

Kaleidoscope

Some Aspects of Angelology, Light, the Divine Throne and Color Mysticism in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture

Stephen Lambden

Say: O my God! O my God! I supplicate Thee by the blood of Thy chosen Ones through whom the countenances of the Supreme Concourse (malá' al-a'lá) and the companions of the Crimson Ark (aḥṣáb al-ṣafínat al-ḥamrá') hath been dyed crimson, to make me one that crieth out in Thy Name and is steadfast in Thy Cause. Thou, verily art the Powerful, the Mighty, the All Gracious.
Prayer of Bahá'u'lláh

Praise be to God Who hath caused the Light to circle round the twin Mounts of His Light and made the Light to revolve around the twin Spheres of His Light. He hath caused the Light to beam forth in the Loci of His Light and made the Light to be retained in the Repositories of His Light. [Additionally] He hath caused the Light to scintillate through the impulses of His Light and made the Light to shine resplendent in the Countenances of His Light. Praise God! Praised be God! Worthy of praise is He Who establishes His Own worth, for besides Him there is none other.
Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i kull al-ta'ám

A kaleidoscope (Gk. *kalos* = beautiful + *eidos* = form) is an optical 'toy', a device in which beautiful colors and forms can be visually experienced. This brief paper will exhibit kaleidoscopic features in being something of a *kashkúl* ("begging bowl") to mix my metaphors. It will contain miscellaneous notes relating to religious cosmology, angelology, color and "throne" symbolism in select Abrahamic, Bábí, Bahá'í, and religious and mystical texts. It will be seen that colours are related to the theology of the celestial Throne. It will be demonstrated here that angels, lights of different kinds and the Throne of God

are all motifs closely related to each other. First, a few paragraphs by way of setting the scene.

Angelology

Though a complex theological subject, angelology can be given a quite simple (though necessarily inadequate) definition. It may be regarded as the study of the doctrine regarding angels (Ar. *malak*; Per. *firishtih*). It is the study and mystical significance of the myriad variety of angels, including so-called archangelic beings. Bahá'ís, it can be said at the outset, do not believe in the literal existence of angels as distinct, non-human, super-

natural orders of celestial beings. They interpret non-literally the ontological reality of such angels and archangels as they are traditionally pictured and understood. In line with its modernistic demythologization perspectives, Bahá'í sacred writings interpret "angels" as scriptural symbols capable of various "spiritual" significances.

With various symbolic significances "angels" are, however, quite frequently mentioned in the extensive Arabic and Persian Bábí-Bahá'í scriptural writings; those deriving from Mírza Ḥusayn 'Alí Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892; founder of the Bahá'í religion) and His slighty younger contemporary, Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad Shírází, the Báb (1917-1850; the founder of the short lived, 20 year or so Bábí religion). Angels of various kinds are basically divine agents, messengers, who are very frequently mentioned in Abrahamic (Jewish, Christian and Islamic) and other religious and philosophical texts.

A vast angelological literature has existed from antiquity and continues to proliferate. Today, it is actually quite "trendy" to know about or experience angels. In various Islamic and other sources angels are said to have been created from (celestial) "light" and have diverse functions, including the performance of laudatory cosmological, envoy mediatory and other services. They were believed to "sing" the praises of the divine Creator in ways that have a positive, creative dynamic. From ancient times religious texts have related angels with light[s], colors and the performance of theologically meaningful cosmic functions.

Colors

A precise and concise definition of "color" is "a sensation of light induced in the eye by electromagnetic waves of a certain frequency – the color being determined by the frequency" (CED [1988]: 283). Light, color, colored lights are aspects of the same phenomenon. "Light" can exist in various colors. Light is more than simply "the agency by which things are rendered visible" (as a basic definition has it); it being something rather complex.¹ In basic terms, as indicated, it is "electromagnetic radiation capable of producing visual sensation" (CED: 826). There are many fascinating aspects of "light" that cannot be gone into here. It will simply be noted that it 'travels' at a phenomenal speed – it can circumambulate the equator in less than 1/7th of a second; its speed in a vacuum is apparently 2.997×10^{10} cm. sec. (MDHS: 238) Bypassing the modern technicalities of quantum electrodynamics and wave particle duality issues, "light," it should be noted, has been given countless definitions throughout the ages. So too has the phenomenon of color and the diversity of colors.²

Light actual and Light mystical in religious scripture

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . .

And God said, "Let there be Light"; and there was light. (Gen 1:1, 3)
וַיֵּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר

The opening book of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis, has it that God created “light” (Heb. *awr*) on the very first of the six days of creation though He did not create the “sun” until the “fourth day” (see Gen 1:14-19). From antiquity what manner of primordial “light” this was has been a subject of cosmological and theological controversy. This especially since the physical “sun” was not something initially called into being. Light and darkness were differentiated on day two of creation as was the positioning of the **רָקִיעַ** (Heb.) *raqí‘a*, the light-radiating (loosely) “firmament,” “expanse,” “vault” or “sky.” This phenomenon as can be learned from ancient cosmologies is a solid dome-like “expanse” which arches over the earth.

The Hebrew and Aramaic Jewish mystical text named the *Sepher ha-Zohar* (“The Book of Splendour”) attributed to Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai (fl. 1st-2nd Century CE., but actually written by the Spanish kabbalist Moses de Leon, ca. 1240-1305), makes a major shift in its deep qabbalistic exegesis of Gen 1:1ff. when the implications of the divine words “And God said, ‘Let there be Light’” (Gen 1:3 cf. 1:14) are reached (see *Zohar*, Bereshit I.16bf., I.31b-32a; Sperling, trans. 1:68f; Tishby, *Zohar* III:585f). From this point it is reckoned “we can begin to discover hidden things relating to the creation of the world in detail” (ibid).

The jussive Hebrew phrase of command, **יְהִי**, “Let there be [Light]” is expressed by 3 Hebrew letters derived from the Hebrew verb ‘to be’; namely,

[1] **י** *yod* [2] **ה** *he* and [3] **י** *yod*. When voweled and pronounced “*yehi*” these three letters signify “Let there be!” (Gen 1:3a). In the *Zohar* the thrust and position these three letters of *yehi* (= Y-H-Y) indicates the “union of the Father” (= the first *yod* = the sephiroth *ḥokmah* = “wisdom”) and the “Mother” (= the *he* = the sephiroth *binah* = “understanding”).

The second occurrence of the letter *yod* in *yehi* (= Y-H-Y), “Let there be!” is believed to indicate a new beginning. Indeed, the *Zohar* continues to mention that this new beginning is seen when the Hebrew word for “Light” (A-W-R) integrates this (second) Hebrew letter *yod* within itself. It then becomes the four letter Hebrew word A-W-I-R which means “air,” “atmosphere,” “supernal air” or (loosely) “ether” (cf. Tishby, *Zohar* 1:314f). This configuration also relates the genesis of “Light” to that hypostatic reality which is foremost, that is “wisdom,” which, in Jewish mysticism, is often regarded as the first of the ten sephiroth (see Tishby, *ibid* fns).

The *Zohar* further interprets the “light” of Gen 1:3 with “the light of the eye.” It was shown to the first man Adam who could thereby see from “one end of the world to the other” (*Zohar* 1.31b). All human beings have seen, have visually experienced, things. They are aware that they are wholly dependent upon “light”; primarily through its major terrestrial source, the “Sun.” Everyone knows that light exists and is fundamental to life. Both outward and inward “light” and “life” are closely associated together. Thus, for example, we read in

the magnificent prologue to the fourth Gospel of John, “In him [Jesus, the Divine Logos] was life and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3).

The sacred books have it that just as we cannot live without physical light we likewise cannot truly have “faith” and live spiritually without a relationship to the “Sun of Truth.” For Bahá’ís this metaphor is indicative of the Logos-Reality (*nafs*) of the divine manifestation of God (*mazhar-i iláhi*) which, they believe, illuminates everything seen and unseen. Relative to earthly life the “sun” is the orb of light around the life and being of which all earthly things revolve. The light-beaming Sun is the origin of everything, their quintessence and their symbolic goal. The opening of the Qur’anic Light Verse (Q. 24:35) reflects the statement made in the First Epistle of John (1 John), that “God is Light” (1Jn 1:5). In splendid metaphorical rhyming prose, the Qur’án even has it that there exists “light upon light” (*núr ‘alá núr*). Thus we read in the celebrated and much commented upon “Light verse” (Q. 24:35):

نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ اللَّهُ

God is the Light of the heavens and of the earth

مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ

The likeness of His Light is even as [the light streaming from] a niche (*mishkat*) containing a lamp (*al-miṣbáḥ*);

المِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ

the lamp (*al-miṣbáḥ*) is in a glass (*zujájat*),

الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ

the glass even as a resplendent Star (*kawkáb durriya*)

يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ

enkindled from the oil (*zaytún*), of a blessed Tree (*shajarat mubáraka*) [an olive]

لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ

neither of the East nor of the West.

يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ

Its oil (*zaytuhá*) well nigh radiates forth – even though it [Fire] hardly touches it.

نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ

It is Light upon Light [and]

يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

God guideth unto His Light whomsoever He willeth.

اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالُ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ وَيَضْرِبُ

And God [does indeed] strike similitudes (*al-amthál*) for the people for God is aware of it all things.

In Arabic, Persian and other languages, many fascinating commentaries have been written upon this verse by scores of Muslim Qur’án commentators. The Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ often

cited it. They variously interpreted this much celebrated “Light verse.” In his early Khuṭba al-Jidda (Sermon at Jeddah) the Báb creatively drew upon the Light verse when He listed and highlighted the magnificence of His early revelations. He also wrote a number of commentaries upon Qur’án 24:35 finding deep spiritual significances in the *abjad* numerical relationships between the Arabic words for *núr* (“light” abjad, 256) and *nár* (“fire” abjad 251). These two words indicative of “heaven” and “hell” differ by a value of five. Light is 256 (=light) and Fire 251 (=fire), abjad 5 being the difference and 5 being abjad of Báb (=2+1+2 = B+a+b = 5). This difference then, can indicate the messianic “Gate” or the person of Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad Shirazi, the Báb. The Báb is Himself the “Gate” to the divine mysteries.

In His Tafsír áyat al-núr (Commentary upon the Light Verse) or Tafsír al-hurúfát al-muqatta‘ah (Commentary on the Isolated Letters), Bahá’u’lláh also found deep intimations of the advent of the Báb and other lofty matters in the light verse (see bib.). He responded to His questioner, the early Bábí believer and Bahá’í martyr [Ḥajj] Áqá Mírzá [Áqá] Rikab-Sáz Shírází, in the following manner:

Then know thou that that which thou hast asked concerning the “Light Verse” [Qur’án 24:35] which was sent down upon Muḥammad, the Messenger of God aforesaid, concerns a verse the comprehension of which the worlds cannot sustain.

Bahá’u’lláh continued by saying,

Even if whatever lieth within God’s knowledge became “Pens” and all that has been decreed became oceans of “Ink” and the Fingers of Might wrote [its mysteries] for all time, this would not suffice to exhaust even a single letter of the meaning of this honorable and blessed verse which hath been revealed by the Tongue of Grandeur.

He further added,

Nevertheless, I shall cause to be sprinkled down upon thee a dew-drop from the fathomless ocean of the sea of knowledge and wisdom in order that thou might be amongst those who have hastened to the plains of knowledge and who have drunk deep of the goblet of Divine Favour from the hand of the Youth seated upon the Throne of Paradise.³

Islamic tradition has it, according to a prophetic *hadíth*, that God is wrapped in 70,000 (the number varies here) veils of “Light” and “Darkness.” Interestingly, for some Sufi mystics there exists a mysterious “black light.” Just as this unusual motif is found in the Jewish *Sepher ha-Zohar*, so it, for example, occurs in the writings of the Sufi ‘Ayn al-Quḍát al-Hamadání (d. 526/1131) who viewed the “dark” reality as a phenomenon located behind the heavenly Throne of God (see Bowering, ‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani’ Elr. III:140ff). Additionally, there are thought to be various colored lights associated with and even constituting the Divine Throne (*al-‘arsh*). One cosmologi-

cally interesting Islamic tradition associates the Divine Throne, Light and Angelic beings and reads as follows:

God – exalted be He – created the [Divine] Throne (al-‘arsh) from His Light (núr) and the [celestial] Seat [Chair] (al-kursí) conjoined (al-mutaṣiq) to the [this Divine] Throne (al-‘arsh). Around the [Divine] Throne (al-‘arsh) are Four Streams [Rivers] (anhar): [1] a River of Light (núr) which glitters, [2] a River of Fire which flames up [burns], [3] a River of White Ice (al-thalj al-abyaḍ), and [4] a River of [cosmic] Water (al-má’). Angels do rise up within these rivers giving praise [to God].

Tafsír of Ibn ‘Abí Khátim
cited *Badá’ al-zuhúr*

Light concepts became central to a good many systems of Islamic theology, philosophy and mysticism. In this respect it will be pertinent, by way of example, to make mention of the founder of the Ishráqí (Oriental) system of philosophy and gnosis founded by the martyred medieval thinker Shiháb al-Dín Yaḥyá Suhrawardí (d. 587/1191). This founder of the *Ishráqiyyún* (the ‘Illuminationist school’), sometimes combines elements of Shí‘í theology, Sufi gnosis, Islamic peripatetic philosophy, Zoroastrian thought and the Hellenistic Hermetic tradition. He is especially famous for his philosophy of illumination as expounded in his weighty *Hikmat al-Ishráq* (The Wisdom of Illumination). Light is central and fundamental to his theology, philosophy, cosmology and prophetology.

It is in Suhrawardí’s *Hikmat al-Ishráq*

that the probably Jewish-rooted term **هورقليا** which is often read *hurqalyá* or *hawarqalyá* occurs once. In its aberrant Arabic form **هورقليا** was associated by Suhrawardí in the *Hikmat al-Ishráq* with the “eighth clime” and with the cosmic, supernatural cites of the shadowy inter-worlds Jábulqa [á] and Jábarsa [ṣá] (the Arabic spellings sometimes vary).

This word **هورقليا** appears to be a slightly garbled Arabic transliteration of the aforementioned biblical Hebrew **הַרְקִיעַ** = *ha-ráqîa* (= *hawaqalya* = *hurqalya* see Gen. 1:4b), meaning the firmament, vault, atmosphere or sky which is clearly identified with heaven and separates the earthly and celestial waters (see Gen. 1:6ff).

This Hebrew word **הַרְקִיעַ** = *ha-ráqîa* is translated “the firmament” in the Authorized (King James, 1611) version of the Bible. In various Rabbinic texts and Jewish mystical traditions the expanse that is the “firmament” (“air”) and “heaven” has a very close association with bright light and with the sun.⁴ It is understood to signify a dazzlingly radiant light-beaming cosmic phenomenon also being a kind of luminous “inter-world,” betwixt earth and heaven. Thus, the *Sepher ha Zohar* (“Book of Splendour”) (see above), for example, several times identifies the (Heb./Aram) *ráqîa*’ (“firmament”) as a reality of stunning brightness (Zohar 1:15aff). This important Jewish mystical text appropriately cites Dan 12:3 in this connection. The Zohar appropriately cites Dan 12:3 in asserting that the **מַשְׁכִּלִים** (*mashk-ilím*, the “wise”) “shall shine (*yázhiru*)

like the brightness of the “firmament,” the **הַרְקִיעַ** (*zohar há ráqîa’*)” (*Berachoth*, 1.16aff).

In view of its cosmological and other senses **הַרְקִיעַ** would not have been inappropriately adopted in an Ishráqí cosmology of light.⁵ **هورقليا**, *hawaqalya/húrqalyá* became important term in Shaykhí mystical cosmology and hermeneutics. It indicated the sphere of the eschatological resurrection “body.” It was adopted by Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Zayn al-Abidin al-Ahsá’í (d. 1826) in its sense of “interworld” (see JK 1/ii, 103). *Hurqalyá* does not, however, appear to have been directly adopted in the Bábí Bahá’í demythologization of latter day “resurrection” motifs.⁶

The Divine Throne and the Angels in Select Shí’í Islamic Hadíth

Within Shí’í hadíth collections there are many fascinating statements about the divine Throne (*‘arsh*) or “Seat,” “Chair” the (Arab.) *kursí*. It is sometimes far more than just an object for sitting upon:

I inquired of Abu ‘Abd-Allah [=Ja‘far al-Sadiq the 6th Imám] . . . regarding the verse of God, the Almighty, the Great, “His *kursí* (“Seat,” “Chair”) comprises the heavens and earth” (Q. 2:255). The Imám replied, ‘O Fuḍayl, all things, the heavens and the earth, all are within the *kursí*.’”

I inquired of Abu ‘Abd-Allah (=Ja‘far al-Sadiq) . . . regarding the words of God, the Almighty the Great, “His Chair comprises the

heavens and earth” [= Q. 2:255]; ‘Do the heavens and the earth include the *kursí* (“Seat,” “Chair”) or does the *kursí* include the heavens and the earth?’ The Imám replied: ‘It is the *kursí* which comprises the heavens, the earth and the Throne. The *kursí* (also) includes every (other) thing.’

It will be seen below that throne cosmology and throne mysticism is closely related to ideas about colour as mediated by angels. First a note about colour terminology in Arabic.

Color terminology

The second edition of the Brill produced *Encyclopedia of Islam* (EI²) contains an excellent article “LAWN,” “color,” by A. Morbiya. It opens by stating that “one of the distinctive features of the Arabic language is the great richness of its chromatic vocabulary. It is as if the smallest detail, the most minute nuance, was deemed to require a nomenclature *sui generis*.” The article goes on to undertake “a morphological and semantic analysis of the names of colors” and sums up ways in which “Muslim thinkers, theologians and philosophers, have analysed perception of colors” ending with “the symbolic dimension of colors.”

A few further extracts from this entry are worth citing,

The morphology of adjectives of colour is characterised by the fact that they are, in the majority of cases, formed on the diptote paradigm af‘al in the masculine, fa‘lá’

in the feminine. The af’al theme is a theme of intensity, which also supplies the elative; this common formulation of the intensive and of the adjective of colour is apparently not coincidental, and it is asserted that, semantically, the latter may have been regarded, at a certain stage in the evolution of the language, as an intensive: that which we translate as “red” may, originally, have signified “more red than . . .”

Note also from the same article these fascinating aspects of Arabic color terminology:

Of the derived forms of the Arabic verb there are two of the paradigms if’alla and if’álla which have a particular quality: they express states (colour or deformity); they do not derive from the “bare form” fa’ala, but are denominative in origin, formed from adjectives of the paradigm af’al expressing the states cited above; and they denote an intensive aspect which is illustrated by the doubling of the final radical. The XIth form (if’álla), less common than the IXth (if’alla) seems to be a doublet of it, still more intensive. Thus we have, besides *ibyaḍḍa* and *iswaḍḍa*, meaning respectively “to become white,” “to become black,” *ibyáḍḍa* and *iswáḍḍa*, for “to become pure white,” “to become black as ebony.”

Ibid. Morbiya, *EI*² Vol. IV: 698-707

The Hadíth of the Angelic Throne of Lights

The following notes pertinent to aspects of the Islamic/Shaykhí background and Bábí-Bahá’í uses of colour symbolism will help to broaden and deepen the theme of the relationships between angelology, throne and colour symbolism – themes and motifs which need not always be so interrelated. In Shaykhí and Bábí-Bahá’í sources such relationships can often be traced back to a seminal and very influential Islamic tradition recording a dialogue between Imám ‘Alí (d. 40 / 662) the son in law and (for Shí’is Muslims and Bahá’is) the immediate successor of the Prophet Muḥammad, and a Catholic Christian. Their dialogue concerned the nature of God’s enthronement. This influential tradition is recorded in the *Usul al-Káfi* of Kulayni vol.1 I:129-130 and (among other places) the *Biḥár al-anwár* (“Oceans of Lights”) of Muḥammad Báqir Majlisí (d. 1699) (see *Biḥár*⁷ 58:9-10). The Christian questioned Imám ‘Alí about the nature of God and his possible holding up, His bearing the divine Throne (*al-‘arsh*). In the course of the dialogue the Imám came to express the view that the divine Throne (*al-‘arsh*) is supported or constituted of four celestial lights; [1] red light (*núr ḥamrá’*); [2] green light (*núr akhḍar*); [3] yellow light (*al-núr aṣfar*) and [4] white light (*núr bayáḍ*).

... The Commander of the Faithful [Imám ‘Alí] said: . . . ‘God, exalted and glorified be He, is the bearer of the Throne (*ḥámil al-‘arsh*)

and the heavens and the earth and what lieth within and between them. Such [is in accordance with] the statement of God [in the Qur'án]: “God holds in position the heavens and the earth lest they should deviate; and should they deviate there would be none to hold them in place aside from Him. He hath ever been the One Clement and Forgiving” (Q. 35:41).

At this [the Catholic] responded and said, ‘Then inform me about His [Qur'anic] saying, “and eight of them [angels] shall bear aloft the Throne of thy Lord (*‘arsh rabbika*) above them” (Q. 69:17). How can this be when you have said [citing the Qur'án] that He beareth the Throne and the heavens and the earth?’

He [Imám ‘Alí] said: ‘The [celestial divine] Throne (*al-‘arsh*) was created by God – blessed and exalted be He – from four Lights (*anwár*): [1] a Crimson [Red] Light (*núr aḥmar*) by means of which redness (*al-ḥumra*) was reddened; [2] the Green Light (*núr al-akhḍar*) by means of which greenness (*al-khudra*) was made green; [3] the Yellow Light (*al-núr al-aṣfar*) by means of which yellowness (*al-ṣufra*) was yellowed and [4] the [Snow-] White Light (*al-núr al-abayḍ*) through which whiteness (*al-bayáḍ*) is [whitened] realized. This [Light-Throne phenomenon] is the knowledge (*huwa al-‘ilm*) which God, the Bearer (*al-ḥamla*) [imparts to] such as are empowered to uphold it [the Throne]. And that Light (*al-núr*) [=knowledge] is of the Light of His

Grandeur (*min núr ‘azimat*) and of His Power (*qudrat*). . . .’

Wherefore hath all that hath been born aloft been born aloft by God by virtue of His Light, His Grandeur and His Power. Of their own selves (*li-nafsihi*) [these realities] have no power to [actualize either] misfortune [injury, damage] or benefit [good]; neither do they have the power of [bestowing] life (*ḥayát*) or resurrection [from the dead]. Hence, everything is upheld [born aloft, actualized by God]. God, exalted and glorified be He is the One Who supports these twain [the heavens and the earth, lest they dislodge] and the One Who encompasses them both and everything [besides]. He is the Life [giver] of everything and the Light of all things “So praised and exalted be He above that which they assert.” (Q. 17:43).

‘Alí subsequently informs the Christian that

Those who bear the Throne (*al-‘arsh*) are the learned (*al-‘ulamá*) whom God gave the capacity to bear His knowledge. There is naught that emergeth from these four things (the [1] Throne, [2] the Chair, [3] the Heavens and [4] the Earth) which God has created in His Kingdom, save that which God intended for His chosen ones (*al-aṣfiyá*) and which He showed unto His friend (Abraham) as He says (in the Qur'án), “So We were showing Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith” (Q. 6:75). How can it be

possible that the bearer[s] of the Throne (*ḥamlat al-'arsh*) bear God (Himself) through Whose Life is the [very] life of their [own] hearts and through Whose Light they are guided unto the gnosis [knowledge] of Him [God] (*ma'rifatihī*).

Kulaynī, Káfī I:129 130;
Majlisī, Biḥār, 58:9-10).

The Celestial Throne and the Angels

From early on in the evolution of Islamic (Shí'í-Zaydí) Qur'án exegesis biblical materials were assimilated into qur'anic exegesis. Muqátil b. Sulaymán (d. Basra c.150/767), probably an early Zaydí exegete, commenting upon a phrase of the celebrated 'Throne Verse' (*áyat al-kursí* = Q. 2:255) – the part which reads, "His [God's] Seat [Chair, Throne] (*kursí*) encompasses the heavens and the earth and He is not burdened by sustaining both in existence" states as follows, without *iṣnád* (but from the *Isrá'íliyyát* of Wahb b. Munabbih taken from the ahl al-kitáb = Jews or Christians):

Four angels bear the [divine] Throne (*kursí*); every angel hath four faces (*arba'at wujúh*). Their feet [legs] (*aqdám*) are [situated] beneath the [foundational] Rock (*al-saḥra*) which lieth beneath the lowest earth (*al-arḍ al-suflá*) extending [for the distance of] a 500 year journey (*masíra[t] khamsmá'at 'ám*); and between all [of the 7] earth[s] is a 500 year journey!

(1) [There is] an angel whose face

hath the appearance of a man [human form] (*'malak wajhihi alá ṣúrat al-insán*). He had the archetypal form (? *wa huwa sayyid al-suwar*). Of God he requests sustenance for the progeny of Adam (*al-rizq li'l ádamiyyín*).

(2) [There is] an angel whose face hath the appearance of the exemplar of [master, lord of] cattle [cf. Q. 6] (*'malak wajhihi alá ṣúrat sayyid al-an'ám*) which is the ox (*wa huwa al-thawr*). Of God he requests sustenance for the cattle [animals] (*al-bahá 'im*).

(3) [There is] an angel whose face hath the appearance of the exemplar of [master, lord of] the birds (*sayyid al-ṭayr*) (*'malak wajhihi alá ṣúrat sayyid al-ṭawr*) which is the eagle [vulture] (*wa huwa al-nasr*). Of God he requests sustenance for the birds (*al-ṭayr*) . . .

(4) [There is] an angel whose face hath the appearance of the exemplar [master, lord of] of beasts of prey (*'malak wajhihi alá ṣúrat sayyid al-sibá'*) which is the lion (*wa huwa al-asad*). Of God he requests sustenance for the beats of prey (*al-sibá'*).

Muqátil b. Sulaymán, *Tafsír* I:213 on Q. 2:255b cf. V:222

This exegesis is obviously directly or indirectly much influenced by the Ezekiel's quasi-cosmological *merkabah* ('throne-chariot') vision contained in the 1st chapter of the book of the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Chap. 10, etc). Ezekiel 1:10 speaks of the four faces of the four creatures which he visioned.

(5b) *out of the midst thereof came*

the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. (6) And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. . . . (10) As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man [in the front], and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle [at the back].

The Bible, King James Version

This Merkabah ([Throne] Chariot) vision was foundational for various traditions expressive of Jewish Merkabah mysticism and the Christian vision of John of Patmos of the ‘four living creatures’ about the celestial throne recorded in Rev 4:6b-9.

Jews, Christians and Muslims have all developed interesting mystical doctrines about the divine Throne. Often they can be seen to have transformed earlier traditions rooted in the Bible and various post-biblical traditions.

In Islam the celestial throne of God is of central cosmological importance. It was given a variety of symbolic and esoteric significances by the Twelver Imáms and numerous Sufi thinkers, philosophers and mystagogues. In his *Mirát al-anwár* (‘Mirror of Lights’) the Shí‘ite theologian and Qur’án exegete Abú’l-Ḥasan al-‘Ámilí al-Iṣfahání (d. Najaf 1138/1726) records that *al-‘arsh* (among other things) is borne by the the Prophet and the Imáms who are the bearers [custodians] of the knowledge of God the locus of which is the ‘*arsh* (‘Throne’) (‘Ámilí

Iṣfahání, *Mirat*, I:236-7).

Commentary of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá’í

A portion of the above cited tradition was cited and commented upon in some detail by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá’í (d. 1826) in one of his epistles written in reply to to the ‘The Brethren from Isfahan.’⁸ Interpreting the four ‘Lights’ (*al-anwár*) (sing. *núr*) mentioned by Imám ‘Alí, Shaykh Aḥmad has it that “the confluence of these four Lights constitutes the ‘Throne’ (*al-‘arsh*) in its totality.” He states that the “white Light” (*al-núr al-abyáḍ*) is the most elevated [transcendent] (*al-a‘lá*) [reality] situated at the right-hand side of the Throne [of God] (*yamín al-‘arsh*) placing the other three lights—yellow Light (*al-núr al-aṣfar*); green Light (*al-núr al-akhḍar*) and red-crimson Light (*al-núr al-aḥmar*) — in a supportive tetradic configuration. These four Lights are interpreted as the four laudatory exclamations:

- (1) *subḥán Alláh* (“Glorified be God”) = White Light-Pillar (*al-abyáḍ*)
- (2) *al-ḥamdu liláh* (“Praised be God”) = Yellow Light-Pillar (*al-aṣfar*)
- (3) *lá iláha ilá Alláh* (“There is none other god but God”) = Green Light-Pillar (*al-akhḍar*)
- (4) *Alláh al-akbar* (“God is Greatest”) = Crimson Light-Pillar (*al-aḥmar*)

As four Pillars (*al-arkán*) they constitute the totality of established existence (*jamí‘ al-wujúd al-muqayyad*) whose

beginning is the First Intellect (*al-‘aql al-awwal*) and whose end is the [dusty] earth (*al-thurá*). God established an [Arch-] Angel (*malak*) “for every Pillar so as to bear it”; namely,

- [3] Seraphiel (?) (Isrá’fíl [“Angel of last Trump”]) = White
- [2] Michael [Míká’íl] = Yellow
- [4] Azrael [‘Azrá’íl (Principal) Angel of Death] = Green
- [1] Gabriel [Jibríl] = Red

The Shaykh reckoned that “The meaning of [‘Alí’s saying] “He [God] bore it aloft” is that His gravitas was focused into this (these) [Arch-] Angel”(s) every [Arch-] Angel having subsidiary hosts of angels (*junúd min malá’ika*) “the number of which none can estimate except God” (Ibid). For Shaykh Aḥmad God indirectly bore the “Throne” through the four [Arch-] Angels and their celestial hosts.

Shaykh Ahmad further expounded these matters as follows:

Know thou that the Throne (*al-‘arsh*) is indicative and suggestive of an intricate support (*ma‘án^{an} mukhtlífa*) . . . and the confluence of these four lights constituteth the Throne (*al-‘arsh*) in its totality. The [Snow-] White Light (*al-núr al-abyáḍ*) is the most elevated [transcendent] (*al-a‘lá*) [reality] and is at the right-hand side of the Throne (*yamín al-‘arsh*); that is to say, its right-hand Pillar [Support] (*rukn*). The Yellow Light (*al-núr al-aşfar*) lieth beneath it while the Green Light (*al-núr al-akhḍar*) is at the left-hand side of the Throne (*yasár al-‘arsh*) and is its left-hand Pillar [Support] (*rukn*). The

Crimson Light (*al-núr al-aḥmar*) lieth beneath it such that the Yellow Light (*al-núr al-aşfar*) is the right-hand Pillar [Support] (*rukn*) beneath the White (*al-abyáḍ*). The Crimson Light (*al-núr al-aḥmar*) is the left-hand Pillar [Support] (*rukn*) beneath the Green (*al-abyáḍ*).

These four Lights are *subḥán Alláh* (“Glorified be God”) which is the “White” [Light-Pillar] (*al-abyáḍ*). *Al-ḥamdu liláh* (“Praised be God”) is the Yellow [Light-Pillar] (*al-aşfar*) while *lá iláha ilá Alláh* (“There is none other god but God”) is the Green [Light-Pillar] (*al-akhḍar*) and *Alláh al-akbar* (“God is Greatest”) is the crimson [Light-Pillar] (*al-aḥmar*).

These Four Pillars (*al-arkán*) constitute the totality of established existence (*jamí‘ al-wujúd al-muqayyad*) whose beginning is the First Intellect (*al-‘aql al-awwal*) and whose end is the [dusty] earth (*al-thurá*). He [God] – glorified be He – set up an [arch-] Angel (*malak*) for every Pillar so as to bear it. They are [1] Gabriel [Jibríl], [2] Michael [Míká’íl], [3] Isrá’fíl and [4] ‘Azrá’íl. The meaning of [‘Alí’s saying] “He [God] bore it aloft” is that His gravitas was focused into this [Arch-] Angel. And for every [Arch-] Angel there are [subsidiary] hosts of angels (*junúd min malá’ika*) the number of which none can estimate except God.

The Four varieties of coloured Lights are separately commented upon by Shaykh Aḥmad in considerable detail. It must suffice here to focus on a portion

of his alchemically informed comment regarding the red or Crimson Light:

And [now regarding] the Crimson [red] Light (*al-núr al-aḥmar*). It is an Angel (*malak*) [derived] from the [snow-] white Light (*al-núr al-abyaḍ*) and the Yellow Light (*al-núr al-aṣfar*). They [alchemists] say that redness (*al-ḥumra*) is born of these two [coloured lights] and they deduce that through redness cinnabar [sulphide of mercury] (*bi-ḥumra al-zunjufr*) [results] for this is of mercury (*huwa min al-zaybaq*) and yellow sulphur (*al-kibrít al-aṣfar*). . . .

The Báb and the ‘Hadíth of the Throne of Lights’

The Báb (1819-1850) was very much influenced by aforementioned ‘Hadíth of the Throne of Lights’ originally uttered by Imám ‘Alí in dialogue with a Christian and mystically interpreted by the first two major figures of al-Shaykhiyya (Shaykhism). Even before He declared His mission on May 22 1844 before Mullá Husayn, it is the case that, towards the very beginning of the first supplicatory introduction to His earliest extant, pre-declaration (early 1844) *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara* (“Commentary on the Sura of the Cow” Q. II), the Báb writes,

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Praised be to God Who manifested himself (tajalla) unto the spheres of existent Being (al-mumkinát) through the ornament of the differentiated [disengaged] Point (bi-

ṭaraz al-nuqṭat al-mumfaṣilat) [sprung] out of the abyss of origination (lujjat al-ibdá’) – unto, in and towards Existent Being . . .

. . . Through it He created the duality [pairing; marriage] (zawjiyya) and He created “I-ness” [individuality] (al-aniyya), And the Divine Will (al-mashiyya) was mentioned through the Dhikr of the Eternal [cosmic] alphabet, (bi-dhikr al-handasah al-azaliyya) which is other than God. And it, it is indeed (fa-hiya hiya) the Primordial Eternity (al-azaliyya al-awwaliyya) without termination of eternity. Nay rather! It, it is [indeed] the Dawning Place of the Sun of the Divine Oneness (shams al-ahadiyya) glistening forth from the Eternal Perpetuity (al-ṣamadániyya al-báqiyya) through the Eternity of the Divine Ipseity (bi-baqá’ al-huwiyya) [which is] of the Empyrean domain (al-jabarútiyya).

So Oh! Truly wondrous [fairest] Ornament (fa-ya na‘ma al-ṭaráz) of the Snow-white “A” (alif al-bayḍá’) coming into being subsequent to the [primordial phenomenon of the] differentiated Point [itself sprung] out of the Creative Reality.

Thus, it, it is indeed of the Ornament of Bahá’ (“Glory-Beauty”) (al-ṭaráz al-bahá’) in the Pillar of Laudation (rukṅ al-thaná’)!

Then indeed it, it is assuredly the Yellow Ornament (al-ṭaráz al-safrá’) in the Snow-White Pillar (rukṅ al-bayḍá’)! [YELLOW+WHITE]

Wherefore indeed it, it is the Ornament of Origination (al-ṭaráz al-badá’) in the Green Pillar (rukn al-khuḍrá’)!

Then [also] it is assuredly the Ornament of Origination (al-ṭaráz al-badá’) in the Soul of the Crimson Pillar (fi nafs al-ḥamrá’)! [GREEN+RED]

Shouldst thou say [RED] Crimson (al-ḥamrá’) then would it be ornamented [coloured as] Yellow through the [effect of the] Snow-White (al-safrá’ bi’l-bayḍá’). And shouldst thou say Green (al-khuḍrá’) it would [indeed] be ornamented [coloured as] Snow-White (al-bayḍá’) through the [effect of] the Crimson (bi’l-ḥamrá’) So Oh! Blessed be this [Reality] for it, it is:

[1] [the power] of eternal reddening (muḥammirat azaliyya); [RED/CRIMSON]

[2] the [power] of perpetual whitening (mubayyiḍat ṣamadiyya), [SNOW-WHITE]

[3] [the] originative greenness (mukhaḍḍirat a[i]badiyya); [GREEN]

[4] and the [power] of heavenly yellowing (muṣaffirat malakútiyya). [YELLOW]

Again, It, it is assuredly the reiteration of the Point in the outstretched [letter] “A” through the pre-existent creative Power. And “no God is there except Him. . . .

Iranian National Bahá’í Archives
Manuscript Collection 69/II:2-3

Tafsír (al-ḥurúf al-) Basmalah

Towards the beginning of His Tafsir *Basmalah* (c. 1845-6?) and also at the end of this detailed commentary on “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate” the influence of the symbolism of the four lights is evident as it is in the course of the Báb’s detailed ‘qabbalistic’, letter by letter commentary. Some 22 pages into this work in one of the mss. (6014C Pt. II) the Báb mentions that God is operative according to a tetradic configuration as “He Who[1] created thee; [2] then gave thee sustenance; [3] then caused thee to expire then [4] brought thee back to life.” (319)

The Báb then continues,

Creation (al-khalq) deriveth from the denizens of the snow-white dome (ahl qubbat al-bayḍá’); *providence* [sustenance] (al-rizq) deriveth from the denizens of the yellow dome (ahl qubbat al-bayḍá’); *life* (la-hayát) deriveth from the denizens of the green dome (ahl qubbat al-khaḍrá’) while *expiration* [death] (al-mamát) cometh from the denizens of the crimson dome (ahl qubbat al-ḥamra).

In the concluding prayer towards the very end of His Tafsir *Basmalah*, the Báb says (371):

Thus She [It] is She [It] (fa-hiya hiya) [which is] [1] Crimson (ḥamrá’), [2] Yellow (ṣafrá’), [3] Green (khaḍrá’) and [4] Snow-white (bayḍá’). They [the Angelic Lights] [do indeed] cry out above their Throne (‘arsh) in praise of their Creator (al-badá’) through

their vocalization of ‘There is no God except Him (lá iláha ilá huwa)! So Praised be God who made the ornament of His authorization the splendour-beauty of Lordship (bahá’ al-rabbániyya).

The gravity of the Deity is here lauded by a tetradic color configuration which is an expression of angelic or archangelic laudation of the oneness of God.

***Tafsír súrat al-aşr* (“Commentary on the Súrah of the Era [Declining Day]”)**

In His detailed sometimes letter by letter (73 letters) commentary upon the 103rd chapter of the Qur’án, the *Tafsír súrat al-aşr* (“Commentary on the Súrah of the the Era [Declining Day] cf. Lawson, 1997), the Báb quite definitely, a number of times exhibits the influence of light mysticism. The letter “N” (*nún*) occurs and is interpreted five times interpreted as *núr* (“light”) (see below, commentary on letters 8+12+15+29+32).

Commentary on the letter *nún*, letter no. 8

Here the “N” is the “Light of God” (*núr Alláh*) “on the level of the essences of the theophanies of the realities of the divine realm . . . (*fí maqám jawhariyyát al-tajilliyyát al-láhútiyya*).” The Báb continues this on the levels of [2] Jabarút, [3] Malakút and [4] Nasút. He also cites Qur’án cites 24:35, the “Light Verse.”

Commentary on the letter *nún*,

letter no. 12 (abjad value = 50)

Interpreting its second occurrence as the 12th letter “N” understood to be indicative of “Light” *Núr*, the Báb gives the letter four light oriented senses.

The twelfth letter [of the Sura 103] is the letter “N” (al-nun) which [signifies]:

[1] *the Pristine Light (al-núr al-baḥt) in the Dawning Place of the Theophany of the [sacred] Presence of the Divine Essence (ṭal’at zuhúr ḥadrat al-dhát);*

[2] *Additionally it is the Designated Light (al-nur al-muta’ayyin) [operating within] the world of [the Divine] Names and Attributes (‘alam al-şifát wa’l asmá’).*

[3] *Additionally it is the Light which pertains to (al-núr al-muta’allaq) the third Pillar of the [Divine] Throne (al-rukhn al-thalith min al-‘arsh) the colour (lawn) of which God made [to be] Yellow (al-aşfar) for it lieth before [opposite] the First Pillar (fí tilqá’ al-rukhn al-awwal) the colour of which is that of the snow white pillar (lawn al-abyaḍ).*

[4] *Then also it is the “Light” which God created in the “Lamp” (al-mişbáḥ) (Cf. Q. 24:35) which radiates the manifestation of the colors of the [Divine] Throne (zuhúr alwán al-‘arsh) from the Yellow coloured (Light) (min lawn al-şufrá) [which] followeth the Snow White (Light) (ba’ad al-bayáḍ) as well as [lit. then] the Green [Light] (al-akhḍá’) which precedeth the Crimson [Red*

Light] (qabl al-aḥmar).

INBMC 69:44 45.

Commenting upon the 15th letter “N” (*al-nún*) in Súrah 103 the Báb says:

The fifteenth letter [of the Sura 103] is the letter “N” [signifieth]:

[1] *the Snow White Light* (*al-núr al-abyaḍ*) by virtue of which is derived the snow whiteness (*abayyaḍ*) of everything Snow White (*kull al-bayaḍ*) in existence (*fi’l imkán*).

[2] *Then again it signifies the Yellow Light* (*al-núr al-aṣfar*) by virtue of which derives the yellowness (*aṣaffarat*) of everything that is Yellow in (*al-ṣufra*) in the [sphere of] *Essential Reality* (*fi’l a’yán*).

[3] *Then also it signifies] the Green Light* (*al-núr al-akhḍar*) by virtue of which derives the greenness (*minhu aṣaffarat*) of everything that lieth in the heavens and upon the earth according to whatsoever the All Merciful intended and sent down in the *Qur’án*.

[4] *It furthermore signifies the Crimson [Red] Light* (*al-núr al-aḥmar*) by virtue of which derives the reddness (*minhu aḥmarrat*) of everything that is Crimson (*al-ḥamra*) from the depth [mystery] [the sphere of] *Existence* (*fi’l imkán*) in the [domain of] *essential Reality* (*fi’l a’yán*).

In commenting upon the 26th letter *lám* the Báb states that this letter L (*lám*) signifies the “the near ones” as assembled groups, apparently understood as “inmates of celestial spheres” then the

“L” signifies a company (*lamam*) whom God made to be situated beneath

the shadow of the Yellow Pillar (*al-rukṅ al-aṣfar*) which is of the [Divine] *Throne* (*min al-‘arsh*). They are a people (*qawm*) in whom is manifest the fruit of the [Divine] “I-ness” (*Identity*) (*thamara al-aniyya*) for the most part among the wayfarers (*al-sálikín*) on the level of the *First Pillar* (*al-rukṅ al-awwal*). And thus is manifest its colour (*lawn*) *Yellow* (*al-ṣafra*).”

Then the Báb adds that the “L” signifies a company (*lamam*) whom God made to be situated beneath the shadow of the *Green Light* (*al-núr al-akhḍar*) which is of the third *Pillar* (*al-rukṅ al-thálich*) of the [Divine] *Throne* (*min al-‘arsh*). The same letter, furthermore, signifies a company (*lamam*) whom God made to be situated beneath the “shadow of the *Crimson [Red] Light* (*al-núr al-ḥamrá’*) which is of the fourth *Pillar* (*al-rukṅ al-rab’ah*) of the [Divine] *Throne* (*min al-‘arsh*).” And on that level, the Báb explains, is evident the creative effects of the *Light of the first Pillar* (*mubáadí núr rukṅ al-awwal*) in their [its] inmost *Reality* (*bi ḥaqíqat*) then [also] the *Pillar of the second Light* through its manifestation [His *theophany*]; then [also] the *Pillar of the third Light* through its grades [His [diverse] *modes*] . . .”

In His commentary on the 32nd letter, *nún*, the Báb continues,

The thirty second letter [of the Sura 103] is the letter “N” (*al-nún*) which signifies:

[1] . . . *The Light of Origination* (al-núr al-ibdá'a) on the level of glorification (fi rutbah al-tasbíḥ)

[2] *Then the Light of Inventiveness* (al-núr al-ikhtirah) on the level of praise (fi rutbah al-tamḥíd);

[3] *Then [also] the Light of Everything* (al-núr al-ashyá') on the level of laudation (fi rutbah al-tahlíl);

[4] *Then [also] the Light of Beauty-Glory* (al-núr al-bahá') on the level of praise (fi rutbah al-takbír)

The lights and the various forms of angelic laudation are here set forth.

Commentary on the letter *nún*, letter no. 32

The thirty second letter [of the Sura 103] is the letter "N" (al-nún) [signifieth] [1] the Light of God (al-núr Alláh) in the Primordial "Niche" (al-mishkat al-awwal) Here we again see the influence of the qur'anic Light verse (Q. 24:35).

Commentary on the letter *nún*, letter no. 55

The fifty fifth letter [of Sura 103] is the letter "A" (al-alif) which signifies [1] the hidden [letter] "A" (al-alif al-ghaybiyya) by virtue of which is derived the [snow-] whiteness (minhu abayyaḍ) of everything snow White (kull al-bayāḍ) in the realm of existence

(fi'l imkán).

In the Commentary on the letter "B" (letter no. 56) color symbolism is again in evidence:

The fifty-sixth letter [of the Sura 103] is the letter "B" (al-alif) [it signifies] [1] the Calamity of God (al-balá' Alláh) for the people of the Crimson Sandhill (kathíb al-aḥmar) . . .

The inmates or people of the *kathíb al-aḥmar*, the red sandhill (crimson hill) are those who seek the divine vision in eschatological times. The calamity may be their inability to envision God.

It is obvious, even from the above highly selected set of examples, that from the very outset of His mission (1844-1850) the Báb was revealing verses that echoed the tradition of the throne and its four lights as uttered by 'Alí and interpreted by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í. As will now be evident Bahá'u'lláh as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá' were also influenced by this tradition of throne and colour mysticism. Only a few examples drawn from the *Lawḥ-i kull al-ta'ám* (The Tablet of all Food) must suffice to illustrate this theme. The citations must largely speak for themselves.

The Influence on Bahá'u'lláh of the hadíth of the Throne of Lights

It should be noted that in the *Lawḥ-i kull al-ta'ám*, the aforementioned colors are associated with the traditional Islamic hierarchy of "worlds":

[1] *Láhút, the Snow-White Light*

It (Q. 3:87) signifieth the realm of the Paradise of Endless Duration, the Throne of the Divine Realm (Láhút), the Snow-White Light. It is the realm of “He is He Himself” and there is none other save Him. This Paradise is allotted unto those servants who are established upon the Seat of Glory, who quaff liquid camphor nigh unto the All-Beauteous One, and who recite the verses of Light in the Heaven of Manifest Justice. Thereby are they enraptured and from that “food” derive comfort.

[2] Jabarút, the Yellow [Golden] Land . . .

It signifieth the Paradise of the Divine Unicity, the Golden [Yellow] Land, the Depths of realm of the Divine Omnipotence (Jabarút). [26] It is the realm of “Thou art He [God] and He [God] is Thou” allotted unto those servants who do not cried out except with the permission of God; who act according to His command and ever restrain themselves in accordance with His wisdom – just as God hath described them [in the Qur’án] for they are the honoured servants of whom it is written: “They speak not till He hath spoken; and they do His bidding” (Q. 21:27).

[3] Malakút, the Green [Verdant] Land . . .

It signifieth the Paradise of Justice, the Verdant [Green] Land, the Fathomless Deep of Kingdom of God (Malakút) allotted to those servants whom “neither traffic nor merchandise beguile from the remembrance of God” (Qur’án

24:27) since they are the companions of the Light. They enter therein with the permission of God and find rest upon the carpet of the Almighty.

[4] Násút, Crimson Land, the Golden Secret, the Snow-White Mystery.

It signifieth the realm of the Paradise of the Divine Bounty, the Crimson Land, the Golden Secret, the Snow-White Mystery and the Point of the human realm (Násút). In it are the proofs of the Remembrance greatest, if you are of those who are informed.

In many of Bahá’u’lláh’s other scriptural Tablets the color schemata and motifs which are sketched below are reinterpreted. The wide-ranging associations and senses that colour and related themes acquired through Shí’í, Shaykhí and Bábí sources again find recondite and often beautiful levels of meaning.

Notes

The above paragraphs are portions of a lengthy monograph which will eventually be separately published.

1. Einstein’s thought was early set in motion by his deep questions about “light.” He wondered, for example, what it would be like to ride on the ‘waves’ of light.
2. That thinkers, philosophers and scientists have grappled with the definition and explanation of “colour” is, for example, indicated in the Haft Vádí or Seven Valleys of Bahá’u’lláh. In the Valley of Tawhíd (the [divine] unity) we at one point read:

In like manner, colors become visible in every object according to the nature of that object. For instance, in a yellow globe, the rays shine yellow; in a white the rays are white; and in a red, the red rays are manifest. Then these variations are from the object, not from the shin-

ing light. And if a place be shut away from the light, as by walls or a roof, it will be entirely bereft of the splendor of the light, nor will the sun shine thereon.

Seven Valleys and Four Valleys, 18f

3. Tafsír al-ḥurúfát al-muqaṭṭa'át (Commentary on the Isolated Letters), from www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/BAHA'-ALLAH/L-hurufat.htm
4. The *Zohar* has many other things to say about the qabbalistic secrets of the word "Light" and also of the genesis of colours, even mentioning a "black light" (refer *Zohar* index).
5. Báb. Tal. Ḥagiga 12b; Bershith 17a, Midrash Rabbah, Gen. VI:6ff (cf. Samuelson, 1994[7]:118f.). The Báb. Talmudr has it that the following words were uttered by the Rabbis on parting from one of their learned associates, "may your eyes be enlightened by the light of the Torah and your face shine like the brightness of the firmament (הַרְקִיעַ) (B. Tal. Berachoth 17a).
6. Contrary to the erroneous critiques of some Islamic anti Shaykhi writers, *húrqa-lyá* is an Ishráqí cosmological term and was not an invention of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsa'í who thought it was a Syriac term used by Sabaeans such as inhabit regions near Basra in Iraq.
7. Suhrawardí's philosophy of illumination was also influential upon the Jewish convert to Islam Ibn Kammúna (d. ca. 1285) who cites the Bible frequently in his *Tanqíḥ al-abḥáthli'l milál al-thaláth* (Perlman, 1971). *Risála fí jawáb ba'di al-ikhwán min Iṣfahán* (Epistle in Reply to some of the Brethren from Isfahan) contained in *Majmú'at al-Rasá'il* 30: 193-215.

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