

The Claims of the Báb

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- It is well understood that the greatest proof of any Manifestation of God is His Person.
- Beyond His peerless Self, it is His Writings.
- In the case of the Báb, He revealed well over 500,000 verses of His Writings (Persian *Bayán* 6:11)

- Many of His Writings spread very quickly to all parts of Iran and Iraq, as well as to some European countries and Russia.
- In the *Bayán* (2:1), He states that “*one hundred thousand verses have been spread abroad among people,*” not including the treatises and prayers, nor His scientific and philosophical Works.

- A small sampling was made available in 1976 under the title of:

***Selections from the
Writings of the Báb***

- This is an anthology of some 200 pages consisting of passages from such major works as the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, the Persian *Bayán*, the *Dalá'il Sab'ih*, the *Kitáb Asmá'*, and other works.

- **The Nature of the Báb's Claims**
- From the very dawn of His momentous declaration, the Báb put forward a claim to:
 - be the latest independent Manifestation of God appearing to humanity at this time
 - being directly empowered by God to open a new religious dispensation after Islam
 - reveal new scriptures
 - ordain a new administrative and judicial system

- In addition, He made it clear that He was the return of the Hidden Imam in His messianic persona as the Imam Mahdí.
- The Báb's claim to be an independent Manifestation of God as well as to be the promised Mahdí (or Qá'im) are easily seen to be already expressed in His initial Work, the *Qayyúmu'l-Asma'*, written in 1844.

- In this Work, the Báb refers to Himself and to His Rank using terms which were understood and accepted by His Islamic audience as being applicable only to an independent Manifestation of God.
- The following is a sampling gleaned from the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*:

- the Proof
- Remembrance
- Remembrance of God
- Greatest Remembrance
- the Gate of God
- the Point
- the Word
- the Mighty Word
- Qá'im of the (year) One Thousand
- Cupbearer at God's Bidding
- the Blessed Tree in Siná
- the Greatest Hour
- the Resurrection
- the Promised One
- One Who Warns

- That the nature of the Báb's claim is comprehended by anyone reading *Qayyumu'l-Asmá'* is illustrated by an incident shortly following the Báb's initial declaration of His mission in May 1844.
- In order to understand the full significance of this incident, it will be necessary to summarize briefly some of the basic facts and events connected with the birth of the Bábí Faith.

- **Islamic Background**
- After the death of Muhammad (632 A.D.), there followed a succession of Imams or leaders, the first being 'Alí, the son-in-law of Muhammad.
- The legitimacy and spiritual authority of the Imams is recognized by Shi'ih Islam, but not by the Sunni branch.

- Traditional Shi'ih belief holds that the twelfth and last Imam appeared in the Tenth Century and that he did not die but rather is hidden and will appear, at the appropriate moment, to fill the world with justice.
- This apocalyptic event is designated as the appearance of the Imam Mahdí, the Qá'im, the Promised One of Shi'ih Islam.

- In late 18th Century Iraq and Iran, there began a reform movement within Twelver Shi'ih Islam known as Shaykhism, after its founder Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'í.



- At that late stage in its history, Islam and the Islamic world had sunk into a state of extreme depravity and corruption. The world of Shi'ism was effectively ruled by the ulamá, the religious leaders.
- The brilliance of Islamic thought of the medieval period was replaced by a ritual orthodoxy and extreme fundamentalism. Moral degeneracy, bribery and venality were rampant.

- It was amid such a sad state of affairs that Shaykh Ahmad arose in an attempt to lead his fellow believers to a more subtle and spiritual concept of religion.
- He gave symbolic rather than literal interpretations of many of the traditional Islamic beliefs, and taught that the “resurrection” of believers was to be spiritual and not bodily.

- At his death in 1826 he was succeeded by Siyyid Kázim Rashtí.
- The latter continued the doctrines of Shaykh Ahmad, but laid increasing emphasis on teaching the imminent advent of the Mahdí (Qá'im).



- So much was this so that, at his death in December 1843, Shaykhism had been largely transformed into a movement of messianic adventism.
- In the *Kitáb-i Iqán*, Bahá'u'lláh refers to them as “the two great luminaries”.

- In January 1844, Mullá Husayn Bushrú'í, one of the chief disciples of the late Siyyid Kázim, set out to find the Promised One who, Siyyid Kázim had insisted, was now living in their very midst.
- His search led him to the city of Shiraz in southern Iran where on 23 May 1844, Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, the Báb, disclosed to Mullá Husayn that he was the one foretold in unmistakable terms by Siyyid Kázim.

- Mullá Husayn recognized in the Báb the various signs given by Siyyid Kázim and accepted the Báb as the Promised One.
- According to Mullá Husayn's account, the Báb began the composition of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* in Mullá Husayn's presence at their first meeting.

- Following the Báb's explicit instructions, Mullá Husayn refrained for the time being from proclaiming his new-found Faith.
- Within a number of weeks, seventeen other individuals also found their way to the Báb and accepted Him as the Promised One.
- He designated these eighteen disciples as “Letters of the Living”.

- In many of the Báb's Writings, He elucidates the spiritual station of these sanctified souls.
- For example, in a Tablet written in 1850, the Báb declares that His first two disciples (Mullá Husayn and Mullá 'Alí Bastámí) were the return of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali.

- In the summer of 1844, all but one of the Letters of the Living were sent forth by the Báb throughout Iran and neighboring regions to teach His Faith.
- The last Letter, Quddus, accompanied Him on pilgrimage to Mecca.

- One of the Letters of the Living (the second, in fact) was Mullá ‘Alí Bastamí.
- He, like Mullá Husayn, had been a leading member of the Shaykhi community.
- He was given the specific task by the Báb of returning to the region of Karbala, the heartland of Shaykhism, and of proclaiming there the new Faith.
- He was not, however, to divulge the identity of the Báb, but only to proclaim that He had, in fact, appeared.

- Arising to fulfill this task given him by the Báb, Mullá ‘Alí arrived in Iraq in early August of 1844.
- He immediately embarked on the mission of proclaiming the advent of the Báb.
- As a proof of the validity of the new Revelation, he produced and circulated copies of the *Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’*.

- It should be borne in mind that, according to Muslim theology and belief, the most tangible proof of divine revelation is the capacity of the Revelator to produce “revealed verses” and “revealed writings”.

- The main characteristics of revealed writings are held to be the profundity and depth of the writing, the literary style and poetic quality of the writing, the manner of writing (spontaneous and uninterrupted), and the capacity to reveal writing under all conditions and circumstances.

- The impact which this work of the Báb had on the population of Iraq was immediate and dramatic.
- The implications of the claims and teachings it contained, coupled with the fearless and public pronouncements of Mullá 'Alí Bastamí, led to his arrest and eventual imprisonment in Baghdad.

- After some deliberations as to what should be done with him, the authorities, under the leadership of Najíb Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, convened a conclave of Sunni and Shi'ih ecclesiastics who tried Mullá 'Alí according to religious law.
- This took place in January 1845.

- The result of the trial was an edict or fatwa, which, among other things condemned the *Qayyumu'l-Asmá'* as heretical and its unknown author a heretic deserving of death.
- This edict was signed by every one of the ulamá present at the trial.
- Mullá 'Alí was held to merit death and remained in prison.
- He disappeared from history and the exact conditions of his end have remained unknown.

- Of particular interest are the contents of the edict itself.
- Here we have an authenticated document of the reaction of the leaders of thought of the Islamic world to the initial Writings and Claims of the Báb.
- The fatwa lays the following specific charges against the Báb:

1. That he wrote a book that resembled the Qur'an in its format, chapters, verses, etc.
2. That he took liberties with the text of the Qur'an by adding, subtracting and interposing new material.
3. That he claimed divine revelation.

4. That he exaggerated concerning some of the Holy Family.

5. That he exaggerated the importance of his own writings and of amendments while de-emphasizing the importance of Islam and Islamic religious law.

- Thus, based strictly on the text of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* (for they had nothing else, not even the knowledge of the Báb's identity), the conclave of Sunni and Shi'ih ulamá unanimously declared that the Báb has claimed divine revelation.

- Let us examine a few passages of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* from which the panel perceived the Báb's claim to divine revelation.
- These are passages that have been cited in the fatwa document itself in explicit support of the charge that the Báb claimed divine revelation.

- In 61:22 of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* we find:
- *We have inspired you as We inspired Muhammad and those messengers who were before Him, with clear signs in order that mankind may have no arguments against God ...*

- In 61:24, the Báb refers to Himself as the “Remembrance” of God, a term unequivocally understood in this context as implying the rank of a Manifestation or Prophet of God.

- In 65:2, the Báb speaks of the verses of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* as being “revealed” by God.
- In 60:14, the Báb likewise speaks of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* as being “sent down” (anzala) by God.
- Both of these terms are immediately perceived as constituting an unequivocal claim to divine revelation.

- In 60:12, the Báb refers to Himself as the Proof (Hujjat), one of the titles of the Imam Mahdí.

- In 62:12, the Báb says:
O people of the Earth! The Remembrance has come to you after a break in the succession of Messengers in order that He may purge and purify you.
- Not only does the Báb assume the title of Remembrance, He also specifically presents His revelation as following in the established succession of divine revelations.

- The above is only a sampling, (there are great many other passages contained in the fatwa) but should suffice to establish that, from the very beginning, the nature of Báb's claims were quite clear and unequivocal to the learned of Islam.

Qayyumu'l-Asmá'

- This work is the first work of the Báb written after His Declaration, as affirmed by Bahá'u'lláh.
- According to Nabil, the first chapter, the “Suratu'l-Mulk”, was written in the presence of Mullá Husayn on the evening of May 22, the perusal of which convinced him of the truth of the Báb's claims.

- This book was finished in a span of 40 days, that is, between the recognition of the Báb by the first and the second Letter of the Living, and consists of over 9300 verses which are divided into 111 chapters, each chapter being a commentary on one verse of the Qur'anic Surih of Joseph.

- This Surih (chapter 12), tells the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, who suffered imprisonment in Egypt, but rose to rule that land.
- It is highly allegorical.

- Mullá Husayn had asked Siyyid Kázim Rashti to provide a commentary on the Surih of Joseph. The Siyyid had responded:
- “This is, verily, beyond me. He, that great One, who comes after me will, unasked, reveal it for you. That commentary will constitute one of the weightiest testimonies of His truth, and one of the clearest evidences of the loftiness of His position.”

- This book was in fact widely disseminated during the first year, as confirmed by the Báb Himself in the Persian Bayan where, in reference to His pilgrimage journey, He states that “the commentary on the Surih of Joseph had, in the first year of this Revelation, been widely distributed.”

- This work is much more than a commentary in the normal sense of the word.
- Much more attention is devoted to doctrinal reflections of the Báb than with actual Qur'anic commentary.
- When a verse is finally commented on, it is usually in an abstruse and allegorical fashion.
- The style is consciously modeled after Qur'an - a fact true of many of the Bab's earlier Writings.

- Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By* has pointed out that the fundamental purpose of this Book “was to forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá’u’lláh) would, in the succeeding Dispensation, endure at the hands of one who was at once His arch-enemy and blood brother.”
- He then goes on to outline the main themes and features of this work.

- Of particular significance is the following passage in *Qayyumu'l-Asma'*, quoted by Shoghi Effendi in his letter to the believers of the East, Ridván 1944.
- He mentions that by the “peoples of the West”, the Báb specifically called upon the American believers:

- *Issue forth from your cities, O peoples of the West and aid God ere the Day when the Lord of mercy shall come down unto you in the shadow of the clouds with the angels circling around Him, exalting His praise and seeking forgiveness for such as have truly believed in Our signs. Verily His decree hath been issued, and the command of God, as given in the Mother Book, hath indeed been revealed.*

- As mentioned earlier, the central theme of the *Qayyumu'l-Asma'* is to foretell the sufferings of the true Joseph, Bahá'u'lláh, at the hand of His arch-enemy, Mirzá Yahyá.
- In revealing this Book, though, the Báb assures all seekers after truth of the continuation of divine Grace and outpouring in this age.

- And according to the divine Plan, He seeks to reaffirm the spiritual and moral teachings of the past Dispensations and uphold the Islamic Laws.
- He goes on to elucidate certain passages and verses of the Qur'án which anticipated His advent at that time.

- It should be borne in mind that in upholding the Islamic law and jurisprudence, and reiterating a number of Qur'anic ordinances, and reaffirming the validity of interpretation of certain traditions attributed to various Imams, the Báb established the very foundation of the social and devotional laws of His Dispensation which in large measure have been accepted and brought forward by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*.

- **Evolutionary Character of the Báb's Revelation**
- To a certain extent the present-day argument about the evolutionary character of the Bab's claims and pronouncements regarding His Mission and His Station may appear to be credible.
- In this section we will consider materials that will help with a better understanding of the situation.

- In one of His later writings, the Seven Proofs, the Báb refers to the evolutionary character of His Revelation, (*Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p 119):
- *Consider the manifold favors vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation.*

- *Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse 'I, in very truth, am God', identified Himself as the Gate [Báb] for the advent of the promised Qá'im, a descendant of Muhammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'án, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being.*

- Therefore, it is clear that in the early period of His ministry, the Báb deliberately employed a certain degree of ambiguity in order to lessen the impact of His otherwise clear claims to divine revelation.
- And that, the true meaning of the title “Báb” or “gate”, is that Siyyid ‘Alí-Muhammad considered Himself to be the gate, or forerunner, of a second Manifestation of God.

- In *Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles*, p. 426, we find the following illuminating statement made on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

- *The Báb declared Himself at the beginning of His mission to be the “Báb” by which He meant to be the gate or forerunner of “Him Whom God will make manifest”, that is to say Bahá’u’lláh, Whose advent the Shi’ahs expected in the person of “the return of the Imam Husayn”.*

- *The Sunnis also believe in a similar twofold manifestation, the first they call “the Mihdí”, the second “the Return of Christ”. By the term Báb, the Báb meant to be the forerunner of the second manifestation rather than, as some have maintained, the gate of the Qá’im.*

- *When He declared Himself to be the Báb, the people understood by the term that He was an intermediary between the absent Qá'im and His followers, though He Himself never meant to be such a person. All He claimed to be was that He was the Qá'im Himself and in addition to this station, that of the Báb, namely the gate or forerunner of "Him Whom God will make manifest".*

- To sum up everything:
- From the beginning of His ministry, the Báb laid claim to the station of the bearer of an independent divine revelation, thus of one having the authority to inaugurate a new religious dispensation and to proclaim new laws and principles.

- However, in the early period of His ministry, He used the term “Gate” (Báb) in a deliberately ambiguous way in order to diminish somewhat the impact of his otherwise unequivocal claim to divine revelation.

- He also refrained, in the beginning, from using the full powers with which he felt Himself invested to avoid giving an unnecessary shock to the Islamic recipients of His message, and to reaffirm the essentials of Islam and its laws.
- He was explicit in stating this principle of His mission.

- After a four-year period, fraught with numerous momentous events, the Báb then wrote both the Arabic *Bayán* and the Persian *Bayán* in which he reiterated His claims to divine revelation and put forth an entirely new set of laws, abrogating those of Islam.

- At the same time, He stated clearly that the entire purpose of His system and His Cause was to prepare His followers for recognition and acceptance of a further, greater Manifestation of God, soon to come, clarifying thereby the true meaning of the title “Báb”.

- Thus, the Báb's ministry had the two-fold function of establishing an independent religious system (but of short duration) and of serving as a preparation for a further revelation.