet—every letter!—contains oceans of profundity, and the author has only made a feeble effort to paddle around on the surface of the smallest sea. No, this tablet does not utilize the stark, literal clarity of a statement like the Báb’s aforementioned “I am...I am, I am the Promised One...” Yes, Bahá’u’lláh, even at the time of His declaration in the Garden of Ridván ten years after His mystical experience in the Síyáh-Chál, used the languages of metaphor, allusion, and symbolism. In the *Surah of Patience*, He is most definitely “...calling His lovers and... inviting them to attain His presence.” He just wanted His lovers to listen very closely to what He had to say and conclude for themselves what He meant.

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