

Autobiography in the Writings of the Báb

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While much of the sustained research in the writings of the Báb in modern scholarship has focused on his earliest writings¹, the works written between 1844 and 1846 continue to present some of the most serious challenges to analysis and understanding. Aside from the general problems facing a reader of the Báb's famously obscure works, the Báb's earliest writings are rendered particularly difficult by an ever-shifting authorial voice. One must constantly ask in reading these early texts, *who* is the author, *who* is addressing us from the page? The obvious answer of course is, the Báb, Siyyid 'Ali Muḥammad. That this answer doesn't resolve our problem can be best indicated by an example. The following two passages are both drawn from the Báb's writings from this earliest period:

*Verily, We have bestowed revelation upon you [the Báb] just as We bestowed revelation upon Muḥammad and the Messengers before him, with clear signs, that perchance you might be a Proof unto God for the people after the [four] gates ... O people of the earth! Stray not from the bounds of the word of the Remembrance, and speak not concerning Him save by the truth, for the Remembrance has not revealed his verses but by the truth.*²

*I have not claimed a single word of revelation. They say, "He has laid claim to spiritual authority and its trappings." May God kill them for that in which they lie! I have neither made claims to nor spoken a word with regard to anything other than servitude ... The Remnant of God, the Lord of the Age, has, after the four gates, no designated gate and no specific deputy ... Verily, revelation from Thy presence, the like of which was sent down upon Muḥammad, was closed and ended with him.*³

These excerpts are both from the pen of the Báb, though ironically neither is in the authorial voice of "the Báb." The first is from the *Qayyúm al-Asma'*, written in 1844, and the authorial voice is that of God. The second is from the *Du'a-yi alif*, written in 1845, and is in the voice of a pious Shi'i siyyid of Shiraz. The problem that these two texts exemplify is an acute one – the problem of *taqiyya*.

In its most well-known sense, *taqiyya* means the dissimulation of belief for reasons of self-preservation, but it has in Shi'ism a much broader range of meaning. From the many injunctions to practice *taqiyya* found in the recorded sayings of the Imams, it becomes clear that *taqiyya* was not simply a negative obligation not to put oneself in harm's way, but was also a positive duty to conceal secrets. Regarding the nature of these secrets, one scholar of Shi'ism put it this way:

In the corpus of the Imams, certain subjects appear to constitute the main objects of *taqiyya*: information relating to the 'Qur'an of the imams,' the [pious hatred] toward the Companions of the Prophet and in particular toward the first three caliphs, or the identity of the Qa'im ...⁴

Two of the three primary objects of *taqiyya* given in this list have to do with Shi'i messianism – the Qur'an of the Imams and the identity of the Qa'im. *Taqiyya* then was a Shi'i religious obligation, was concerned with the concealment of secrets, and, more importantly, such secrets were often of an eschatological nature.

It is important to understand *taqiyya* in this wider sense and not just as dissimulation or self-preserving denial. When understood as a technique of arcanization, as concealment of secrets, we are able to discern *taqiyya* in the early writings of the Báb as operating at a variety of levels and layers. It is not simply that these earliest writings present two stark extremes of declaration and denial of messianism, as in the passages from the *Qayyúm al-Asma'* and the *Du'a-yi alif* cited above. Rather, there exists in these earliest works a range of revelation and concealment, a spectrum that extends from the open directness of the *Qayyúm al-Asma'*, to the opaque covering of the *Du'a-yi alif*, and includes in between a variety of shades of coding, allusiveness, and encryption of the messianic secret. And, what is perhaps most important for our present-day attempts to understand these texts, this spectrum of *taqiyya* isn't solely involved in claims or denials of a messianic station, but rather extends to the Báb's communication of personal belief and statements of doctrine. For example, the Báb in some texts expresses views of the Imams that He contradicts in other works, or states belief in certain orthodox usuli-Shi'i tenets that He elsewhere completely rejects. It is thus imperative that we make some attempt to crack the Báb's *taqiyya* code, to read between the lines of His esoteric writing, if we are to have any hope of success in understanding what the Báb thought – what, in other words, Bábí doctrine really was.

The three autobiographical works that I will discuss here – the *Khutba al-Jidda*, the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, and the *Khutba dhikriyya* – are

indices of this spectrum, and they provide a window into the chronology of the Báb's practice of *taqiyya* during this period. I refer to the three texts in question as "autobibliographies" for the simple reason that they all share the characteristic of including lists by the Báb of works He had previously written. Autobibliography is a well-established genre in Islamic letters, and has traditionally been employed for a variety of reasons. In the Báb's milieu of 19th-century Shi'ism, autobibliographies were generally written by established scholars and are perhaps best understood as having the combined function of a curriculum vitae and a course syllabus; they indicated the areas of learning that a given scholar had covered or specialized in and, to use the language of the modern academy, provided students with a list of courses that they could seek a degree in.

While one might be tempted to understand the Báb's autobibliographical works against this scholastic background, there are a number of factors that would point to the inadequacy of such a view. For one thing, Shi'i scholars were not generally in the habit of describing their own works as divine revelations. As with the Báb's Qur'an commentaries, the Báb's autobibliographies are radically different from previous works in the genre in that they are bound up with His claims to be the Shi'i messiah. When there is light to be shed on these works from the Shi'i textual tradition, it is to be found not in the curriculum vitae of hadith scholars, but rather in the apocalyptic imaginary, the culturally-shared body of images and ideas associated with the coming of the Promised One. As we go through the three texts, I will highlight the Báb's utilization of this "imaginary of the end" in signaling – sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely – His messianic authorial voice.

The earliest of the three works is the *Khutba al-Jidda*, written during the Báb's return-journey from the pilgrimage during the late-winter or early-spring of 1845. The Báb was in Jidda for only a few days, from February 24th to March 4th, at which point He sailed from Jidda for Bushihr. We know these precise dates because they are given by the Báb Himself in the *Khutba al-Jidda*. Further, since the last date He gives there is March 4th (24th of Safar), this provides a *terminus post quem* for the *Khutba* itself. It seems most likely that it was written aboard ship soon after sailing from Jidda, though Abu'l-Qasim Afnan has noted that in one extant manuscript of the *Khutba* revealed in Jidda, the scribe headed it "*Khutba fi Bushihr* from His Holiness the Báb."⁵ It is indeed possible that the *Khutba al-Jidda* was written in Bushihr – i.e. in mid-May or late-June of 1845 – though the *terminus ante quem* for composition is June 21st, 1845, the date of composition for the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, since the *Khutba al-Jidda* is listed in the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*. I am sceptical of a

later, Bushihr dating of the *Khutba al-Jidda* because of the absence of any mention of the length of the journey by ship, the length of stay at port in Bushihr, or of disembarking at Bushihr, whereas the Báb goes into minute detail throughout the *Khutba al-Jidda* into all of the earlier stages of His pilgrimage journey. If He had already arrived at Bushihr when composing it, why give so much chronological detail about His trip and yet leave off the details regarding these final legs of the journey? Fortunately, Dr. Stephen Lambden is currently working on this text, so I will leave the resolution of these thorny matters to his able hands.⁶

The *Khutba al-Jidda* is a short work, just thirteen pages long in the manuscript collection INBA 91.⁷ It begins with a page and a half of cosmogonic narrative – a style of exordium common to many of the works of the Báb during this period – describing the creation of the cosmos and its metaphysical structure in terms of a set of quaternities standard to Shaykhism and ubiquitous in the Báb's Writings throughout His ministry. The Báb then launches into a brief polemic against Ishraqi philosophical theology, mentioning by name one of the works of Mulla Sadra Shirazi, and stating that the Ishraqis have gone astray in their particular views on the quaternality of being and the status of the names and attributes of God. The Báb then extends His critique to include those 'ulama who have taken a favorable view of Ishraqi thought. There follows a brief transition to the next major section of the text – a detailed recounting of his pilgrimage journey – and here the Báb shifts to a more directly messianic register. Thus, for example, He writes:

*This is the light that hath borne the letter ha` through the land of the innermost heart, and hath gone forth from the bounds of the letter waw through the pen of God's Remembrance, to whom hath been revealed verses in the language of God, the Speaker, as divine proofs, that all people might realize the limitedness of their drink and recognize the true meaning ordained in this pearl-white water.*⁸

The Báb then describes His pilgrimage journey, and the messianic overtones continue strongly throughout this section of the *Khutba*. The action throughout this section is ascribed to God rather than the Báb. Thus, this portion of the *Khutba* begins, "Praise be to God ... who hath dispatched the Word of His servant from the land of his birth ...", and the text continues in this vein for another four and a half pages, naming the points on His journey to and from Mecca and providing the dates of each stage of this journey in extremely indirect language. Towards the end of this itinerary, the Báb writes:

So praised be God, the One, the Self-Subsisting, the Single, the Worshipped, Who hath spoken in praise of His Remembrance and the days of his journey, and hath made mention of the path of his ascent in visitation of the manifestations of His power, Muḥammad and his family, that all might learn the meaning of destiny and the secret thereof through the knowledge of the days of his ascent, and from the knowledge of the days of his journey might proceed to the inner meaning of the Throne and the Footstool, and make that holiest of journeys into the concourse of Names and Attributes, until all people might enter the blessed House of God by the exalted verses sent down in this pearl-white tablet and prostrate themselves at the place of prostration as they did the first time ... So praised be He Who hath ordained in the path of these journeys what He had ordained for all of the Gates aforetime.⁹

This passage clearly states, among other things, that the *Khutba al-Jidda* is a work of divine revelation (*tanzil*), that contemplation of the Báb's doings can provide the reader with various forms of cosmological gnosis, and that the Báb Himself is in some way equivalent to the Gates of the Hidden Imam.

The remainder of the *Khutba* is devoted to a listing of the works of the Báb that were stolen from Him during his journey from Mecca to Medina. More than a dozen individual works appear to be listed, but there is some ambiguity here, since some of what he writes may not be in regards to individual works but rather meant to characterize His writings in general. A number of specific works are named, however, and most of these were listed again in the Báb's *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, written less than four months later. The first item listed – if indeed it is an item *per se* – is rather representative of the list as a whole. The Báb writes:

Among that which was stolen are verses regarding the inner mysteries of the writing that hath been inscribed by the hand of the Remembrance in red ink upon eleven pearl-white leaves, gilded with liquid gold, and lined about in red, concerning the knowledge of two parts of the hidden secret manifest through the greatest secret, the true meaning of the inner mysteries of the Qur'an [batin al-qur'an]. These verses are such as no one aforetime has touched upon, nor shall any hereafter encompass them in knowledge.

One of the most interesting features of this list is that the Báb describes almost every item on the list as being concerned with the

batin al-qur'an, the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an, or even of the *batin at-ta'wil*, the inner meaning of the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an. His language of "secrets" and "concealed secrets" makes constant allusion to a saying ascribed to the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, which says, in a form quoted by the Báb in His first commentary on the letter *ha'*: "Our cause is a secret, a secret concealed by a secret, a secret veiled within a secret, a secret that cannot be known save by means of a secret."¹⁰

If we return to our original problem, the problem of *taqiyya*, we might ask how much does this *Khutba* reveal and how much does it conceal? This text is a far cry from the "verily, verily, I am God" of the Báb's latest works, but on the other hand there is nothing here in the way of outright dissimulation. The Báb here openly describes His works as revelation and compares Himself to the Gates of the Imam, but the real messianic punch of this *Khutba* is communicated only between the lines, in an esoteric manner, and is necessarily selective in the readership to whom it will reveal its secret. That ideal readership is the Shaykhi community, in whose language the Báb expresses Himself throughout this text, and in terms of whose apocalyptic imaginary the Báb encodes his messianic declaration.

As I said before, the Báb opens this work with a cosmogonic narrative that is markedly Shaykhi in its terminology and symbolism, discussing cosmic reality in terms of a symbolic system of quaternities that was first codified, as it were, in the writings of Shaykh Ahmad. It then proceeds to a polemic against Ishraqi philosophy, mentioning by name the *Kitáb al-Masha'ir* by Mulla Sadra, a book against which Shaykh Ahmad penned a gigantic, refutation-style "commentary." At the end of that polemic, after remarking that most of the 'ulama have sided with the Ishraqis, the Báb mentions that this state of affairs had continued up until His own time, when suddenly there had dawned the twin lights of the luminescent sun and moon – a reference, I believe, to Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim. The Báb then writes:

People of late carried out a campaign of lies against those two luminaries in contradiction to what is encompassed in the knowledge of the Creator, just as the people of old had calumniated against the Friends of God [the Imams], without certain knowledge and having no clear book. Thus it went until the letter Kaf returned (raja'a) to the place [of the appearance] of the Cause, in the region of God's command, and the cycles of time came full circle to the Day of God, in a new and wondrous mode, and the lights that had been an inaccessible mystery dawned forth with knowledge of the divine cloud of unknowing, and the Siniatic Tree was made to speak forth upon the ocean of

*praise, and the word of glorification was made manifest upon the crimson earth.*¹¹

One would have to have been an avid reader of Siyyid Kazim to be able to decode this messianic declaration, for in writing here of the return of the letter Kaf, the Báb is alluding to a prophecy made in Kazim's *Sharh al-Qasida* that the name of the Qa'im will be numerically equal to double the value of the letter kaf when pronounced. The abjad value of the pronounced kaf, or *kaf, alif, fa*, is 101, so the doubled value is 202. The abjad value of 'Ali Muḥammad is – 202. The Báb also refers to Himself elsewhere as this letter Kaf, and Tahiriḥ would later point out that this specific prophecy of Siyyid Kazim was fulfilled by the Báb.¹²

The list of the stolen works at the end of the *Khutba al-Jidda* provides a similar instance of this encoding of the Báb's messianic declaration in language that would likely only be decipherable to Shaykhi initiates. In terms very similar to earlier Isma'ilism, the Shaykhis had developed an elaborate theory of the cycles of spiritual history that centered on a notion of a dialectic between the *zahir* and the *batin*, the manifest and the hidden. According to this cyclical theory, Muḥammad and the Qur'an initiated a cycle of the *zahir*, the outward, and so during Muḥammad's prophetic cycle the *zahir* of the Qur'an was in force. According to all of the Shaykhi writers, including the anti-Bábí Karim Khan Kirmani, the cycle of the *batin* began in the year 1200, and would witness the coming of the Qa'im, who would initiate a spiritual cycle under the sign of the *batin al-qur'an*.¹³ As I noted above, the Báb refers to nearly all of the works in the list given at the end of the *Khutba al-Jidda* as being verses of the *batin al-qur'an*. Also, He begins the recounting of His pilgrimage itinerary by dating it as "the year *after* the year 1200," without further specifying the date. Taken together with the earlier reference to the cycles of time having come full circle, and in the hands of an attentive Shaykhi reader, these references to the revelation of the *batin al-qur'an* in the thirteenth century would signal the Báb's claims to be the messiah. The Báb, then, has hidden the secret in plain sight, visible only to those who know what they're looking at.

I move now to the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, a work clearly dated to the 15th of Jumadi ath-thani, 1261, or June 21st, 1845. This work is extremely valuable in that it provides lengthy lists of works that the Báb had produced up to that time, including dozens of books, commentaries, letters, khutbas, and prayers. Like the *Khutba al-Jidda*, it also encodes the Báb's messianic claims, though the Báb in this text approaches the balancing act of revelation and concealment with altogether different methods. It is not markedly Shaykhi in its language or symbolism, but appears to assume a wider audience. It

evokes the Qur'an at the beginning by opening with a series of disconnected Arabic letters. The Báb had earlier affixed disconnected letters to the surahs of the *Qayyúm al-Asma'* and the *Kitáb ar-Ruh*, the two most explicitly messianic texts written by the Báb during the earliest period of his ministry.

In contrast to the *Khutba al-Jidda*, where the Báb describes His works as verses sent down by God, at the beginning of the *Kitáb al-Fihrist* the Báb states that it was sent down from the *Baqiyyat Allah*, the Remnant of God, a title given to the Hidden Imam. The Báb states that He is Himself a servant of the Remnant of God, and He then proceeds to testify to His belief in Muḥammad, the twelve Imams, Fatima, and the four Gates of the twelfth Imam. He then proceeds for several pages to describe His writings as verses sent down to Him from the Remnant of God, refers to Himself consistently as a servant of God and the Remnant of God, though all the while indicating that His own works technically constitute revelation, writing, for example, that “the reading of these verses in these, the days of God, is more excellent than all the deeds recorded in the Book of God.” He states that His revealed works will endure until the day of Resurrection, which to a Shaykhi audience meant until the arising of the Qa'im. In any case, the whole of this introduction serves to simultaneously reveal and conceal the Báb's claims. He clearly is claiming to be capable of producing inspired verses, but by saying that these verses are sent down from the Hidden Imam He is distancing himself from any identification with that Messianic figure, even implying that He is waiting, just like all other orthodox Shi'a, the Messiah's *future* appearance.

At this point in the text, the Báb takes a most fascinating approach to concealing His revealed secret. He cites a handful of lengthy traditions, all of which, in one way or another, indicate the possibility for post-Qur'anic revelation. I provide below a translation of this lengthy section of the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*:

Verily, all that has been revealed by the hand of the Remembrance will remain in force until the Day of Resurrection, and the decree of God will suffer no alteration – unto Him do all return! Say: I, verily, have laid claim to no Cause other than that whose reality has been revealed in the tradition [al-hadith]. Would that you might read these traditions, that haply you would be of those who have attained certitude in the verses of God!

God said (exalted be He), in a sacred tradition: My servant ceases not from drawing nigh unto me through supererogatory acts of worship until I love him, and when I love Him I become the ear with which he hears, the vision

by which he sees, the tongue wherewith he speaks, and the hand by which he strikes. If he beseeches Me, I will answer his prayer, and if he asks of Me, I will grant him his request. Even if he holds his peace, I will then take the initiative [and answer his unspoken prayer].

He [an Imam] (upon him be peace) said: One who loves us and only grows in his love for us, who devotes himself to our knowledge and asks about certain matters from us and not others –the heart of such a one we inspire with the answers to those matters about which he asked.

In al-Kafi¹⁴ [it is related that] a Christian monk asked about certain things from Musa ibn Ja'far (upon him and his father be peace), saying: "Teach me about the eight letters that were revealed, four of which were made known on earth and four of which remained in heaven. To whom were these latter four revealed, and who will interpret their meaning?" Musa replied, "The one about whom you ask is none other than he who will arise from among us [qa'imunaa]. God will reveal these unto him and he will interpret their meaning. God will reveal to him what has not been revealed to any of the truthful ones, the messengers, nor the rightly-guided." Then the monk said, "Teach me about two of the four letters that were made known in this world. What are they?" Musa replied, "I will tell you about all four of them. The first of them is 'there is no god but God, His unity eternally without peer.' The second of them is 'Muḥammad is the Righteous Messenger of God (the blessings of God and His peace be upon him and his family).' The third is 'We are the People of the Household.' The fourth is 'Our partisans (shi'a) are from Us, and We are from the Messenger of God (the blessings of God be upon him and his family), and the Messenger of God (blessings) is from God (but by way of intermediate causes).'"

In al-Kafi [it is related] from Abi 'Abd Allah (upon whom be peace), who said: Verily, God, exalted and glorified is He, created a name with letters that are unutterable, with a pronunciation that cannot be voiced, with an individuality that is not corporeal, of a likeness that cannot be described, and with color that has no hue. It transcends measurement and delimitation, and is veiled from the senses of all possessors of sense. It is hidden without being concealed. He made it to be a word perfected by the joining of four parts, yet not one letter thereof comes before any of the others. He manifested from it three names, since creation

depended on these latter names. He veiled one of them, and that is the hidden, treasured name. The outer form of these names that have been manifested is "God," "Blessed" and "Exalted." And He, praised be He, gave to the service of each of these names four pillars, making twelve pillars in all. Then for each pillar He created thirty names, names which are related to them.

The Merciful, the Compassionate, the King, the Holy One, the Creator, the Fashioner, the Former, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Whom neither weariness nor sleep overtake, the Knower, the All-Informed, the Hearing, the Perceiving, the Wise, the Almighty, the All-Compelling, the Most Great, the Exalted, the Mighty, the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent ... [lists 35 names in all, with one repeat] These names and the names that (make up) the Most Beautiful Names comprise three hundred and sixty names and are related to these three names. These three names are pillars and He concealed the single, hidden, treasured name by these three names, even as He, exalted is He, says: "Say: Call upon God or call upon the Merciful. By whatsoever name you call Him, His are the Most Beautiful Names." (Q 17:110)

Those who claim, however, to have met the Proof of God, such as they are none but liars! Say: this, My Path, is the like of what has been set forth in the above traditions, and my inner heart lied not about what it saw... (cf. Q 53:12).¹⁵

The Báb prefaces this brief compilation of traditions, as you can see, by saying that He has claimed no Cause other than in accordance with these traditions. The first two traditions describe modes of extra-Qur'anic revelation or inspiration, the third alludes to secrets that the Qa'im will reveal, and the last describes the hidden name of God, the revelation of which is frequently associated in Shi'i apocalyptic literature with the messiah. Nowhere in this text, then, does the Báb state that He is the Qa'im, but He leaves wide open for the reader the option of drawing that conclusion. Once again, He's hidden the messianic secret in plain sight.

The last text to be considered, written in January of 1846, is the Báb's *Khutba dhikriyya*, a text about which there has been considerable confusion among Western scholars with regard to its title, though there isn't space here to go into those perplexities.¹⁶ The Báb begins the work with a very brief cosmogonic exordium, and then proceeds to a lengthy creedal statement. He first affirms the unity and absolute unknowability of God, and then goes through a series of doxological statements, testifying to His belief in

Muḥammad, the Imams, Fatima, and so forth. The Báb refers to the coming of the Qa'im in the future tense, certainly giving no indication here of His identification with that figure. He states that He believes in the standard dogmas of the Shi'i faith in a perfectly orthodox manner – “just as the people have believed concerning it,” as He says. We know from other works of the Báb that He did *not*, in fact, believe in these dogmas “just as the people did,” and much of the first *wahid* of the Persian Bayán is devoted to spelling out the Báb's radical interpretations of things like resurrection and so forth.

In contrast with the *Khutba al-Jidda* and the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, there is really nothing in the way of a direct indication of the Báb's claims in this text. The only hint to these claims is given in the list of works at the end, and here again the Báb draws from the symbolism of the apocalyptic imaginary to communicate this allusion. The Báb writes:

*I testify that everything set forth in this book is the truth, by the grace of God, the Exalted, though many of mankind are of the ungrateful. Indeed, there is delineated in this book all that went forth from my hands from the year 1260 unto the middle of the [first?] month of the year 1262. These consist of four perfect books and ten masterful epistles, each one of which is a sufficient proof for leading all who dwell in the heavens and on earth unto a station of servitude. Thus I now mention their names by the names of the members of the Family of God, who are their revealers, that these texts may be canonical within the realm of exposition and honored with divine titles in the domain of conclusive proof.*¹⁷

Following this, the Báb lists fourteen works – the number of the Shi'i Holy Family – and renames each work after a member of this family. That the purpose of this list is primarily symbolic is indicated towards the end. The eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth works do not correspond to any actual works of the Báb, and serve here to fill out the list and underscore the repetition of the sacred number.

In comparison with the other two texts that I have discussed, the *Khutba dhikriyya* is the most obvious in its practice of *taqiyya*. It conceals much more than it reveals, but it *does* reveal something. For one thing, like the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, it serves as an index to *other* works of the Báb, works in which He is quite explicit about his claims. But more importantly there is the symbolic nature of the list itself, and the renaming of His works here as the 'Alid Book, the *suhuf* of the Imams and so forth. One of the central elements of Shi'i apocalypticism is the belief that the Hidden Imam is in possession of secret books and *suhuf*. According to these traditions,

Muḥammad was given *suhuf* containing the true revelations that had been sent down to all of the previous prophets, and He passed these on to the succession of the Imams. Among them was the *Sahifat Adam*, the *suhuf Ibrahim wa Musa*, etc. There is also the *Kitáb ‘Ali*, said to contain a detailed list of all possible rulings of Islamic law, which when revealed would obviate the need for all disputation and legal interpretation in determining the rules of the Shar’iah. Descriptions of these messianic *kutub* and *suhuf* are scattered across dozens of traditions, and in many of them number symbolism has a prominent role. That the Báb considered His own writings in relation to these hidden books is made plain by more or less direct references to them in the *Qayyúm al-Asma’*.¹⁸ Beliefs regarding these books were even drawn upon by Bahá’u’lláh in communicating His own claims, inasmuch as the Hidden Words were originally given out as the *mushaf fatima*, one of the hidden books in the possession of the Hidden Imam.

In looking at these three works of the Báb, we have seen that the practice of *taqiyya* in this early period meant more than simply directly denying messianic claims, and was more often a technique of esoteric communication. Given the right readership, with initiation or familiarity with the right body of apocalyptic lore, the Báb was able in these works to simultaneously reveal and conceal His messianic claims, to set forth, in the words of Ja’far al-Sadiq, “a secret concealed by a secret, a secret veiled within a secret, a secret that cannot be known save by means of a secret.”

Appendix

A Provision Translation of the Khutba Dhikriyya

Translated by J. Vahid Brown from a typescript of a single ms. with handwritten corrections by Nader Saiedi

Khutba Dhikriyya¹⁹

The sixth epistle²⁰ of sermons²¹, consisting of fourteen sermons: first sermon.

I have revealed this sermon regarding all that hath been inscribed in this book,²² that all might thereby be of those who bear witness.

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

Praise be to God Who hath created the water by the mystery of construction²³, hath established the throne upon the water²⁴ by the modality of execution²⁵, hath sent down the verses from the world of the divine cloud by the flowing of decree²⁶, hath set forth what He determined on Mount Sinai by the power of praise, and accomplished in glory²⁷ whatsoever He determined by the deliquescence²⁸ of necessity.²⁹ So glorified and exalted be He Who hath sent forth the messengers – givers of glad tidings and warners – that none may worship aught but Him. He hath given into their hands a rank of His own power such as all else but He must fail to attain, that they might establish the truth through His words and frustrate falsehood by His verses, that haply these verses might be a proof leading unto a station of wisdom for any who take cognizance thereof, and thus may all be of those who submit unto Him.

So glorified and exalted be He, Who hath made between He and His messengers a rank of glory in utterance – the supreme grace in the world of creation – and hath honored thereby some of the messengers above others, as hath been sent down in the revelation³⁰ by the decree of God, the All-Glorious. Indeed, God hath not spoken to mankind except by prophetic inspiration³¹, or from beyond a veil, or by sending inspired messengers by His permission and according to His will. Verily, He is exalted, wise. He hath established in His utterance a mode of power the like of which He hath not granted unto the utterance of His servants. Verily, He is living, almighty, and sends down

unto whomsoever He wills whatsoever He wills of His verses. Glorified and exalted be He above what is attributed to Him.

I testify unto God in this book according to what God hath testified of Himself, by Himself, without any need of the testimony of the foremost in knowledge among His servants, that verily there is no God save Him, Who hath existed from everlasting without the mention of any thing, and is now the Existing One as He hath ever been, with nothing with him. Immeasurably exalted is His Essence above the depiction of the realm of construction and its inhabitants. Supremely magnified is His Self above the description of the realm of origination³² and whatever is like unto it, glorified be He!

The realm of origination is cut off from His existential reality, as is the realm of fashioning³³ from His inner identity. Whoever says, "He is He" hath truly lost Him, for none may find Him other than He Himself, and He hath no attribute other than His Essence, no name other than His glory.³⁴ And whoever declares His unity hath indeed denied Him, for nothing recognizes Him and no servant comprehends Him. The world of names is cut off from the world of the divine cloud by [the interposition of] His realm of omnipotence, and the world of attributes is inaccessibly removed from the imaginal world by [the interposition of] His sovereign Kingdom.³⁵ He hath from time immemorial been the Lord, with none as objects of His Lordship, the Knower without objects of knowledge, the Almighty without objects of His might, the Creator without any creatures, and He is now as He hath ever been.³⁶ There is for Him no name, no description, no depiction, and no designation. All things are entirely cut off from His Essence, as are all entirely severed from His existential reality. He cannot be mentioned in terms of separation, nor can He be spoken of in terms of union. Whoever says "He is the True One" depends in this matter [of so designating Him] upon the creation. And whoever says "He is the Just," nevertheless fails to give His justice any description, glorified and exalted be He. The act of origination³⁷ hath been brought into being by means of the act of construction itself, without a touch of the fire of God's Essence. The Will was fashioned by the act of origination, without any division of God's own Self. Verily, the originated is barred from recognizing the act of origination, while the fashioned realm is severed from His

love by its mere fashioned station. Glorified and exalted be He, for whom no praise can be mentioned – not by negation, nor assertion, nor praise, nor signs, nor glory, nor indications, nor by mention of [the letter] há', nor by flight from wáw, nor arising between the two affairs, nor by the letter lá' ³⁸. Glorified and exalted be He above what is attributed to Him.

I testify unto Muḥammad (blessings ...) according to what God Himself hath testified concerning him, wherein none have knowledge save Him. He hath fashioned him for the magnification of His Essence, hath chosen him for the holiness of his honor, and hath made him, among his people, unique in beauty, that he be established upon the station of “no vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision. He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving.” I testify that Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Alláh is His messenger, who hath transmitted that which he bore of God’s cause and held fast with his own hands to carrying out the Divine Decree, glorified and exalted be He. God hath warned you all lest anyone speak concerning him other than what God hath Himself determined for him. Glorified and exalted be He above what is associated with Him.

I testify that the vicegerents of Muḥammad – the blessings of God be upon him and his family – are twelve souls [inscribed] in the Book of God on that day when no letter save them had been created, just as God hath testified of them in the grandeur of His omnipotent realm, the holiness of the world of His divinity, the magnificence of the expanse His majesty, and the loftiness of the kingdom His everlasting bounty, of which none has knowledge save Him. I bear witness that they have transmitted what they bore from the bequest of the messenger of God – the blessings of God be upon him and his family – and that they are truly the triumphant, with whom it shall be well. I testify that he who will arise from among them³⁹ – the salutations of God be upon him – is alive, that by him God hath raised up all things, that to him God will extend all things, and that by him He will unite all things. I testify that his return is the truth, as is the return of all [of the vicegerents]. Verily, God will give new life to the earth by his manifestation, and he will utterly confound the works of those who join partners with God.

I testify that Fátima, the daughter of the messenger of God – the blessings of God be upon him and his family – is a blessed leaf from the snow-white tree of “No god is

there but God,” glorified and exalted be He above what is associated with Him.

I testify unto the truth of all things unto which God hath testified in His hidden knowledge, and in the same manner do I testify unto the falsity of falsehood. Verily, I am a servant of God, a believer in Him, His verses, and His book, the Discrimination⁴⁰ – the like of which there hath never been – and in the love of all that which is most beloved of Him and the rejection of all that which is most despised by Him. Sufficient as a witness is God, the Exalted. I testify unto [the reality of] death, and of the questioning [in the grave], and of the resurrection, and of the reckoning, and of the raising of the bodies of the dead, and unto whatever God hath established, beyond these, in His knowledge, just as the people have believed concerning it.

I testify that everything set forth in this book is the truth, by the grace of God, the Exalted, though many of mankind are of the ungrateful. Indeed, there is delineated in this book all that went forth from my hands from the year 1260 unto the middle of the [first?] month of the year 1262. These consist of four perfect books and ten masterful epistles, each one of which is a sufficient proof for leading all who dwell in the heavens and on earth unto a station of servitude. Thus I now mention their names by the names of the members of the Family of God, who are their revealers, that these texts may be canonical within the realm of exposition and honored with divine titles in the domain of conclusive proof.

First is the Aḥmadian Book, in elucidation of the first thirtieth of the Qur’án and in commentary on the Surah of Praise.⁴¹

Second is the ‘Alawian Book, divided into seven hundred perfect surahs, each of which is of seven verses.⁴²

Third is the Ḥasanian Book, divided into fifty books of irresistible verses.

Fourth is the Ḥusaynian Book, in elucidation of the Surah of Joseph – upon whom be peace – arranged in one hundred and eleven surahs of forty-two verses, each one of which is a sufficient proof unto whomsoever is on the earth and whatsoever is beneath the throne, should it not suffer any alteration. Sufficient is God as a witness.⁴³

Fifth is the Fáṭimid Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters on the acts [of worship related to] the twelve months in the Book of God.⁴⁴

Sixth is the ‘Alawian Epistle, comprising fourteen prayers in answer to ninety-two questions, composed during the month of fasting, after my return from the pilgrimage.

Seventh is the Báqirian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in commentary on the letters of the “bismallah.”⁴⁵

Eighth is the Ja’farian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in elucidation of [Ja’far’s] prayer – upon him be peace – for the days of the Occultation.⁴⁶

Ninth is the Músawian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to two souls from among the servants of God, provided [in answer to them] in the land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries.⁴⁷

Tenth is the Riḍáwian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters concerning the recitation of fourteen sermons – which are the very height of eloquence – from the tree of the laudation, “No god is there save Him, the All-Glorious, the Beneficent.”⁴⁸

Eleventh is the Jawáidian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to fourteen questions concerning the realm of Divinity [lahut].

Twelfth is the Háḍian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to fourteen questions concerning the Dominion of Power [jabarut].

Thirteenth is the ‘Askarian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to fourteen questions concerning the Kingdom [malakut].

Fourteenth is the Hujjatian Epistle, comprised of fourteen holy prayers which were revealed at the beginning of this Cause and are related to the Imam of Justice.⁴⁹

All fourteen of these holy texts are present in this book, along with – at the end of the text – that illustrious epistle regarding the fourteen books of the Imáms.⁵⁰ All of these are inscribed in this book. Regarding that which went forth from my hand and was stolen while [I was] on the path of pilgrimage, a detailed account thereof hath been made in the Riḍáwian Epistle. It is incumbent upon whomsoever may find any of those [stolen texts] to carefully preserve them. Happy is he who preserves all that hath been sent

down from my presence in exquisite tablets with the finest of handwriting. And [I testify] by Him who hath honored me with His verses that a single letter thereof is more glorious in My sight than the kingdoms of this world and the next – may God forgive me for such a comparison.

And glorified be God, Lord of the Worlds, above what they attribute to Him. And peace be upon His messengers, and praise be to God, the Lord of all the Worlds.

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NOTES

¹ For instance, the three major dissertations on the Báb's writings – by MacEoin, Lawson, and Eschraghi – all focus on the Báb's early writings.

² Qayyúm al-Asma', sura 61, pp. 244f in ms. dated 1323. All translations are provisional and my own unless otherwise noted.

³ Du'a-yi alif, from Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar*, 1:179-82.

⁴ Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, p. 129.

⁵ A.-Q. Afnan, '*Ahd-i A'la*', p. 474n. 18.

⁶ For now, see Dr. Lambden's introduction and partial translation of the *khutba* online at: <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/03-THE%20BAB/post%201844/kh-jidda.htm> (cited 20 December 2004).

⁷ INBA stands for Iranian National Bahá'í Archives, a series of just over a hundred book-length collections of manuscripts that were photoreproduced and distributed in an extremely limited fashion during the latter half of the twentieth century, partly to avoid the irrevocable loss of this material at the hands of Iranian authorities committed to the complete destruction of the Bahá'í community. Some authors (e.g. D. MacEoin, S. Lambden), refer to these volumes with the acronym INBMC, and reserve INBA as an acronym preceding individually-numbered mss. once housed in the Iranian Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly's archives, a discrete collection which no longer exists due to the destruction of Bahá'í institutions and the murder of the entire membership of the National Spiritual Assembly following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. See http://bahai-library.com/?file=rabbani_inba_index.

⁸ INBA 91, p. 65. The symbolism in this passage is bound up with the Báb's quaternities: *ha'*, innermost heart, verses, and the color white are the highest terms in their respective quaternities, and all are related to divinity.

⁹ INBA 91, pp. 68f.

¹⁰ *amrunaa huwa al-sirr wa mustasirr bi'l-sirr wa sirr muqanna' bi'l-sirr wa sirr la yufiidahu ila 'l-sirr*, cited by the Báb in INBA 67, p. 23. This tradition is often quoted by Shaykh Ahmad and frequently alluded to by the Bab. There are several variants of this tradition; see, for example, those given in Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, p. 231n. 687.

¹¹ INBA 91, pp. 64f.

¹² See Vahid Rafati, *Development*, pp. 181f., and Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 3 pp. 402 and 509.

¹³ See MacEoin, *From Shaykhism*, p. 213.

¹⁴ The famous early collection of Imami traditions, *Usul al-Kafi*, compiled by Kulayni

¹⁵ For the texts of the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, a number of mss. were consulted, though my translation of these passages is based primarily

upon the Princeton MS. (Bábi Collection of William McElwee Miller, vol. 4, ff. 1a-6a.

¹⁶ For a summary of the issue up to the period of MacEoin's bibliographic labors, see Appendix Four in his *Sources*, p. 207. MacEoin's conclusions there are incorrect; the text in fact is the *khutba dhikriyya*, and has no relationship whatsoever with the *Risala-yi dhahabiyya*, other than the fact that Nicolas mistakenly referred to this text by that name.

¹⁷ Translated from a typewritten copy of a single ms., with handwritten corrections by Nader Saiedi, whom I thank here for kindly sharing the typescript and his corrections with me.

¹⁸ MacEoin writes (*From Shaykhism*, p. 159):

The Qayyúm al-Asma' may be said to combine something of the character of the tawqí'at written by the hidden Imam through his intermediaries, the four abwáb, of the various books reputed to be in possession of the Imams — the mushaf of Fatima, Al-sahifa, Al-jami'a, Al-jabr, the complete Qur'an, and the previous scriptures — and of the Qur'an itself.

¹⁹ See Browne, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 68, where he calls this the *Sahifa-i-Ridawiyya*. For a full discussion of the various confusions regarding this tablet and its title, see MacEoin, *Sources for Early Bábi Doctrine and History*, p. 207. I do not agree with MacEoin that this work should be titled "Risala-yi dhahabiyya," but this issue cannot be dealt with here. See also A.Q. Afnan, *Ahd-i 'Ala*, pp. 437f. and 473f. n. 2.

²⁰ Here and throughout this text, "epistle" translates *sahífiḥ*.

²¹ "Sermon" renders *khutbih*.

²² Here and throughout this text, the Báb refers to the *Sahífiḥ al-Ridáwiyyih* as *dhálik al-kitáb*, or literally "that book." Since this text is itself one of the sections of that *Sahífiḥ*, this phrase will be rendered here as "this book."

²³ *sirr al-inshá'*

²⁴ Cf. Qur'an 11:7: "And it is He Who hath created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was upon the waters."

See also GWB 46:

Thus have We established for thee, through the waters [má'] of Our wisdom and utterance [hikmati l-bayán], the foundations of thy belief. This, verily, is the water whereon the Throne of thy Lord hath been raised. 'His Throne had stood upon the waters.' [Q 11:7] Ponder this in thine heart, that thou mayest comprehend its meaning.

In the Báb's *Ziyára jámi'a kabíra*, He says of the Imáms:

I swear by my father and mother, and by whatsoever is in the knowledge of my Lord, that the heavens were raised not by pillars but by your name[s]; that the Throne was set upon the waters by your command [istaqara al-'arsha 'ala l-má'i bi-amrikum]; and that

káf was joined to nún for the mention of your afflictions.
(INBA50, p. 55f.)

²⁵ *al-imḍá`*

²⁶ *al-qaḍá`*

²⁷ *bahá`*

²⁸ *dhawaban*. This term appears to belong to the nomenclature of alchemy. For example, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i uses the term in this sense in *Jawahir al-Kalam*, vol. 2, p. 258.

²⁹ Compare this passage with the *Tafsír súrat al-hamd*, INBA69, p. 123.

No thing will ever know Him and no thing will ever be united with Him inasmuch as the mention of the thing (ḍhikr ash-shay`) is made to exist (kuwwina) by means of the Will (mashíya), and the mention of existence (ḍhikr al-kawn) is made to have an essence (ḍhuwwita) by means of Purpose (iráda), and the mention of the essence (ḍhikr adh-dhát) is delimited (huddida) by means of Determination (qadar), and the mode of Determination is realized (huqqiqa) by means of Decree (qaḍá`), and the alteration (badá`) of the Decree is fixed (yuthbat) after the [stage of] Execution (imḍá`). Therefore, the station of the secret of construction (sirr al-inshá`) and the exaltation of its status in itself is by means of the manifestation of Mt. Sinai in the crimson pillar.

Also relevant to this passage is the Báb's letter in answer to questions about alteration of the divine will (*badá`*) and the Preserved Tablet (*lawh al-mahfúz*) in INBA67, pp. 172-76.

³⁰ I.e., the Qur'an.

³¹ *wahí*

³² *ibdá`*

³³ *ikhtirá`*

³⁴ *bahá`*

³⁵ There appears to be a hierarchy implied in this sentence: the '*alam al-'amá* is above *jabarút*, while the '*alam al-amthál* is above *malakút*. I have inserted the clarifying phrases in brackets in line with this reading of the passage.

³⁶ Here the previous sentence is repeated, with *al-ka'in* replacing *rabb*: "He is the Existent with none as objects of His Lordship, the Knower without objects of knowledge, the Almighty without objects of His might, the Creator without any creatures." I am surmising that this repetition is due to a scribal error.

³⁷ Alternatively, the world of origination; only the word *al-ibda`* is used, but this is often used by the Báb as a designation for a level of a distinctive four-fold cosmological hierarchy. Likewise, the term is used by the Báb to designate four levels of creative *activity* that are proper to the generation of four different levels of cosmic reality.

³⁸ The allusions here are many and baroque, but on one level these references to letters can be understood to imply that God is exalted

above being truly qualified by affirmation (*huwa*, written in Arabic with the letters *ha`* and *waw*) nor by negation (*la`*, “no”).

³⁹ The *Qá'im*, the awaited Twelfth Imám.

⁴⁰ *al-Furqán*, a synonym for the Qur'án.

⁴¹ This is Báb's *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara*.

⁴² This refers to *Kitáb al-Ruh*.

⁴³ This refers to the *Qayyúm al-Asma`*.

⁴⁴ This refers to the *Sahifa a'mal al-sana*.

⁴⁵ This refers to the Báb's *Tafsir al-basmala*.

⁴⁶ This refers to the *Sharh Du'a al-Ghayba*.

⁴⁷ The *Sahifa bayn al-Haramayn* is most likely intended here.

⁴⁸ On the basis of the statement later in this *khutba* to the effect that the Ridawian Epistle (*Sahifa Ridawiyya*) contains details about the works which were stolen from the Báb during his pilgrimage, MacEoin was of the opinion that this is none other than the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*. If that were the sole criterion, however, it is equally likely that this refers to the *Khutba al-Jidda*. Neither of these works is divided into fourteen sections.

⁴⁹ The *Sahifa Makhzuna* is probably intended here.

⁵⁰ The text here has *awliya il-'ubád*, which could be translated “the Guardians of the worshipers.”