

The Báb's Epistle Refuting the Claims to the Station of Bābiyyat (Gatehood)¹

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Introduction and background

This luminous Epistle of the Báb, revealed in Shíráz upon His return from pilgrimage in the latter part of 1845, imparts profound insight into the wisdom of His early declarations and the deliberate manner in which He unfolded the nascent stages of His Cause.²

At that time, only a year after His declaration to Mullá Ḥusayn in May 1844, fierce opposition had already arisen among the people of Shíráz, fuelled by the hostility of the governor, Ḥusayn Khán, and the religious authorities. In this charged atmosphere, the Báb ascended the pulpit of the Vakíl Mosque and, before the assembled multitudes, uttered words akin to those preserved in this Epistle—a moment whose date, as attested by a letter of His faithful amanuensis and scribe, Siyyid Ḥusayn Yazdí, cited by Aboul-Qásim Afnan (*Ahd-i 'Alā*, p. 166), falls upon the 22nd of September, 1845.

To the superficial observer, the text of this Epistle may seem to suggest that the Báb distanced Himself from the claim of “Bābiyyat”—the Gate to the Hidden Imám—at precisely the moment when His Cause had already begun to spread. Detractors, both in His own day and later, seized upon such statements to allege inconsistency in His mission. Yet a careful reading, considering history and of His later, explicit declarations, reveals a very different truth.

¹ Bābiyyat (بابیت) — Literally “the state of being a gate.” In Shí'í thought, “Báb” (Gate) was historically used to designate the intermediary between the Hidden Imám and his followers during the period of the Minor Occultation (874–941 CE). By the nineteenth century, popular expectation associated “Bābiyyat” with being the exclusive channel to the Twelfth Imám. The Báb, however, redefined this title. His true station was not that of the Gate to the Hidden Imám, but the Gate of God (*Báb Allāh*)—the channel through which divine revelation flowed, and the herald of “Him Whom God shall make manifest.

² Muḥammad Afnán, *Safíneh-yi 'Irfán*, vol. 8 (Darmstadt: Asr-i Jadíd, 2005), pp. 106, 117.

Provisional Translation

The Epistle, composed in Persian, is extant on pages 169–170 of Volume 91 of the *Iran National Bahá'í Archives* (INBA) series, published in 133 B.E. (1976–77 C.E.), comprising a compilation of the Writings of the Báb. It may also be consulted in the INBA digital archive at the following addresses: [INBA, vol. 91, p. 169](#) and [INBA, vol. 91, p. 170](#).

A typed version of the Epistle is reproduced on page 4 of this article.

Presented below is a provisional English rendering of this profoundly sacred Epistle, offered for study and reflection.

Thus Doth the Báb Reveal:

“‘Alif, Mīm, ‘Ayn³

O ‘Alí,⁴ grant Thy succor

*In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and in Him do we seek
assistance*

*Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds, and may the blessings of God rest upon
Muḥammad and His sanctified kindred. And after: Thus speaketh the least of the
servants of God, ‘Alí, son of Muḥammad,⁵ the late Muḥammad-Riḍá⁶—may his resting-
place be hallowed.*

*A number have ascribed unto this feeble servant the claim to the station of the Bābiyyat
of the Imám—peace be upon Him. Yet in truth I have never claimed such a station, nor
am I now its claimant.*

*And it is incumbent upon him who would claim so mighty a station that he be endowed
with all the perfections of knowledge and of action, lacking in no branch of learning nor
in any customary ordinance.*

³ The disconnected letters ‘Alif, Mīm, ‘Ayn (ا م ع) appearing at the head of the Tablet may be understood as an allusion to the sacred triad of Allāh (الله), Muḥammad (محمد), and ‘Alī (علي), which, in Shí‘í thought, represent the foundational pillars of religion: tawḥīd (the oneness of God), nubuwwat (the prophethood of Muḥammad), and imāmat (the guardianship and succession of ‘Alī and his line). Such cryptic invocations, reminiscent of the ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘āt (“disconnected letters”) that open certain chapters of the Qur’ān, function not merely as symbolic initials but as esoteric signifiers, situating the Tablet within a scriptural and mystical register and evoking themes of divine unity, guidance, and authority (Muḥammad Afnán, *Safíneh-yi ‘Irfán*, vol. 8, p. 117).

⁴ “‘Alí” refers to ‘Alí ibn Abí Ṭálīb, the first Imám, cousin, and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad, revered as a central figure in Shí‘í Islam.

⁵ The phrase ‘*the servants of God, ‘Alí, son of Muḥammad*’ refers to the Báb Himself, whose given name was ‘Alí-Muḥammad.

⁶ The name *Muḥammad-Riḍá* denotes the Báb’s father.

And he must encompass all the outward and inward sciences,⁷ exercising methodical investigation and complete exposition thereof.

Nor should any matter of miracle or extraordinary occurrence, praiseworthy in the sight of God, exist except that he be its possessor in the manner of centrality, and not in mere potentiality, which God has placed in all things, either inherently or derivatively.

And if he be deficient in any matter whatsoever, or wanting even in a single letter of the sciences, there can be no doubt that he is not the bearer of this exalted station.

And the Lord of all being, and the people of His guardianship are witnesses, endowed with discernment, that I possess not even a letter of the sciences current among the learned, nor have I the knowledge or power to effect any of the extraordinary occurrences that transcend the customary order.⁸

And if words have flowed from My pen,⁹ they are but the promptings of innate disposition, wholly at variance with the conventions of men, and can in no wise be adduced as proof for any matter.

And whosoever should ascribe unto this lowly one the station of the Bābiyyat of the Imām—peace be upon Him, God Himself is witness that such a person is in error, and in the hereafter shall he abide in the Fire.

And in this parchment, there is neither guile nor dissimulation (Taqiyyih); rather, both My outward being and My inward reality bear testimony to that which is written therein

And sufficient is God as a witness unto that which I say.”

⁷ Outward and inward sciences (‘ulūm ṣāḥirīyah wa bāṭinīyah) — In Islamic thought, “outward sciences” generally refer to rational and transmitted sciences such as grammar, jurisprudence, logic, astronomy, and medicine. “Inward sciences” often denote esoteric knowledge, including mysticism, theology, and spiritual gnosis. The expectation of the Shī‘ī community was that the Qā’im would master both domains exhaustively. The Báb rejects this standard as the measure of divine authority, emphasizing instead the direct revelation of verses from God.

⁸ Customary order (‘ādah) — Refers to the natural order of creation as ordinarily experienced. The phrase *khawāriq al-‘ādāt* (“extraordinary occurrences that transcend the customary order”) is a classical designation for miracles. In Shī‘ī eschatological literature, the Qā’im was expected to manifest continual miraculous powers. By declaring that He does not affect such wonders, the Báb reorients the criterion of divine proof away from physical marvels toward the spiritual miracle of revealed scripture.

⁹ “Words have flowed from My pen” — The Báb emphasizes that His writings do not derive from acquired learning (‘ilm al-iktisābī) or scholarly convention (*qawā’id al-qawm*), but from innate divine inspiration. This claim mirrors the Qur’ānic assertion of the Prophet Muḥammad’s “unlettered” status (*ummī*), highlighting that the authenticity of revelation lies not in academic erudition but in its transcendent origin.

The Báb's Epistle in Refutation of the Claims to the Station of Bābiyyat (Gatehood), Typed Version

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم و به نستعين

الحمد لله رب العالمين و صلى الله على محمد و اله الطاهرين و بعد چنين گوید اقل خلق الله علي بن محمد المرحوم محمد رضا طاب ثراه که جمعی ادعای مقام بابیت امام را علیه السلم نسبت باین بنده ضعیف داده اند و حال آنکه مدعی چنين امری نبوده و نيستم و حتم است بر کسیکه ادعای چنين امر عظيم را نماید که متصف بجمع صفات کمالیه علمیه و عملیه بوده علمی از علوم و رسمی از رسوم را فاقد نباشد و احاطه بر کل علوم ظاهریه و باطنیه بنهج تحقيق و تفصيل داشته باشد و نباشد امری از امور کرامه یا خارق عادت که عند الله محمود باشد مگر آنکه بر نحو قطبيت نه بنحو قوهء امکانیه که در همه اشیاء خداوند بالاصالة یا بالعرض قرار داده مالک باشد و اگر امری از امور یا حرفی از علوم را فاقد باشد شکی نیست که حامل این مقام عظيم نیست و خداوند عالم و اهل ولایت او شاهد و بصیرند که بحر فی از علوم رسوم اهل علم و بامری از خوارق عادات عالم و قادر نيستم و کلماتی اگر جاری از قلم شده باشد بر محض فطرت بوده و کلا مخالف قواعد قوم است و دلیل بر هیچ امری نیست و هرکس در بارهء حقیر اعتقاد رتبه بابیه امام علیه السلم را نماید خداوند گواه است که در ضلالة است و در آخرت در نار و در این ورقه حبله و تقیه نیست بلکه ظاهر و باطنم بر آنچه نوشته گواهی می دهند و کفی بالله علی ما اقول شهیداً

Commentary and Meaning

The Expectation of the Qá'im

The Shí'í populace, steeped in centuries of eschatological anticipation, expected the promised Qá'im—the One who would arise—to demonstrate absolute mastery over all branches of knowledge, to perform miraculous deeds, and to embody superhuman powers. In their imagination, the proof of divine authority lay not in the verses revealed from God, but in feats that conformed to their literalistic traditions.

In this Epistle, the Báb sets forth the very criteria His adversaries demanded: mastery of all sciences, possession of all perfections, and control over miracles. He then declares with perfect candor that He does not possess these things according to their understanding. In this way, He simultaneously exposes the vanity of their standards and points beyond them toward the true criterion of divine revelation—the Word of God.

The Nature of His Mission

The Báb was not the “Gate” to the Hidden Twelfth Imám, as the people supposed. Rather, He was the Gate of God, the channel through which the divine revelation flowed, and the forerunner of “Him Whom God shall make manifest.” To have proclaimed this reality openly in 1845, at the very dawn of His mission, would have provoked an immediate outbreak of violence, threatening to extinguish the nascent Cause before its foundations were firmly laid. His deliberate and measured language, therefore, was not an act of denial, but a manifestation of divine wisdom, ensuring that the Cause would unfold gradually, in stages commensurate with the capacity of the people.

The Revelation of Verses

The Báb openly acknowledges that words flowed from His pen, not by means of scholarship or human learning, but by the promptings of innate, God-given inspiration—words that transcended the rules and conventions of the age. Here He discloses the true proof of His mission: not mastery of sciences, nor miracles, but the spontaneous revelation of verses from God, surpassing human ability and defying the grammarians' standards.

No Guile, No dissimulation (*Taqiyyih*)¹⁰

The Báb closes by affirming that His words are free from guile or dissimulation. His outward and inward being alike testify to the truth of what is written. This is a striking declaration in Shí'í context, where *taqiyyih*—the concealment of one's beliefs under persecution—was a long-established principle. The Báb refuses to rely on such dissimulation. His mission is entirely transparent, and God Himself is His witness.

The Wisdom of Gradual Disclosure

Later in His ministry, the Báb's station became progressively manifest.¹¹ He openly proclaimed Himself the Promised Qá'im, revealed the Bayán, and testified with His blood to the divine origin of His Cause.

Yet His early writings, such as this Epistle, reflect the divine pedagogy by which a Manifestation unveils His mission gradually, allowing His followers to be tested, His adversaries to be confounded, and the Cause to take root.

The charge that the Báb “changed His position” misapprehends both the nature of His mission and the manner in which all Manifestations progressively disclose their claim.

Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, and Bahá'u'lláh each revealed Their Cause in stages, suited to the understanding and readiness of their audiences.

Bahá'u'lláh testifies to this truth in one of His Tablets revealed in Adrianople:” Know verily that the veil hiding Our countenance hath not been completely lifted. We have revealed Our Self to a degree corresponding to the capacity of the people of Our age. Should the Ancient Beauty be unveiled in the fullness of His glory mortal eyes would be blinded by the dazzling intensity of His revelation” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 59).

¹⁰ *Taqiyyih* (تقیه) — A doctrine in Shí'í Islam permitting the concealment of one's true beliefs in situations of persecution, traced back to Qur'ānic verses such as 16:106 (“except one who is compelled, while his heart is firm in faith”). While widely accepted in Shí'í practice, the Báb explicitly disavows dissimulation in this Tablet, asserting that His “outward being and inward reality” are identical and transparent. This stance marks a radical departure from the established norms of Shí'í religiosity.

¹¹ “Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, “I, in very truth, am God,” identified Himself as the Gate [Bab] for the advent of the promised Qa'im, a descendant of Muhammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'an, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being” (The Bab, *Selections*, p. 119 (*Dala'il-i-Sab'ih*, p. 29).

In the Qur'ān, Muḥammad is enjoined: “Do not proclaim what is revealed to you until the appointed time” (cf. 15:94), and Christ frequently enjoined secrecy upon His disciples (e.g., Mark 8:30).

The Báb's apparent “withholding” of full claims in 1845, therefore, must be understood not as vacillation or inconsistency, but as the deliberate exercise of divine wisdom: a measured and gradual disclosure of His station and mission, intended to safeguard the nascent Faith, nurture the capacity of His followers, and prepare the world for eventual recognition of His Cause in its plenitude.

Conclusion

This Epistle is thus not an evasion, nor a denial, but a profound testimony. The Báb disavows the false expectations of the people while testifying to the true proof of His mission—the revelation of the Word of God. He safeguards the Cause at its earliest, most perilous hour, while sowing the seeds of the recognition that would later blossom into open acknowledgment of His station.

Far from weakening His claim, this Epistle reveals His truthfulness, His wisdom, and His utter reliance upon God. His Cause, far from being inconsistent, is coherent from first to last: He was the Gate of God, the Herald of “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” and the Martyr of Shíráz and Ṭabríz, whose Revelation prepared the way for the dawning of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith.