

## The Authority of the Feminine and Fatima's Place in an Early Work by the Bab<sup>1</sup>

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The power and authority of the millennial or apocalyptic imagination is fully evident in the success of the Babi movement of nineteenth-century Iran. Among the most striking and memorable features of Babism is surely the prominence, prestige, and religious authority acquired by the woman disciple of the Bab known as Tahirih. The famous Babi cleric, poet, martyr, and symbol of Iran's encounter with both its own history and the version of modernity proffered by the West is possibly more noted by posterity than the founder of the Babi movement himself because she represents both an apparent anomaly and a heroic symbol of modern female liberation. Tahirih after all left an unhappy marriage and her children to follow her revolutionary vision for a more just society. She was accomplished in a virtually completely male dominated milieu, the clerical. She traveled widely throughout Iran preaching to audiences of men and women the dawn of a new day, and most dramatically, she threw off her veil in public in direct defiance of social and religious norms. She was also a martyr. After the attempt on the life of the shah in 1851, Tahirih was strangled by her own silk scarf and buried in a well in the courtyard of a religious official in Tehran.

However much the story of Tahirih is appreciated by modern and contemporary feminists and suffragists, it is important to recognize that while her heroism may have inspired many in far-flung salons of Europe and eventually America, she is very much a daughter of her own culture, history, mythology, and religion. This assertion will perhaps be received with cynicism, for how could such a paternalistic and male-dominated religion and culture as Iranian Islam of the first half of the nineteenth century produce such a woman celebrity and champion of women's rights? Indeed, it has never been established that Tahirih was a champion of women's rights<sup>3</sup>. What we know is that she was a deeply religious mystic who felt a new day arising in the world. She was a messianic player. But it was not accidental that she was a woman, and it is not without consequence for the history of the Babi movement, which though it passed from the stage of history more or less a failure, it nonetheless gave rise to several other trends and movements in Iran whose influence may still be felt. Tahirih the

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<sup>1</sup> In remembrance of Elizabeth Martin.

<sup>2</sup> The following is a revised version of an article that originally appeared in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, edited by Linda Walbridge, Oxford University Press: New York, 2001, pp. 94-127.

<sup>3</sup> Susan S. Maneck, "Women in the Baha'i Faith" *Religion and Women*, Arvind Sharma (ed.), Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994, 211-27.

Babi walked, it seems, right out of the poems, songs, and higher forms of religiocultural literature as the return of Fatima. It was a sacred performance.

Tahirih, whose full name was Fatima Zarrin Taj Baraghani, Qurrat al-'Ayn, was seen by a large number of her fellow Babis as the "return," or reincarnation, of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad and wife of the first Imam, 'Ali. Whether this exemplifies reincarnation or transmigration remains to be addressed. It is indisputable, however, that Baraghani was seen by the Babis (and perhaps herself) as the personification of those virtues and attributes that Fatima had come to symbolize for the Iranian Shi'i community. At the most superficial level, her name was Fatima and her cognomen Tahirih was first applied to her holy ancestor, as was the other name by which she is so widely known, Qurratu'l-'Ayn, "Solace of the eyes." As an antitype of the Fatima known and venerated by nineteenth-century Iranian Muslims, she may be expected to be rather distinctive. The Fatima of the Bab's Qur'an commentary is particularly useful as a function of many different factors: she is a bearer of religious authority (*walaya*: see the discussion that follows for a further elaboration of the meaning of this term); she is a focus of religious devotion and meditation, an icon, as it were, without which the spiritual and religious life may be considered incomplete; she is seen as the embodiment of the spiritual reality of the earth itself, a cosmogonic principle, and at the same time a recurrent actor in a historical drama that will lead ultimately to the long-awaited Day of Resurrection. An examination of the Fatima in this commentary, written before the actual formation or founding of the Babi movement, will help us to understand how many of the Bab's contemporaries saw Tahirih (i.e., the nineteenth-century religious scholar and poet) and, perhaps most important, how Tahirih saw herself. On this latter question, Abbas Amanat has offered the following interesting suggestion:

Frustrations in her family life and persecutions in her Babi career both served as impetuses for inspirations that she transposed into a religious paradigm; what she terms "the state of primal truth." By assuming the symbolic role of Fatima, she envisaged a feminine model – a "primal truth," as she called it – that substantially differed from the role assigned to Fatima in the Islamic, more particularly Shi'ite, tradition as the daughter of the Prophet, the wife of 'Ali, and the mother of Hasan and Husayn; the role that guaranteed her sanctitude (sic) by lineage, marriage, and motherly love. Qurrat al-'Ayn's Fatima was one of independent will and action. The leadership she assumed in the 'Atabat and later at Badasht was the realization of this paradigm.... The only solution she saw, for women and men alike, was a break with the past, and as the first step, a deliberate infringement of religious norms. To find her in the forefront of Babi radicalism and an advocate of progressive revelation is only logical. Her initiation in the Letters of the Living, on the other hand, was an

acknowledgment of her equal place with men in the first unit of the ideal Babi order of All-Beings.<sup>4</sup>

This study suggests that it was not so much a break with the past – that is, the past as "primal truth" – as the revivifying of it that is really at work in the rise of the Babi movement and perhaps its most famous proponent, the woman Tahirih. Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and wife of 'Ali was, according to tradition, something of an activist, such as it could be expressed within the confines of seventh-century Arabia. And it seems clear that tradition honors Fatima for her heroism, a brief outline of which is offered below. In the introduction to his *Persian Bayan*, written after 1848, the Bab specifies that his first followers, the eighteen Letters of the Living, are the return of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, the Family of God plus the historical four emissaries of the disappeared twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-`Askari (disappeared in 873-74) who successively represented the highest authority in the Shi'i world from that time until 949-50.<sup>5</sup> Thus Tahirih not only "assumed the role" of Fatima. She was Fatima.

In the course of this article I also demonstrate that the Bab did not invent such doctrines out of whole cloth, but rather his ideas are, in the main, consonant with the general position of Fatima in Shi'i religiosity, piety, and mysticism. Most important is Fatima's recognized status as an equal bearer of religious authority (*walaya*) along with the Imams and Muhammad the prophet.<sup>6</sup> In order to demonstrate more fully how someone like Tahirih could acquire the prestige and power she undoubtedly had within her milieu, I delineate the main features of the doctrine of *walaya* as it had developed within Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism by the first half of the nineteenth century.

## Walaya

In the course of this examination of the religious authority of Fatima, I clarify that however much the eventual course of the Babi movement was at odds with the religious status quo of mid-nineteenth-century Iran, at its core was a cluster of beliefs shared in common with orthodox Shi'i Islam. The heart of all Shi'ism centers on the strong veneration of the first Imam, 'Ali

<sup>4</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 331

<sup>5</sup> *The Persian Bayan of Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab*, 1.2, tr. Dr. Denis MacEoin, [The Second Chapter of the First Unity: \[H-Bahai\] Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts](#) (July, 1997-)

<sup>6</sup> Such a status is reflected in the words of Ali Shariati: "She herself is an Imam...." (Ali Shariati, *Fatima Is Fatima*, trans. L Bakhtiu [Tehran: The Shariah Foundation, (1980)], p. 225. For important recent scholarship on Fatima see the writings of Muhammad Ali Amir Moezzi: "Aspects de l'Imamologie Duodécimaine I: Remarques sur la Divinité de l'Imam", *Studia Iranica*, 1996, 25(2), 193-216; "Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 6, pp. 317-322; (in collaboration with Jean Calmard), "Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet Mohammad," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 9, pp. 400-404; *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Tr. David Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, passim. The recent lucid discussion of the general development of the religio-literary image of Fatima will also be of interest: Verena Klemm, "Image Formation of an Islamic Legend: Fatima, the Daughter of the Prophet Muhammad," in Sebastian Günther (ed.), *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, Leiden & Boston: E. J. Brill, 2005, 181-208.

ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) (and his wife and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima) as the guardian, protector, and true friend of those who have acknowledged his station as the immediate successor of the Prophet Muhammad. For this reason he is known as *wali*, and the quality of his authority is called *walaya*, frequently (and inadequately) rendered "sainthood."<sup>7</sup> There is in Shi'ism no notion more fundamental than this. It will be seen, perhaps not surprisingly, that the idea was just as central to the Bab's thought, as it is to Shi'ism in general. Also, it will be seen that belief or faith (*iman*) is conditioned by the degree to which one accepts and testifies to the *walaya* of the so-called Family of God (*al Allah*).<sup>8</sup> This family consists of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima, and the eleven other Imams. No deed, no matter how meritorious, is acceptable unless it has been performed by one who has fully confessed the truth of this *walaya* as borne by the Family of God. Moreover, such *walaya* has existed from eternity, much like the so-called "Muhammadan light" and numbers among those who have recognized it the prophets Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. As an eternal principle, it remains an imperative for all would-be believers at all times: through acceptance or rejection of this spiritual authority, one determines the fate of one's soul.

*Walaya* is implicated in the fourth of five pillars of belief of traditional Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism, which are (1) Divine Unity (*tawhid*), (2) Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), (3) the Resurrection/Return (*ma'ad*), (4) the Imamate (imama), and (5) Divine Justice (*'adl*). In Shi'ism prophetic authority ended with the death of Muhammad (632), but the Prophet is understood as having two types of mutually complementing authority: the one, connected with the office of prophethood (*nubuwwa*); the other, in some ways a more general, yet at the same time purer (and therefore higher) type of authority connected with the office of guardianship (*walaya*). This teaching is based on the Qur'an, where the noun *wali* occurs in several important contexts. Most important for this discussion are all those Qur'anic verses that describe God as the *wali* of the believers<sup>9</sup> or the single verse that says that *walaya* belongs to God alone (18:44). The general meaning of *wali* in these instances is "protector," "friend," and "guardian." By extension, and in the context of the most urgent doctrinal need of the Shi'i community, namely to explain the system of distinctive leadership which it developed, *walaya* came to mean "religious authority": believers are bound to obey what God, their best friend and guardian, ordains. The "Family of God," to use the Bab's distinctive terminology, are the only conduits of this divine protective friendship, particularly in the context of the earliest struggles for leadership

<sup>7</sup> This word is sometimes vowelized as *wilaya* and frequently nice distinctions are made between the two spellings in which *walaya* refers to spiritual authority and *wilaya* refers to political authority. Linguistically and etymologically there is no basis for this distinction. One important Shi'i lexicon states that the vowelizing is optional and the word connotes both political/temporal and spiritual power. A. Isfahani, *Tafsir Mir' at al-Anwar wa Mishkat al-Asrar*, Tehran: Chapkhaneh Aftab, 1874/1954, 337-38.

<sup>8</sup> I prefer "Family of God" as a translation for this term to "clan of God" found throughout Amanat, because of the obvious differences in connotation and denotation it carries: nearness, intimacy, and familiarity. These persons are seen as the Holy Family in Shi'ism, not the Holy Clan.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Qur'an 2:107; 2:160; 2:257; 3:68; 6:51; 6:70; 9:112; 13:37; 18:26; 29:22; 32:4; 42:8; 42:9; 42:28; 42:31.

within the Islamic community where one could make the error of choosing the wrong "protecting friend" as a leader. Shi'ism says that this is precisely what happened to those Muslims who chose Abu Bakr and the other two early caliphs as leaders.<sup>10</sup> While prophethood is in some sense superior to guardianship because only a prophet receives revelation through direct inspiration (*wahy*) and the task of a prophet is to establish a code of law (*shari'a*), *walaya* is essential because only through this office or institution can true religious authority be continued beyond the death of the prophet. Furthermore, it is thought to be superior to *nubuwwa* because unlike that institution, it is related directly to God. God is frequently called a *wali* in the Qur'an, but never a *nabi*. In this way *walaya* is seen to be a divine attribute certainly shared by all prophets, with *nubuwwa* representing in some ways a subfunction of *walaya*. Postprophetic guardians (*awliya'*) do not have *nubuwwa*; it is only by virtue of their *walaya* that they have authority in the community to interpret (never reveal) scripture. But their interpretation has the authority of revelation.

Another complementary meaning of the term *walaya* is kinship, closeness, allegiance and, in some ways, intimacy. A bearer of *walaya* is thus seen to enjoy an especially close relationship to, in this case, God. This feature of the word has lent it so well to all those contexts in the Islamic tradition which have to do with sanctity and saintship.<sup>11</sup> To take a recent example, it was on the basis of these factors that Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) formulated the influential and politically astute doctrine known as "The Guardianship of the Jurist" (*Vilayat-i faqih*), through which he demonstrated to the satisfaction of his numerous followers that the decisions and opinions of the godly jurist are guided by the unerring (*ma`sum*) hand of the Hidden Imam and would therefore be identical with His teaching. Furthermore, these rulings and opinions would somehow represent the very presence of God and the Hidden Imam, a figure with almost ineffable sacral and charismatic authority and power. Earlier examples of the usage have been recently singled out as possibly the most important factor at play in the spiritual authority of the Sufi shaykh or *pir* from very earliest times in Islam.<sup>12</sup> It is something of a truism that the Shi'i Imam is the analogue of the Sufi shaykh (or vice versa). One reason is that the basic understanding and function of the term *walaya* seems to be fairly constant across the borders that otherwise separate the two. The point is that concern with *walaya* means concern with power and authority. In the early work by the Bab, there is a great deal of concern with *walaya*. In this study we are interested mainly in the *walaya* and spiritual authority of Fatima. It is with an enhanced appreciation of this topic that the remarkable life of Tahirih,

<sup>10</sup> The most recent scholarly treatment of the key events and personalities in the drama that unfolded after the death of the Prophet is Madelung, Wilferd. *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Hermann Landolt, "Walayah," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, and now the appropriate passages in Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, index s.v. *walaya*, *wali*, *awliya'*.

<sup>12</sup> Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, London: Curzon Press, 1996.

and the religious leadership of women, can be better understood within the context of nineteenth-century Iran.

### Usuli/Akhbari Debate

Before we turn directly to the writings of the Bab on this topic, it is important to summarize, in very general terms, some of the pertinent historical developments in Shi'i legal theory that serve as immediate background to his career. By the time the Bab was writing, which was very close to the time of the fulfillment of the Shi'i eschaton, a thousand years having elapsed since the disappearance of the Twelfth/Hidden Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-`Askari, a long-standing dispute among religious scholars had been rumbling for a number of decades. This dispute had to do precisely with the way religious authority (*walaya*) would be expressed and recognized among the believers and is known as the Akhbari/Usuli debate. Although the Usuli position eventually won the day, it is important to know what was at stake. In one sense, this dispute can be characterized as "reason vs. revelation." The Akhbari position was against the institutionalization of "independent jurisprudence" (*ijtihad*), and the Usuli position upheld it. At stake, then, was not only a more or less abstract legal theory, but also the potentially powerful office of *mujtahid*, independent legal scholar, whose findings in all aspects of religion would be binding upon the believers. These findings were derived through resort to so-called sources (*usul*: roots) by the legal thinker or jurist (*faqih*): (1) Qur'an, (2) Sunna, or (3) Qiyas/Analogy. The process whereby these elements were employed to derive a solution for a legal problem is called *ijtihad*- "independent intellectual exertion." The Akhbaris asserted that there was only one legal authority, namely, the Hidden Imam, the bearer of *walaya* for this time, and that in such a circumstance there was in effect only one *mujtahid* whom the faithful were required to emulate and follow, namely the Hidden Imam. Thus the Akhbari position threatened the social standing of an elite group of highly qualified legal experts by asserting that each believer was to work out their own "salvation" through contemplation of the sources of religion: 1) the Qur'an and 2) the Sunna. The name Akhbari comes from the word used to refer to the thousands of traditions – *akhbar*, sing. *khbar*, sometimes called *hadith* – that preserve the Sunna of not only the Prophet, but the other thirteen immaculate ones, the twelve Imams and Fatima. The Akhbaris taught that each believer had direct access to the truth through reading the Qur'an and this supplementary material. The Usuli position was eventually to lead to the establishment of the important institution known as *marja`-i taqlid*, "one who is to be [blindly] imitated in matters of religion."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> On this topic see Kohlberg, Etan. "Abu Turab." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 1978, 347-52.; "From Imamiyya to Ithna-'Ashariyya." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976), 521-34.; "The Development of the Imami Shi'i Doctrine of jihad." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgandlandischen Gesellschaft* 1976, 126, 64-86.; Newman, Andrew Joseph III. *The Development and Political*

In the process of winning the battle, Usulis argued heavily against the kind of mystical or intuitive communion with the Hidden Imam that made the Akhbari position feasible. In so doing, they argued very persuasively for the superiority of the rational faculty and the use of reason. One response to this argument would come in the form of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (d. 1826) and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti (d. 1843), who throughout their works cautioned against the elimination of the mystical or intuitional aspects of religion and argued, in compelling language, for an epistemology composed of equal parts of reason and "revelation." The Shaykhi position won many supporters precisely because it rescued, in a reasonable manner, the mystical noetic so dear to the Persian soul.<sup>14</sup> The Bab's writings, especially the ones examined in this article, are perhaps an equally strenuously (if differently) argued mysticism. As we will see, the Bab's source of authority is the Qur'an and the Family of God and no one or nothing else.<sup>15</sup>

### The Bab's Writings

There has been a tendency to regard the *Tafsir surat Yusuf* as the first work of any significance written by the Bab, but this is wrong.<sup>16</sup> The *Tafsir surat al-Baqara* – a work that has been habitually ignored by persons writing on the Babi religion – is really the Bab's first major religious work. It first became known in the West through E. G. Browne, who discussed it and the circumstances under which he received a copy, in an article written in 1892.<sup>17</sup> (It had been sent to him by Mirza Yahya Subh-i Azal, who had

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*Significance of the Rationalistic (Usuli) and Traditionalist (Akhbari) Schools in Imami Shi'i History from the Third/Ninth to the Tenth/Sixteenth Century A.D.* Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Service, 1986.

<sup>14</sup> On the Shaykhi teachings see Juan R. I Cole, "[Individualism and the Spiritual Path in Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i](#)," *H-Bahai Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 1/4 (September, 1997).; "The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i," *Studia Islamica*, 1994, 80, 1-23; Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shiite Iran*. Translated by Nancy Pearson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. [Hereafter *Corbin*]; Corbin, Henry. *En Islam iranien*. 4 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1971-72. [Hereafter *EII*]; Rafati, Vahid. *The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shi'i Islam*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1979

<sup>15</sup> On the subtle, amphibolous, and powerful relationship between Imam and Text, see Todd Lawson, "[Reading Reading Itself: The Bab's 'Sura of the Bees,' A Commentary on Qur'an 12:93 from the Sura of Joseph-Text, Translation and Commentary](#) *H-Bahai Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 1/5 (November, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Even as recently as 1989, we find the following statement on the date of the *Tafsir surat Yusuf*: "As far as can be verified, up to this time [when he produced the *Tafsir surat Yusuf*] the Bab had not produced any work of significance, and it was only during his encounters with his early believers that he became fully aware of his talent for producing Qur'anic commentaries." Amanat, *Resurrection*, 172-73. Manuscript: *Tafsir Surat Yusuf* by the Bab" (1) Haifa, Baha'i World Centre: (QA)

<sup>17</sup> Edward , 637-710, "A Catalogue and Description of 27 Babi Manuscripts," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1892, 24, 493-99. Azal, like his half-brother Baha'u'llah, had been a follower of the Bab from the early days. As a result of disagreements between himself and Baha'u'llah, he became the leader of the Azali faction of the Babis. Browne received a great number of Babi manuscripts from him. In this article Browne quotes a passage from the *Tarikh-i Jadid* which recounts the conversion of the young Shaykhi Mulla Husayn Bushru'i to the cause of the Bab in May 1844. While Mulla Husayn was visiting the Bab in the latter's home, he discovered a commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*. Reading some of it, he was impressed by the merits of the work and asked his host who its author was. The Bab said that he in fact had written the work. This story relates that Mulla Husayn was puzzled by one of the passages in the work: "the explanation of the inmost of the inmost" (*tafsir-i batin-i batin*). Mulla Husayn is reported to have said: This appeared to me to be an error, and I remarked, "Here it should

received it from a scribe in Tehran.) By virtue of the number of existing manuscripts of this work that he enumerated, Denis MacEoin rekindled interest in it as a valuable source for the history and doctrines of the Babi movement.<sup>18</sup> Through further research it has become clear that the Bab's *Tafsir surat al-Baqara* enjoys a unique and heretofore unappreciated significance for a study of the growth and development of the Babi religion. MacEoin may have been correct when he suggested that it is much less likely to have been corrupted by partisans of the later Baha'i/Azali dispute because of its status as a preproclamation work.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, such corruption may be a red herring, since a study of a number of manuscripts of the later and much more famous and pivotal *Tafsir surat Yusuf* reveals very little willful tampering with the text.<sup>20</sup> But MacEoin is certainly correct in his assertion that "since this *tafsir* is the only extended work of the Bab's written before May 1844 [when he made his momentous claims public] and still extant, it is indisputably of unique importance as a source of concrete evidence for the development of his thought in the six months or so that led up to the initial announcement of his prophetic claim."<sup>21</sup> Insofar as this first major work was also a *tafsir*, its interest goes beyond the confines of a study of a specific heresy to engage with the greater Islamic tradition itself on the common ground of the Qur'an.

Indeed, it is of some significance that this first major work by the Bab is a commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*, or Sura of the Cow (in actual fact, it is a commentary on both the *Surat al-Fatiha*, the first sura and the *Surat al-Baqara*, the second sura), a sura sometimes regarded by exegetes as "the Qur'an in miniature" because in it are found many of the same concerns,

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be 'the inmost,' and they have written 'the inmost of the inmost.'" "What can I say?" [the Bab] answered, "the author of the Commentary lays claim to even more than this of greatness, glory, and knowledge. Consider the passage attentively." I did so, and said, "It is quite correct. But I am wearied. Do you read and I will listen." He read for a time, and then, as men are wont, I said, "It is enough. Do not trouble yourself further." Browne, *Catalogue*, 496-97. While this account is important for the history of the *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara*, it raises the question of why Mulla Husayn should have been stopped by such an expression. The *tafsir* does in fact employ it, although Browne was unable to locate it in his manuscript. It also seems logical to assume that Mulla Husayn would have been quite conversant with such language. The writings of both Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim contain many allusions not only to the *batin al-batin*, but also to the *batin batin al-batin*, *Whir al-batin*, and so forth. The young Mulla may have wanted to say that this particular passage deals only with the *batin* and should not therefore have been referred to as an explanation of the "inmost of the inmost." It may be that the passage was left out of Browne's manuscript because it was thought to damage the credibility of the Bab. Or it could be an apocryphal tale designed to present the Bab as more learned than Mulla Husayn. *Tafsir surat al-baqara* (ms.) by the Bab, Sayyid `Ali Muhammad Shirazi, Tehran Bahai Archives 6014C [Baq]. Additional manuscripts: Cambridge University Library, Browne Or. Ms. F8. (C); Leiden University Library, Or.4971 (Ar.2414). Item No. 8. (L); *Majmu'ah-ye Athar Hadrat-i A'la*, 156-410. (1).

<sup>18</sup> Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 46-47.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Todd Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid `Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab (1819-1950)" In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew L Rippin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 223-53.

<sup>21</sup> MacEoin, *Sources*, 47. Extant works that were probably written by the Bab before the *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara* include the short Arabic Risalat fi al-Suluk (on which see MacEoin, *Sources*, 44-45). For a translation and description of this short epistle, see Todd Lawson, "[The Bab's 'Journey towards God': Translation and Text.](#)" In *H-Bahai Translations of the Shaykhi, Babi and Bahai Texts 2/1* (January, 1998b). Manuscript: *Tehran Baha'i Archives*, 6006.C: (S)

ordinances, conceits, and images found throughout the book. A commentary on this sura by any given author would therefore tend to reveal the way he would approach the entire Qur'an. It may be, in fact, that the Bab had intended to produce a commentary on the whole Qur'an at this time. He is said to have later produced no less than nine complete commentaries on the Qur'an during his incarceration in Azerbaijan.<sup>22</sup> Why he would have suspended such a project at this earlier date is open to speculation. We do know, however, that it was shortly after the completion of the commentary on the first part<sup>23</sup> of the Qur'an that Mulla Husayn Bushru'i made his visit to Shiraz, during which time the Babi movement may be said to have been born. Such a dramatic occurrence might possibly have had the effect of deflecting the Bab's attention from such a "merely literary" project to concentrate on newer and more important developments. One of these developments was the composition of another *tafsir* (the *Qayyum al-Asma* or *Tafsir surat Yusuf*) of such a startlingly different nature from this earlier work that the two might be thought to have been written by two different authors, though in reality this is probably not the case.<sup>24</sup>

The radical interpretation of several passages in the *Surat al-Baqara* as speaking directly to the subject of *walaya* is not an innovation of the Bab's but has characterized a strong tendency in Shi'i exegesis from the earliest times.<sup>25</sup> This is clarified in notes in the following text that direct the reader to similar interpretations in classical literature. Of interest here is that such a commentary was written by one who was not a member of the ulama class, but rather a young merchant. The nature of the commentary shows that there was a perceived need to reassert, revalorize, relocate, or perhaps take possession of this cardinal Shi'i doctrine. Why such a need was felt at this particular time and within the Iranian merchant class, has been discussed at length by scholars concerned with the social history of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Iran. The following discussion attests to the degree to which this need was felt, and the consequences it had for the interpretation of scripture. Here we begin to understand why the *Tafsir surat al-Baqara* provides invaluable information about the development

<sup>22</sup> Zarandi, Mulla Muhammad (Nabil). *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha'i Revelation*, tr. and ed. Shoghi Effendi. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahai'i Publishing Trust, 1974, 31

<sup>23</sup> Literally *juz'*. The Qur'an is divided in thirty more or less equal parts (*ajza'*) for liturgical purposes, enabling the believer to read equal parts of the text on successive days of the sacred month of Ramadan, for example. The first part includes the first sura, al-Fatiha, the Opening, consisting of seven verses and the first 141 verses of the *Surat al-Baqara*. The *Surat al-Baqara* comprises roughly two and one-half parts. It is the longest sura of the Qur'an.

<sup>24</sup> This much more famous second work, the *Qayyum al-Asma*, appears to be the first work written after the commentary on *al-Baqara*. By its special structure it actually may be considered a commentary on the entire Qur'an. Thus, if it had been the Bab's desire to produce a complete *tafsir* at this early stage, he may be seen as having accomplished this task though in a radically and unpredictably untraditional form. For a fuller description of this second commentary, see Lawson "Interpretation as Revelation."

<sup>25</sup> If the basic conclusion of this paper is correct, namely that the Babi movement represents an efflorescence of themes, motifs, and religiosity associated with the earliest extremist Shi'is, then Halm's statement, referring to the Ahl-i Haqq and the Nusayris, needs to be reassessed: "Descendants of the Kufan *ghulat* have survived to the present time in two mountainous areas of retreat, far from the centres of political power and from Sunni as well as Shiite orthodoxy.... The Nusayris are the only Islamic sect to preserve the unbroken tradition of the Kufan *guluw*." Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, trans. J. Watson, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991, 158-59.

of the Bab's religious ideas.

### **Walaya in the Bab's Earliest Work**

The subject of *walaya* is introduced very early in the *tafsir* where reference is made to the *Absolute Walaya (walayatuhu al-mutlaqa)* of `Ali. In the following pages, Qur'an citations are presented in small capital letters in order to make as clear as possible the connection between the words of the commentator and the sacred text. In the course of the Bab's commentary on the second verse of the Fatiha, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds," the verse is said to be the book (*kitab*) of `Ali, in which God has placed all the principles (*ahkam*) of Absolute Walaya pertaining to it. It is designated here, the Paradise of the Inclusive Unity (*jannat al-wahidiya*), whose protection has been reserved for all those who affirm `Ali's *walaya*.<sup>26</sup>

In this very brief statement, certain important terms are introduced, which play a key role throughout the rest of the *tafsir*. Apart from the word *walaya* (guardianship, friendship), the designation *wahidiya* occurs over and over again throughout the work. It is descriptive of one of the degrees of divinity which constitute the whole hierarchical metaphysical structure of the world. It is the degree immediately inferior to the divine Exclusive Unity (*ahadiya*). Such terminology betrays the influence of the so-called *wahdat al-wujud* school associated with Ibn `Arabi. Suffice it here to say that the *Absolute Walaya* represents a theoretical position at least one remove from the Ultimate. A third ontic level, "existence as an expression of divine mercy," is associated with Fatima. We will return to this presently.<sup>27</sup>

The choice of the word *principles (ahkam)* has several connotations. In this short introductory sentence to the *tafsir* on the Fatiha, the Bab characterizes this opening chapter of the Qur'an as containing seven clear verses (*ayat muhkamat*). The hermeneutic polarities of *mutashabihat/muhkamat* represent one of the oldest concerns of *tafsir* in general and have occasioned much speculation on the part of exegetes of all schools and attitudes. The

<sup>26</sup> Baq., pp. 8 and 1, p. 156: *qad ja `alaha Allahu zillaha li-man aqarra bi-walayatihi*; C, f.2b: *qad ja `ala Allahu...* Repeated reference throughout this commentary to *ahadiya, wahidiya, rahmaniya*, and so on constitutes one of its more distinguishing characteristics. The terminology comes originally from Ibn `Arabi (638/1240) and its use here by the Bab offers yet another example of how the work, if not the thought, of one of history's greatest mystics had thoroughly permeated Iranian Shi'i spiritual discourse (*irfan*) by this time. For a study of these terms as they were received by Ibn `Arabi's student Qunawi and others, see William Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," *Muslim World*, 1982, 72, 107-28. (See also the critique of this article: Hermann Landolt "Review of W. Chittick, 'The Five Divine Presences- From al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari.' *Studia Iranica*, Suppl. 8, 1985, #488, p. 126.) Briefly, the term *ahadiya* represents the highest aspect of the Absolute about which we can notion (if one may use a noun as a verb) but does not, of course, define the Absolute that must always be beyond whatever occurs about It in our minds- The term *wahidiya* refers to the second highest aspect of the Absolute, the aspect that involves the "appearance" of the divine names and attributes. See also `Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani, *al-Istilahat al-Sufiyya*, edited by Muhammad Kamal Ibrahim Ja'far, Cairo: al-Hai'at al-Misriyat al-`Amma li'l-Kitab, 1981, 25.47. The proper understanding of this technical terminology has been a subject of scholarly debate in Iran for centuries.

<sup>27</sup> Etymologically feminine, *rahmaniya*, from the Arabic word for "womb," is the abstract noun mercifulness. Ibn Arabi seems to be the one responsible for characterizing the existentionation of creation as an act of mercy, an expression of *rahmaniya*.

primary idea is that the Qur'an contains both ambiguous and unambiguous verses. At the most basic level, these are thought to be divided between straightforward legal prescriptions and the rest of the book. The terminology here is taken from Qur'an 3:7:

He it is who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning) [*muhkamat*]. They are the foundation of the Book [*umm al-kitab*]. Others are allegorical [*mutashabihat*]. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings [*ta'wil*]. But no one knows its hidden meanings [*ta'wil*] except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book, the whole of it is from our Lord." And none will grasp the message except those who have understanding.

With this *aya* comes one of the more fundamental differences between the Sunni and Shi'i exegetes who disagree about its grammar and syntax. The above translation represents the "Sunni" reading. A Shi'i reading would be: "And none knows its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge" (*al-rasikhun fi'l-'ilm*). These *rasikhun* are of course the Imams, in the first place, and in the second place, at least amongst the Usulis, the *mujtahids*. So understood, the designation of the verses of the Fatiha as unambiguous strongly suggests that the Bab read them as having a positive and binding relationship with a true understanding of the Book. Seen in this light, his statement that verse 2 of the Fatima ordains belief in the Absolute *Walaya* of `Ali must be taken as divine law, binding upon the believer in the same way as legal prescriptions for the terms of inheritance, or even prayer and fasting, are obligatory.

In this same commentary on the seven verses of the Fatiha, we first encounter Fatima. In line with his method and the structure of this section, the Bab designates the third verse, "the merciful the compassionate" (*ar-rahman ar-rahim*), as "the book of Fatima" (*kitab Fatima salat allah 'alayha*).<sup>28</sup> That Fatima is associated with *rahma*, "mercy," is in line with the general idea of existence as mercy and the role of the feminine articulated in the writings of Ibn `Arabi.<sup>29</sup> It should also be noted that *rahma* is a feminine noun constructed on the root *rhm*, which is also the basis for the word *rahim*, "uterus, womb." Fatima is associated with this verse because it is gender-specific so that grammar reflects reality – a basic axiom of the worldview we are investigating. That it is also the third verse of the sura means that the order: Muhammad, `Ali, Fatima (*ahadiya, wahidiya*,

<sup>28</sup> In the commentary on the rest of the Fatiha, each verse of which is designated as "the book" or writing of one of the fourteen Pure Ones, that is the twelve imams, Fatima, and Muhammad. For specifics on the heptadic structure that reflects the realities of Family of God, see Lawson (1986).

<sup>29</sup> See also Huda Lutfy, "The Mystical Dimensions of Literature" *Alif: Journal of Comparative Politics* Spring 1985, 5, 7-19.

*rahmaniya*) is corroborated both through the gender reference and chronological order of birth.<sup>30</sup> The remainder of the commentary runs:

And God has put in [this verse] all that is hers and all that pertains to her. [This verse] is the Garden of Divine Grace (*jannat al-na'im*). God has ordained its shade for the one who believes in her and loves her after he has recognized her as she deserves (*ba`da ma`arafaha bima hiya ahluha*), as she appeared to the seeker (or: knower/Gnostic, 'arif) through his own self (*kama tajallat li'l 'arif lahu bihi*). Then this garden will open to him.<sup>31</sup>

While there is no explicit mention of *walaya* here, it is nonetheless assumed throughout the *tafsir* that Fatima is, as a member of the Family of God, one of the fourteen bearers of *walaya*. The Bab, it seems, wishes to highlight various nuances of this religious authority according to the particular bearer/*wali* he is discussing. In the case of Fatima, this religious authority is clearly associated with love (*mahabba*) and knowledge/gnosis (*'irfan*), and as we already saw, mercy. For example, in his commentary on 2:25, the Bab states that Paradise or "the Garden" is indeed the love of the form of Fatima (*mahabbat shabah Fatima*). Before we look further at this material, it may be helpful to offer a brief summary of the general place of Fatima in Islam and Shi'ism.

### Fatima of History

Fatima (11/633), the daughter of Muhammad and wife of the first Imam `Ali ibn Abi Talib (40/661) enjoys an exalted position in Shi'i piety and is thought by some to function for the Shi'a much the same way that Mary functions in the Catholic tradition.<sup>32</sup> She is depicted in the histories as the long-suffering darling of her father, to whom she was born through Muhammad's first wife, the incomparable Khadija. She was married to `Ali, which sources say was a difficult marriage.<sup>33</sup> But while she lived, she was

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that we find no mention of Fatima at the corresponding place in the eleventh-century classical work by the otherwise influential Shi'i theologian Tusi, Muhammad al-Hasan, al-. *al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Najaf, 1957-63, Vol. 1, 28-30.

<sup>31</sup> Baq. p. 8, 11.4-8. The phrase "Garden of Grace" (*jannat al-na'im*) is determined by Qur'anic usage (see, e.g., 26:85). "Gnostic" translates 'arif. There are other choices: "recognizer," "knower," "seeker."

<sup>32</sup> Ali's nickname Abu Turab is said to have originated because whenever he and Fatima would quarrel, he would leave the house and cover his head with dust, presumably out of the frustration at being married to the Prophet's daughter. Indeed, the Prophet himself bestowed this name upon him (Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.). For other explanations of the distinctive nickname, see Kohlberg, *Abu Turab*, 347-52; and "The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful, by Rajab Bursi (d. 1411)." In *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, foreword by Javad Nurbakhsh, introduction by S. H. Nasr. London: Khaniqah Nimatullahi Publications in association with the SOAS Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, University of London, 1992, 261-76, cf. 268. One of the key figures in the drama and legend of Tahirih the Babi is one Shaykh Abu Turab. For the most recent and quite penetrating study of this drama, see Negar Mottahedeh, "[Ruptured Spaces and Effective Histories: The Unveiling of the Babi Poetess Qurrat al-Ayn- Tahirih in the Gardens of Badasht.](#)" *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 2/2 (February, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> The bibliography on Fatima remains to be compiled. For this paper I have benefited from Laura Veccia Vaglieri's excellent *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., entry. See now (in collaboration with Jean Calmard), *Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet Mohammad*, 400-404. A study of Fatima in *tafsir* is Jane Dammen McAuliffe's

his only wife. She is venerated as the mother of the second and third Ithna `Ashari Imams, Hasan and Husayn (and by extension all of the Imams). She is held up to the believers by the sources as a model of suffering, patience, generosity, wisdom, and valiant heroism ending in martyrdom. During the Prophet's Meccan and early Medinan period, when the Banu Hashim imposed a ban upon dealings with Muhammad, Fatima is singled out as having endured the privations with great dignity and patience.<sup>34</sup> Of all the Prophet's children, Fatima lived the longest (although she died only a few months after the Prophet's death) and gave Muhammad, who would have otherwise been bereft of male progeny, many descendants. Indeed, one of the many calumnies directed at Muhammad was that he was without male progeny. Such a man was known derisively in this milieu as "cut off" (*al-abtar*).<sup>35</sup> Muhammad was cruelly taunted with this epithet by his fellow Meccans because of the death of his and Khadija's two infant sons, Qasim and Abdallah. Fatima is seen by the tradition as being the one responsible for giving the lie to this cruel insult by providing the Prophet his two grandsons, Hasan, Husayn, and their sisters Zainab and Umm Kulthum.<sup>36</sup> Shi'i religious literature delights in demonstrating how this epithet, recorded in the sura *The Abundance* (Qur'an 108, as it happens, the shortest sura in the book), was turned against Muhammad's enemies because through Fatima Muhammad's lineage not only continued but multiplied greatly in the Imamate that is the institutional sanctuary of *walaya* in Shi'ism.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, it was Muhammad's enemies who were "cut off" (*al-abtar*) by the will of God.

Fatima is greatly venerated by all Muslims who, when speaking of her, typically add the honorific *al-Zahra'* (the shining one, the luminous, the gloriously radiant). Among the Shi'a this veneration reaches its greatest intensity. Two Western scholars, Henri Lammens and Louis Massignon, studied the historical basis for this reverence and reached diametrically opposite opinions: Lammens argued that the historical Fatima was "a woman devoid of attraction, of mediocre intelligence, completely insignificant, little esteemed by her father, ill-treated by her husband....

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brief "Chosen of All Women : Mary and Fatimah in Qur'anic Exegesis," *Islamochristiana*, 1981, 7, 19-28. Surprisingly, much early and later explicitly Shi'i material is ignored in this otherwise interesting article. For example, the very early *Shi'i Tafsir Furat ibn Ibrahim* mentions Fatima in over twenty places. The commentaries of the two famous classical Shi'i exegetes, Tusi and Tabrisi, also mention her at various points in their commentaries. The commentaries of Muhsin Fayd Kashani and others also frequently cite *hadith*, or more appropriately *akhbar*, which mention Fatima's name.

<sup>34</sup> "She is usually depicted in the Shi'i sources as a bitter woman who spent her last days mourning the death of her father and refusing any contact with the outside world Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism*, The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978.,40.

<sup>35</sup> The lack of descendants is a topos in Muhammad's biography and is reflected in the Qur'an as well. This meant that his progeny was destined to issue only from his daughters, which in his society meant that he was without descendants.

<sup>36</sup> A third son, Muhsin, was stillborn.

<sup>37</sup> Later on in his career, the Bab himself would compose a lengthy commentary on this very sura. See Todd Lawson, "Qur'an Commentary as Sacred Performance: The Bab's tafsirs of Qur'an 103 and 108, the Declining Day and the Abundance." In *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert and die Entstehung der Baha'i Religion*, ed. Christoph Burgel and Isabel Schayani. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1998, 145-58.

anaemic, often ill, prone to tears, who died perhaps of consumption."<sup>38</sup> Massignon has made Fatima "sublime, elevating her to a position often reminiscent of that which the Virgin Mary holds among Christians. For Massignon, she represents the beginnings of Universal Islam" because of her care for the non-Arab converts.<sup>39</sup> Massignon's study improves upon Lammens by offering a "psychologico-religious explanation for the origin and development of the legend of the daughter of the Prophet and bridges the gap between legend and reality as Lammen's book fails to do;" however, "[Massignon's work] cannot escape the objection of the historian, who will consider that the author subordinates the facts to beliefs about Fatima which appeared only later."<sup>40</sup> This statement obviously represents a certain historiographical approach. Beliefs, it is clear, have frequently been as crucial to history as facts. Indeed, in this article beliefs are of primary interest; whether or not they represent, in the case of Fatima, "true historical reality" is immaterial. This is so precisely because we can see how much such belief actually influenced the unfolding of radical religious activity in nineteenth-century Iran. But it is also true – and this is a historiographical element of consequence – that Fatima's life was so obscure that Ibn Hisham and the other earlier historians had little occasion to concern themselves with her.

Fatima died in the eleventh year of the *hijra*, six months after the death of the Prophet. Today (because her grave is unknown), Shi'is visit three places in Medina in order to pay homage to her: her house, the Baqi' cemetery, and the space in the Great Mosque between the *rawda* and the tomb of the Prophet.<sup>41</sup> Her nickname, "Mother of her father" (*Umm Abiha*) has several explanations: she learned through a revelation that the name of her very last descendant would be Muhammad, perhaps as a logical inference from the story of her heavenly, luminous origin and birth. Her name Creator (*Fatir*), which is one of the names listed in an eleventh-century source, represents a glorification of Fatima that seems to be characteristic of the extreme Isma'ilis and of "aberrant" sects such as the Nusayris rather than of the Imamis. Have we here a borrowing of the latter from the former? Veccia Vaglieri asks.<sup>42</sup> The belief that Fatima is Fatir, Creator, would also help explain her *kunya* *Umm Abiha*. Another explanation for the name is that it became Fatima's as a result of her providing comfort to Muhammad during the darkest times.<sup>43</sup> It has been suggested that because of the connections

<sup>38</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*. Cf. Lammens, Henri. *Fatimah et les filles de Mahomet*. Rome: Sumptibus Pontificii Institut Biblici, 1912.

<sup>39</sup> "La notion du voe et la devotion musulmane a Fatima." In *Studio orientalistici in onore di Giorgio della Vida*. Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente, 1956, vol. 2, 102-26., p. 118f. But see the legend of the heavenly table being removed from the *ahl al-bayt* because they tried to share it with outsiders, Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 44-45.

<sup>40</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Dala' il al-Imama* by Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Najaf, 1949/1369, 1-58. This source is used heavily by Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*. It is, unfortunately, unavailable to me.

<sup>43</sup> 'Ali Shariati, *Fatima Is Fatima*. Translated by Laleh Bakhtiar. Tehran: Shariati Foundation, [1980]. 160-61.

between the cult of Mary among Christians and that of Fatima among Muslims, it is possible that the title arose as a counterpart to that of "Mother of God," especially since the name seems to be found only in later (that is, twelfth-century) sources.<sup>44</sup>

Islam has honored 'Asiyah bint Muzahim, (Pharoah's wife), Maryam bint 'Imran (Mary, mother of Jesus), Khadija, and Fatima as the four perfect women of the world, the best women of Paradise.<sup>45</sup> By the twelfth century, Shi'i scholars had compiled a list of nearly a hundred names and attributes by which Fatima should be honored<sup>46</sup> This veneration may be best seen in three of the titles by which she is most frequently designated: al-Zahra', "the luminous"; *Fatir*, "Creator"; and Umm Abiha, "Mother of her Father." Others include the masculine form *Fatim*, *al-Tahira*, *al-Zakiya*, *al-Muhaddatha*, *al-Siddiqah*, *al-Batul*, and *Maryam al-Kubra*, and especially significant in connection with Tahirih, *Qurrat al-'Ayn* – one of the most common names by which Tahirih the Babi was known. Official occasions for honoring her are her birth (20 Ramadan), marriage to 'Ali, and the public feast of Mubahala (21, 24, 25 Dhu'l-Hijja). This last deserves a special word because it is in connection with the Mubahala that Fatima becomes known as one of the *Ahl al-Kisa'*, "People of the cloak." These are Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn, a group that represents an "elite within an elite" in Shi'ism.<sup>47</sup> The anniversary of her death (3 Jumada II and 2 Ramadan) is also befittingly observed. These are all public holy days in Iran and observed around the world. Other holy days, such as the Day of al-Ghadir (18th of Dhu' l-Hijja) and the Muharram observances – tradition has Fatima making a post mortem appearance at Karbala (which the Bab mentions in his tafsir) to lament the cruel fate of her son and his family and companions<sup>48</sup> – are public and private occasions for honoring her memory.

Other events in her life have particular interest here: she is depicted as threatening to remove her head covering twice: on one occasion to protest the treatment of 'Ali after the death of the Prophet,<sup>49</sup> and another time as threatening to remove her head covering in order to stop Abu Bakr and 'Umar from forcibly entering her house after the so-called election of the first caliph.<sup>50</sup> This will bring to mind Tahirih's removal of the veil that so scandalized even the Babis themselves.<sup>51</sup> In another tradition, she is presented as defiantly turning her back to the intruders to express her

<sup>44</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>45</sup> See McAuliffe, *Chosen of All Women*; and Ibn Shahrashub, Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin 'Ali. *Manaqib Al Abi Talib*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Ida', 1405/1980

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib*, vol.3 357-58 cited by Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*. For the name Qurrat al'Ayn, "Solace of the eyes," see also Abu'l-Layth al-Samarqandi (d373/983), *Tanbih al-Ghafilin*, 2nd ed. Taqqadum Press, 1324/1906, 7-25.

<sup>47</sup> For details on the proper observance of this important day, see 'Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-jinan* Beirut: Dar al-Ida', 1407/1987, 350-54. See also the related hadith *al-kisa'*, Qummi, *Mafatih*, 386-89; cf. also Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, 14.

<sup>48</sup> *Baq*, p. 211 in the course of the commentary on Qur'an 2:76; Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

<sup>49</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Mottahedeh, *Ruptured Spaces*

repugnance;<sup>52</sup> she is also seen traveling on horseback with `Ali to ask for the support of the Ansar (who, unfortunately had already committed themselves to Abu Bakr);<sup>53</sup> she is quoted as having challenged 'Umar himself: "You have left the body of the Apostle of God with us and you have decided among yourselves without consulting us, without respecting our rights."<sup>54</sup>

Thus we clearly see the figure of a politically active woman, one who could easily inspire others to similar action. It is curious, in light of this that one of the prevailing images associated with Fatima is that of a sickly and timid victim. Another element in Fatima's political biography is the troublesome Fadak affair. Abu Bakr, according to Shi'i sources, deprived Fatima of inheriting this productive oasis that the Prophet had promised her. This deprivation caused great hardship for her and her family and also deprived the cause of `Ali essential material support. In addition, there is the legend of the *mushaf* of Fatima, the book that Gabriel brought her for consolation after the death of her father.<sup>55</sup> As Veccia Vaglieri points out, the material on Fatima remains to be systematical studied. Once it is, however, it will be most interesting to notice whether or not these conflicting images are the result of confessional influences. In the meantime, the question posed by Veccia Vaglieri, did Imami Shi'ism borrow from Isma'ili Shi'ism in the veneration of Fatima? is quite pertinent to the study of the literature of the Shaykhi school in general. As I demonstrate, it is also pertinent in the study of the writings of the Bab, who, as far as we know, was an Imami Shi'i, born in Shiraz on 20 October 1819 (1 Muharram 1235).

### The Bab's Fatima

Many of the events or topics recounted above are touched upon and elaborated in the Bab's *tafsir*. It is crucial, however, first to establish some idea of what is to be expected. To do this, I rely upon the studies of Henry Corbin, who is the one Western scholar to have penetrated many of the mysteries that this kind of literature holds. In this case, we are particularly fortunate that Corbin devoted an entire book to the study of the spiritual feminine in Iranian religion. In Corbin's distinctive approach, Mazdean religious ideas are connected with Islamic Shiite gnosis, first in the work of Suhrawardi and finally, and more resoundingly, in the corpus of the Shaykhis, a corpus that remains lamentably understudied, though progress has been achieved since Corbin's time.<sup>56</sup> In any case, Corbin saw the founder of the Shaykhi school, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1826) and his

<sup>52</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib*, vol. 3, 359.

<sup>56</sup> See now Cole, *Individualism*, and *World as Text*, Rafati, *Development*, and parts of Todd Lawson, "The Quran Commentary of Sayyid Ali Muhammad, the Bab (1819-1850)." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. McGill University, Montreal, 1987. Until the mid 1970s Corbin's was really the only effort in the West, apart from Nicolas' pioneering work (A. L M Nicolas., *Essai sur le Cheikhisme*. 4 vols. Paris: Geuthner and Ernest Leroux, 1910-14), to devote serious attention to this intellectual development of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century in Iran.

successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, as revivers of "primitive Shiite gnosis."<sup>57</sup> It is even more fortunate that part of this book is a study of Fatima in the writings of Hajj Karim Khan Kirmani (1870), the Shaykhi leader who was, in some respects, the Bab's (1850) most bitter opponent. Both had been avid students of the teachings of Ahsa'i and Rashti (as had Tahiri herself). Corbin's reading of Kirmani's works will be shown to resonate with the image of Fatima in this early commentary by the Bab. It is still too soon to determine on what doctrinal grounds they might have differed with regard to Fatima, or indeed, if they differed at all. The main area of disagreement between the two was not a matter for scholasticism.

In this school of thought the Family of God, the Fourteen Very-Pure, function, according to Corbin, in a way "analogous to the *Aeons* of the pleroma in Valentinian gnosis." One of the distinctions between the Suhrawardian and Shaykhi cosmologies is discerned in the shift from a threefold to a fourfold cosmology. For Suhrawardi these were 1) the earthly, human world, "the object of sensory perception"; 2) the world of Soul or Malakut, "the world of imaginative perception" and 3) the cherubic or angelic world of Jabarut, "the object of intelligible knowledge."<sup>58</sup> Consonant with the motif of quaternity by which much of their thought is distinguished, Shaykhism added a fourth realm (as did Ibn 'Arabi), namely the sphere of deity, the world of *lahut*. For the Shaykhis, however, this realm was "occupied" only by the Family of God – not, as it were, God Himself. Fatima is located first and foremost in this supracelestial realm. As Corbin says, using one of his favorite metaphors:

One might say that [Shaykhi thought] allows us to hear the theme of the celestial Earth... in a still higher octave. Each octave is a new world, a new beginning, where everything is rediscovered, but at a different height, that is, in a higher mode of being. This succession of octaves is what allows the *ta'wil*, or spiritual hermeneutics, to be practiced authentically. Moreover, in the transcendent Person of Fatima as a member of the supreme Pleroma, we shall be hearing something like the motif of the *supracelestial Earth* ...<sup>59</sup>

The four universes or realms "symbolize with" each other so that the "historic dimension" is a means of discovering the sacred relationship between and among these worlds.

This will be essentially the esoteric hermeneutic, the *ta'wil*; it will be a discovery of the true and hidden meaning, the spiritual history that

<sup>57</sup> Corbin, 58; "primitive" here is both a formal and a chronological designation. By it such groups as the Nusayris, the early Isma'ilis, and other of the so-called *ghulat* are intended.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>59</sup> The passage continues: "And through this supracelestial Earth, we are led to the idea of a Shi'ite Sophiology, by which we shall perceive afresh something that Mazdean Sophiology already perceived in the Angel of the Earth, but this time at a new and higher level, since the *progressio harmonica* produces the resonance of harmonics which until then had remained silent." Corbin, 59-60).

becomes visible through the recital of external events. It will mean to "see things in Hurqalya.." <sup>60</sup>

In this quaternary world the relationship between male and female is accorded the highest possible value. Hurqalya is, of course, the abode of the Hidden Imam who is alive there and "in hiding" since his disappearance in 260/874. There is ample evidence throughout the works of the Bab, and particularly in the one under study here, that he himself shared a similar, if not identical, approach to history and scripture (although he does not use the word *Hurqalya* here). But we will see more of this later in this essay. <sup>61</sup>

There is no need to dwell further here on Corbin's harmonic rendition of the history of Iranian mythology and religious symbolism <sup>62</sup> whereby he can see the ancient Spondarmat in the Fatima of the Shi'a, except to say that the *apokatastasis*, the "restoration of all things to their primordial splendor and wholeness, to the state in which they were before the invasion of the Ahrimanic Counterpowers" that he perceives in Shaykhism, <sup>63</sup> is very much a feature of the clan of Babism. As we have already indicated, the authority and power of Tahirih (and the other Babis) is a result of three simultaneous events: a fulfillment of the past, a reenactment of the past, and a break with the past.

### Day of the Covenant

One of the more important controlling myths in Islam, whether Sunni or Shi'i, is the drama of God's establishing a covenant (*`ahd, mithaq*) between Himself and humanity through the prophet Adam. The Qur'an tells the story in a characteristically terse passage at Qur'an 7:172. At a time before the creation of the world, God summoned Adam to His presence whereupon he caused the "seeds" (*al-dharr*) of all future generations to come forth from Adam's loins. God confronted Adam – and this vast company thus arrayed before Him – with the question "Am I not your Lord?" (*a-lastu bi-rabbikum*). The immediate response was "Yea, verily!" (*bala*). The Qur'an explains that this was done so that no human would be able to say on the Day of Resurrection, when all would be given their just deserts, that they should be excused for their sins because they were not aware of their

<sup>60</sup> Corbin, 60.

<sup>61</sup> All of this may be found amplified in greater detail at Corbin, 60-73.

<sup>62</sup> Nothing if not baroque, Corbin's interest in the theme of the "celestial earth" (a basic coincidentia oppositorum, it should be noted) went far beyond, yet somehow remained centered, in the figure of Fatima. He offered the metaphor of music, specifically the *progressio harmonica* of the pipe organ, to explain what he saw as a beautiful and compelling Iranian enrichment of intellectual history: "Whoever is somewhat familiar with the organ knows what are referred to as "stops." Thanks to these stops, each note can cause several pipes of different lengths to "speak" simultaneously; thus, besides the fundamental note, a number of harmonic overtones can be heard. Among the contrivances that regulate them, the *progressio harmonica* designates a combination of stops which allows more and more overtones to be heard as one ascends towards the upper register, until at a certain pitch the fundamental note also resounds simultaneously" (Corbin, p. 51).

<sup>63</sup> On this see Todd Lawson, "A 'New Testament' for the Safavids: Interpretations of The Day of the Covenant (Quran 7:172) in Safavid Quran Commentary." *Proceedings of the Safavid Roundtable*, Edinburgh (1988), forthcoming.

obligation to God. The "Yea verily!" constitutes humanity's primordial assent to the divine covenant.<sup>64</sup> Within this covenant myth dwells the explanatory theory of all Islamicate religious authority. It has been particularly instrumental in justifying the mediation and negotiation of charismatic power and authority in a Sufi milieu, but no less in the Shi'i milieu.<sup>65</sup>

In Shi'i communities throughout the world, the eighteenth day of Dhu' l-Hijja, the pilgrimage month, is commemorated as the Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mithaq*) and anniversary of the public appointment by the Prophet Muhammad of `Ali as his successor at a small oasis known as Ghadir Khumm, "the pool of Ghadir." (In Iran, a Shi'i state, this date is an official public holiday.) This oasis was a way station between Mecca and Medina and it was here, during a rest on the way back from his last pilgrimage, that the Prophet made his famous speech, the words of which are preserved in both Sunni and Shi'i books of Tradition:

We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khumm. We performed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. And then he took `Ali by the hand and said to the people: 'Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: 'Yea verily!' [*bala*] And he took `Ali's hand and said: 'Of whomsoever I am Lord [*Mawla*], then `Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports `Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.' And `Umar [the future second caliph] met him ['Ali] after this and said to him: 'Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i.e., forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman.'<sup>66</sup>

This passage (along with its several variants) is important for two main reasons; 1) the establishment of the continuance of religious authority by the Prophet "the covenant"; 2) the use of the exquisitely polyvocal term *mawla*, which is a derivative of the root *wly*, upon which the word *walaya* is built. *Mawla* is a particularly interesting Arabic word in that it can mean either "master" or "client" – diametrically opposite denotations, according to usage. As such, it represents admirably the mutuality and reciprocal nature

<sup>64</sup> Corbin, 69.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Bowering, Gerhard, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari (d.283/896)*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980; Kazemi-Moussavi, Ahmad. *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam: From the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja'*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996.; Dabashi, Hamid. *Authority in Islam : From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1989; Arjomand, Sayyid Amir, ed. *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*. Albany : State University of New York Press, 1988.; Calder, Norman. *The Structure of Authority in Imami Jurisprudence*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1980; Stewart, Devin J. *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy : Twelver Shi'ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, tr. Momen, p. 15.

of *walaya*. But it also gives rise to alternate interpretations of this sermon, as the entire history of Islam will attest. It is as the de facto and de jure establishment of the sacred covenant that this sermon occupies us for the moment. This covenant functions as the *raison d'être* of Shi'ism. Those who recognize, subscribe to, uphold, and defend the appointment of 'Ali as Muhammad's rightful successor and leader – both spiritual and temporal – of the community of Muslims, are faithful to the covenant and may be considered believing Muslims (*muslim mu'min*). Those who acknowledge anyone else as the successor of Muhammad and leader of the community is accounted a breaker (*naqid*) of this covenant and an infidel (*kafir*).

A natural starting place, then, for a detailed examination of the person/figure/symbol of Fatima in the Bab's Qur'an commentary is the Covenant. The Bab draws a comparison or homologue between the Qur'anic primordial *yawm al-mithaq*, the events of which are narrated in Qur'an 7:172, and the Day of al-Ghadir. The first Qur'anic cue for this comparison is in verse 2:8: "Of the people there are some who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they do not really believe." The people specified here, according to the Bab, are those whom God will cause to forget faith in 'Ali's *walaya* on the Last Day. They are not believers because their faith is flawed, even though they may consider themselves true believers in 'Ali's spiritual authority:

Whoever knows that `Ali is the sign of God in the station of the Exclusive Divine Unity ... is one of the believers "in God and the Last Day," which is really the First Day, and it is the beginning of the mention of the created thing in the world of contingency, and it is the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of `Ali. Such a one is one of the believers. And whoever abandons this station enters into the category: "and he is not an exalted believer." May God protect us through Muhammad and his family from entering into this error!<sup>67</sup>

It will become clear below that "the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of `Ali" is an indirect reference to Fatima, who is the source of all light. The Bab strengthens the connection or homology between the Last Day mentioned here and the Day of the Covenant and the Day of al-Ghadir Khumm by quoting a long hadith from the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari's *tafsir*, in which the occasion of revelation (known in some circles as *sabab al-nuzul*) for this verse is established as the *Day of al-Ghadir*. In this verse, the Imam says God was warning Muhammad about those who feigned allegiance to `Ali following the sermon just quoted. The Bab says:

That place of testimony is the same as the "dimension" (*dharr*) of the primordial covenant, when the covenant of lordship was taken:

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<sup>67</sup> *Baq*, 47-48.

whoever was recognized [then] was recognized [for all time]. Indeed, "those possessed of minds" know what happened there by what happened here (Ghadir Khumm), the realm of this world (or "religion" *tashri*) is in accord with the realm of that world (or "divine creation" *takwin*). But this place of testimony (viz. the Day of al-Ghadir) is greater than the first place of testimony, the dimension of the affirmation of Divine Unity, while the second place of testimony is the dimension of the affirmation of Prophethood – nay, rather it is the essence of the Divine Cause. This place of testimony of the Day of al-Ghadir is the third place of testimony and the greatest dimension. The remaining place of testimony is the last: it is the dimension of the Fourth Support, the rising of the Qa'im, may God hasten his glad advent. This occasion of testimony will occur in the beginning of his appearance (or emergence, *zuhur*) and it is the dimension of the affirmation by their Shi'a that the Family of God are the worn of magnification in the midmost sanctity of praise."<sup>68</sup>

Thus the fourfold structure of the Bab's approach. The Bab says that the *shahada*, the true testimony to the truth of this, is none other than the Imams and Fatima.<sup>69</sup> The Bab demonstrates how Fatima is implicated in this covenant in his commentary on Qur'an 2:83. Here he says that the esoteric meaning of the word *kindred* is a clear designation of Fatima, just as the word *orphans* is a reference to al-Hasan and al-Husayn. "God has spoken here about the taking of the *covenant* with all created things in the eight Paradises, in affirmation of the *walaya* of 'Ali"<sup>70</sup>The Qur'anic verse is:

And remember We took a Covenant from the Children of Israel: Worship none but God; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; Speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and practice regular charity. Then did ye turn your back, except a few among you, and ye backslide even now." [Qur'an 2:83]

In another quaternary interpretation, the phrase: "those who broke the covenant" [Qur'an 2:27] refers to the covenant (*'ahd*) of Muhammad vis-à-vis the signs (*ayat*) of `Ali. This covenant was instituted in the world of the *Unseen* (*al-ghayb*), the spiritual realm. Although the term *lahut* is not used, nor the word *hurqalya*, it is clear that the realm of *al-ghayb* is a spiritual "space" with its own "time."

These signs were placed within (*fi*) the dimension (*dharr*) of the hearts [which represents] the station (*maqam*) of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), and [in] the dimension of the intellects [which represents] the level (*rutba*) of Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and [in] the atoms of souls [which represents] the abode of the Imamate (*imama*), and [in]

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 224.

the dimension of the bodies [which represents] the place (*mahall*) of the love of the Shi'a after God imposed this solemn binding upon all created things [which is] faith (*iman*) in Muhammad, `Ali, Hasan, Husayn, Ja'far, Musa, and Fatima.<sup>71</sup>

The first who "broke the covenant" was Abu Bakr.

He broke the covenant of God concerning His friends (*awliya*) in the unseen worlds and he violated the *walaya* of `Ali in its [future] appearances in the visible Imams . . . and he [broke the covenant] by taking the land of al-Fadak away from Fatima after he knew very well that the Apostle of God had specified it for her during his life and forbidden its produce to go to anyone else.<sup>72</sup>

In Kirmani's treatment of the Qur'anic Day of the Covenant when God demanded from the seed of Adam absolute obedience, this drama was originally played out in the realm of *lahut*, "long before" it achieved its first earthly iteration at the time of Adam. Its second, and most important iteration occurred at the pool called Ghadir Khumm when Muhammad appointed `Ali his successor and took a pact with all of the Muslims to this effect.<sup>73</sup> Fatima's response in this divine setting is precisely the "theurgic accomplishment" of becoming the Earth for the production of the cosmos. None can have access or perception of this realm, it is too ratified, powerful in its beauty and luminous beyond mortal ability to perceive. "The beings of the pleroma of the *lahut* are visible only in their apparitional forms [*ashbah*], which are the receptacles of their theophanies."<sup>74</sup> According to Kirmani, Fatima is the Earth of the sacred *lahuti* universe,<sup>75</sup> which is related to the mysterious earth of Hurqalya.

The Bab describes Fatima as the "Universal earth," "heaven" and "the Sabbath." This same idea may be evident in a particularly vivid passage of the Bab's *tafsir*. At verse 60 of *Surat al-Baqara*, for example, the water that

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 94. *kafirun* instead of the Qur'anic "losers" (*khasirun*, all mss.). These seven names are used as a kind of shorthand to represent the Prophet, Fatima, and the twelve Imams because although they are twelve, they may be known by using only these seven names; That is, each of the names Muhammad, `Ali, Hasan, and Husayn may be applied to more than one Imam while the names Fatima, Ja'far, and Musa can apply to only one person respectively. Earlier in this commentary, the Bab ad Qur'an 2:3 (Baq, 22-23), speaks of seven grades of faith (*iman*), taking his cue from *yuminuna*, "those who believe." One grade, the third, is faithfulness (*wafa'*) - a near synonym - associated specifically with Fatima.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>73</sup> For important background to the Shaykhi reading of Qur'an 7:172, see Lawson, *A 'New Testament'*

<sup>74</sup> Corbin, 63. A study of Shi'i *akhbari tafsir* on precisely the subject of the Day of the Covenant reveals that the apparitional forms of the "first" participants is more or less a standard topos. See Lawson, "A 'New Testament.'" This, of course, was one of Corbin's main points: the Shaykhis represent a revivification of very ancient modes of religiosity combined with a terminology that had more recently developed through the works of such important Iranian philosophers as Mulla Sadra (d.1640).

<sup>75</sup> Formed on the Arabic word *ilah* (god), *lahut* refers to the divine realm. Three other similar words are encountered in such discussions: *jabarut*, *malakut*, *mink* to refer to three realms that issue in descending order from the *lahut*. All of these worlds symbolize with each other. A fifth term, *nasut* (humanity, human dimension), is frequently encountered. It is built on the word *nas* and is the polar opposite of *lahut*. Between *lahut* and *nasut* the whole spectrum of cosmic activity and events occurs.

gushed forth from the rock at twelve different places after Moses struck it with his staff, is said to represent the *walaya* of all the Imams. The Bab says that although the water issued from these various places, it was in fact the same water. The station of Fatima is further defined here as that without which *walaya* could not have appeared in the world:

And remember Moses prayed for water for his people; We said: "Strike the rock with thy staff." Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God, and do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth. [Qur'an 2:60]

The Bab says, the striker here is Muhammad, the staff is `Ali, and the stone [from which the water came forth] is Fatima. And the springs are the twelve Imams. `Ali, by virtue of *walaya*, is counted among them and by virtue of the rank of staff is also distinguished from them. The point of this Qur'anic passage is that it corroborates the history of Islam. Or, more important, the Bab, through this interpretation, demonstrates that in the eternal word of God, the story of Muhammad and his family had been established or "prophesied." History, according to this approach (as Corbin observed), is best seen as a subject for *ta'wil*: it is symbolic (as distinct from allegorical). God commanded Muhammad to give his daughter Fatima in marriage to `Ali so that all people "at all times" might be able to recognize their Imam, to "eat and drink of the splendours of the knowledge dispensed by your Imam through the grace (*fadl*) of Muhammad."<sup>76</sup> Some sources even suggest that at this marriage (which occurred "first" in the spiritual realm) God himself was *wali* for Fatima.<sup>77</sup> Such a myth nicely supplies a narrative explanation for those verses in the Qur'an, mentioned above, which say that God is a *wali* or protector of the believers.

In the Bab's commentary at 2:29, we encounter another instance of the historical event used as a subject of *ta'wil*. And here we also encounter Fatima as the spiritual reality of a heavenly earth. The Qur'anic verse is: "It is He who hath created for you all things that are on earth; then He turned Himself to heaven, and he gave order and perfection to the seven heavens; and of a[[ things he hath perfect knowledge" [Qur'an 2:291.

Fatima here is described as being this "universal earth" out of which the Imams will appear.

<sup>76</sup> Baq, 192-93. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima," noticed this identification of Fatima with the rock "among Isma'ilis and the deviant sects" and says further that she has found no trace of such an idea in the Imami sources. According to Kashani, Muhsin Fayd. *al-Safi fi Tafsir Kalam Allah al-Wafi*. 5 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami li-l-Matbu'at, 1979-82. Vol 1., 136-37, Moses struck the rock invoking the name of Muhammad and his family; there is no mention of Fatima's being the rock in Kashani or Bahrani, two late-seventeenth-century Safavid works. But see Isfahani, *Tafsir*, 244 where a somewhat rationalistic presentation of this reading is found. Isfahani avoids the extreme personifications and "allegorizing" found in the *tafsir* of the Bab. (n.b the possible connection between *hajar* "rock" and Hagar, the wife of Abraham and mother of the Arabs, as a manifestation of Fatima).

<sup>77</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

God made the real meaning of this "comprehensive earth" to be Fatima, upon her be God's blessing and peace. And [He made] what was in her to be the Imams, upon them be God's blessing and peace. He is the One who created, through the angels, all that is in the Earth of the Divine Exclusive Unity, which is Fatima, for Muhammad, upon him be God's blessing and peace.

"Then He lifted Himself to heaven," that is, He married her [Fatima] to `Ali and thus she is equated with heaven as far as honor (*sharfa*) is concerned. Thus God made her ... "one of the mighty portents, a warning to mankind, to any of you that chooses to press forward or to follow behind" [Qur'an 74:36-37].<sup>78</sup>

In Corbin's summary of Kirmani, we discern the logic of the Bab's hermeneutic: Since all earthly events are reflections of a pre-eternal order, the earthly marriage of `Ali and Fatima also had its purest and holiest occurrence in the supracelestial realm. The earthly marriage in Medina thus symbolized the original union that was itself "the manifestation of an eternal syzygy originating in the eternity of the pleroma of the *lahut*. The First Imam and Fatima are related to each other in the same reciprocal way as the first two hypostases [of neoplatonism], *`Aql* and *Nafs*, Intelligence and Soul, or in terms more familiar to us (because they go back to Philo): *Logos* and *Sophia*."<sup>79</sup> It is also of some interest to note that Kirmani "finds" Fatima in the Qur'anic verse quoted here by the Bab (74:36-37).<sup>80</sup> An examination of more traditional commentaries discloses that this exegesis is quite old indeed. Thus the interpretations of both the Bab and Kirmani represent in this instance a revivification of ancient religious ideas.<sup>81</sup> Whether the following striking development also has its roots in the early history of Shi'i Qur'an interpretation remains to be established. The Bab continues his commentary on Qur'an 2:29:

<sup>78</sup> *Baq*, 112.

<sup>79</sup> *Corbin*, 64.

<sup>80</sup> *Corbin*, 66

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Bahrani, al-Sayyid Hashim al-. *Kitab al-Burhan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*. 4 vols. Tehran: Chapkhaneh Aftab, 1375/1955. Vol. 4, 402 and the *hadith* transmitted by al-Qummi, *Mafatih*, via the following *isnad*: al-Husayn b. Muhammad ... al-Baqir, the fifth Imam who it seems was the first to interpret the verse as such. The immediate translation for this interpretation would seem to be grammatical. "This is but one of the mighty portents" translates the Arabic: *innaha l'ihda al-kubra* modifies the previous litany of three portents: "the moon, the night, and the dawn." The Qur'an collapse all three in a not-uncharacteristic rhetorical gesture. The tension between plurality and singularity is represented in the grammatical convention that casts nonhuman plural objects in the feminine. The grammatical feminine is thus the exception rather than the rule. To the Shi'i exegete such an anomalous linguistic event is demystified by identifying it with one of the Family of God, in this case the only female member of that Family, Fatima. It should always be remembered in this context that the Arabic word for "earth" – *ard* – is grammatically feminine. That such otherwise superfluous considerations can have irreversible and long-range effects on doctrine is born out of the example from Christianity. It seems certain that the Johannine "In the beginning was the Word/logos" was an adjustment to the Septuagint's preoccupation with wisdom/Sophia, precisely because it was felt inappropriate to refer to Jesus by means of a feminine noun. Note the interesting, if oblique, confirmation of this in the Arabic translation of the New Testament. Here, in the process of changing logos to *kalmia* a change in grammatical gender occurs. Yet, the resistance to referring to Jesus by means of a feminine noun is apparent in the Arabic: *fi 'l-bad' kana 'l-kalima...* rather than the grammatical *fi 'l-bad' kanat al-kalima...* This anomaly is standard in all Arabic translations of the Bible.

So, in reality it was she who turned to the heaven and fashioned them seven heavens that is, the seven proofs who are equal to `Ali, upon him be God's blessing and peace, with regard to their Origination. The seven, when they go through the processes of Origination and Invention become fourteen manifestations of Origination. And they are seven heavens.<sup>82</sup>

The words *fashioned* and *equal* do not convey the exegetical device of paranomasia with which the Bab conveys this interpretation. The Qur'anic *sawwahunna* ("he gave order and perfection") is formed from the same root as the Qur'anic *istawa* ("then He turned Himself"). This root, *sawiya*, can be variously translated as "leveling," "making smooth," "making equal," "ordering." That the world is orderly – cosmos rather than chaos – is a classic Qur'anic argument for the existence and function of God as orderer and sustainer. How this ordering and creation is to be explained is of course controversial. The Bab holds to a distinctive cosmogony entailing twin creative processes;<sup>83</sup> through these the seven heavens are rendered fourteen – the number of the Family of God. This is a perfect example of the otherworldly potency of Fatima's creative status: she is not only the "Mother of her Father" (*umm abiha*) but the creatrix of her own self and the twelve Imams as well. Kirmani, as recounted by Corbin, seems acutely apt in this instance:

Without the person of Fatima there would be neither the manifestation of the Imamate, nor Imamic initiation. For the pleroma of these entities of light is the very place of the divine mystery. Their light is the divine light itself; their transparency allows it to shine through, retaining none of their own ipseity [viz "ego"] ... they are the very substance of pre-eternal Love; they are the identity of love, lover, and beloved, that identity which all Sufis have aspired to live ....<sup>84</sup>

As Corbin summarizes; Fatima is the Soul of creation, the Soul of each creature, "the constitutive part of the human being." Fatima is "the eternally feminine in man, and that is why she is the archetype of the heavenly Earth; she is both paradise and initiation into it, for it is she who manifests the

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<sup>82</sup> *Baq*, 112-13

<sup>83</sup> *ibda'* and *ikhтира'*. Briefly, the first is the action of God, and the second is the action of the demiurge. For a concise explanation of this terminology as it was used in a much earlier but apparently perfectly cognate context, see A. Altmann & S. M. Stern. *Isaac Israeli, A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century: His Works Translated with Comments and an Outline of His Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958, 152-52. See now Amir-Moezzi, *Cosmogony*, 317-322. This scholar's series of articles, published in various journals and books, entitled "Aspects d'Imamologie Duodécimaine" is essential reading for the present topic. It is hoped that it will be available in a single volume in the near future. See Amir-Moezzi, *Aspects*, 193-216.

<sup>84</sup> *Corbin*, 63-64. See my translation of the Bab's *Risalat fi'l-Suluk* for an explicit mention of this same idea in the same vocabulary Lawson, *Journey*

divine names and attributes revealed in the theophanic persons of the Imams."<sup>85</sup>

The ontological rank of the Soul and the reality of the Soul are the rank of Fatima. The Imams are masculine as agents of cosmogony, since relation is their soul; as authors of spiritual creation they are feminine, since they are the Soul and since the Soul is Fatima.... the theophanic and initiatic function of the holy Imams is precisely their "Fatimic" degree of being (their *fatimiya*, which we faithfully translate as "Sophianity"), and this is how Fatima comes to be called Fatima Fatir, Fatima Creator.<sup>86</sup>

"Without the person of Fatima there would be neither the manifestation of the Imamate, nor Imamic initiation."<sup>87</sup> Corbin points out that it is in the light of such theories the Isma'ili epithet Fatima Fatir (Fatima the Creator) begins to be heard and understood, but this time in a new "key." Fatima, the "queen of women" – a frequent honorific – should really be understood as the "sovereign of feminine humanity" where "feminine" equals "meaning,"<sup>88</sup> or "the totality of the beings of the Possible [*al-imkan*]! All creatures have been created out of the Soul itself, out of the Anima of the holy Imams."<sup>89</sup> The Bab will echo this second idea below in his commentary on Qur'an 2:35. Whether the Bab recognized anything like a Jungian "feminine dimension of humanity" is difficult to say with any certainty at this times.<sup>90</sup>

Kirmanian says the Imams are the brides of the prophet inasmuch as they have been created from the soul or are the soul of the Prophet. As the Qur'an [16:74 and 30:20] says, "He has made wives for you out of your own souls." The real "mother of the believers" is the initiatic function of the Imams. But this "motherhood" ultimately has its source in Fatima. Spiritual birth happens through the "Fatimic" agency of the Imams. The Prophet has said, "I and `Ali are the father and the mother of this community." The Bab quotes this tradition in his commentary on Qur'an 2:83.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Corbin, 66.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>88</sup> See the cognate idea carried, for example, in the phrase *ara'is al-bayan* (the brides of meaning), the title of an esoteric *tafsir* by the mystic Ruzbehan Baqli (d. 1209). Just as a verse of poetry is called a *bayt* (house, tent), the meaning of the verse is considered the bride waiting within the house or tent.

<sup>89</sup> Corbin, 67.

<sup>90</sup> However 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Baha'i leader and thinker (and presumably influenced by the Bab's ideas), spoke of the "feminization of humanity" as a precondition for the establishment of universal peace: "The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced" (J. E. Esslemont, *Baha u'llah and the New Era*, 5th rev. ed. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1987, 149). This could be a perfect example of how such an idea as "equality of the sexes," which appears incontestably modern and Western (i.e., foreign to Islam), is in reality a native outgrowth of Islamic culture.

<sup>91</sup> Corbin, 67-68. The Bab's commentary, on Qur'an 2:83, is as follows: "And when We took compact the Children of Israel: 'You shall not serve any save God; and to be good to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy; and speak good to men, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms.' then you turned

At Qur'an 2:65-66 Fatima as the creative element par excellence appears as both the true meaning of "the Sabbath" and the primary principle of creation or "primal command." It is reasonable to ask if Tahirih the Babi was referring to this when she spoke of "the primal truth" mentioned by Amanat. There, she is presented as seeing Fatima as a role model.<sup>92</sup> It is possible that she was referring to Fatima as the cosmogonic principle we are discussing. This is not to say that Tahirih the Babi did not see in Fatima (the mother of the Imams) a role model. But in line with the metaphysical mood of the time and place which our texts reflect, it is probable that she was interested in Fatima's ontological value before her sociological value. We also see in this commentary a reappearance of the idea introduced at verse 3 of the Fatiha above: a soul perceives according to its capacity, through himself. It sees what it is.

The comprehensive or universal dimension of the Fatimid reality is brought out again in the Bab's commentary on 2:37: "Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and turned towards him; truly he turns, and is All-compassionate" [Qur'an 2:37].

The Bab introduces his discussion by pointing out that words are "single letters that have been combined." The Family of God represent several stations with regard to these letters: Muhammad is the point, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn are each different kinds of *alif* (viz., *layniya*, *mutaharraka*, *ghayr ma`tuf*), the letters that do not change form in the Arabic script (*dal* etc.) represent the remainder of the Imams. Finally, the status of *word* is reserved for Fatima alone, the point being that "meaning" itself is implicated and articulated through the Fatimid reality. The belief in the Divine unity taught by the other prophets is in fact created by God himself from this word. In actual fact, the Bab says, "Adam received certain words" of acknowledgment of the *walaya* of the Tree of the Divine Exclusive Unity that God had forbidden "all other than itself from approaching." But when the visible form of Fatima was manifest to him, by means of his own self, God cast into his soul (his *huwiya*) the likeness of repentance and "He turned to him."

Typically, the Bab here cites, in rapid and skillful succession, a Tradition and another Qur'anic verse supporting his *tafsir*: "The Imam, upon whom be

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away, all but a few of you, swerving aside." The Bab says that God is speaking about His "taking compact" with all created things "in the eight paradises," to recognize the *walaya* of `Ali. The first of these paradises is the Depth of Unity (*lujjat al-wahda*) and is characterized by the command, "You shall not serve any save God ... [and this] without reference [to anything else]." In the second paradise the compact was taken by means of recognizing the *Universal Walaya* (*al-walayyat al-kulliya*) of the "parents," i.e., Muhammad and `Ali who are, respectively, the symbols of universal fatherhood and motherhood. Such recognition, the Bab says, is in reality the good mentioned in the verse, because to do good means to do good to all according to what each merits. The good that these particular parents deserve has only been hinted at, because were the Bab to openly (*bi'l-tasrih*) describe it, the prattling enemies (*mubtilun*) would cavil at it. [*Baq*, 223-24.]

<sup>92</sup> Amanat, *Resurrection*, 331. No source for this statement is given here.

peace, said: "We are the words of God." "God (al-Haqq)," says the Bab, "confirms this statement in His mighty Book with the following words."<sup>93</sup>

Say: 'If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words *of* my Lord are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it.' [Qur'an 18:109]

And the "replenishment" (*madad*) is origination (*ibda'*) and invention (*ikhtira`*) which God placed under the grade of their lordship. And this origination is spent before the light of Fatima is spent. "And [this light] is inexhaustible" [*wa ma lahu min nifad* = Qur'an 38:54].

Fatima is also "the Sabbath":

And well you know there were those among you that transgressed the Sabbath, and We said to them, "Be you apes, miserably slinking!" (2:65)

In the presence of the Lord, the meaning (*al-murad*) of Sabbath is Fatima the Resplendent (*al-Fatima al-Zahra*), because she is the Day of the Book. Verily, God has caused all created things to appear through her; this is clear. And verily God knows that the people of the contingent world are not the Family of Muhammad, because their realities are the shadows of her body, according to the degree to which she appeared to them through their own souls (*la-hum bi-him*). But they transgressed what God had taught them concerning true doctrine (*i`tiqad*) [namely, they thought] "our [human] realities are in the station of unity and gnosis (*maqam al-wahda wa'l-ma'rifa*), and thus more exalted than her body." God said to them: "The wage of their [meager] knowledge concerning the gnosis of Fatima is 'Be you apes, miserably slinking.'"

He who claims that the prophets have become unified in the region of their own hearts as the body of Fatima was unified, his Creator has made him, at the very moment of this arrogant claim, an ape. The wage of sin is justice from God for what they claimed.<sup>94</sup>

Kirmanian has elaborated on the epithet *al-Zahra* in a discussion of the Logos/Intellect. Corbin summarizes: The Intellect is the suprasensory

<sup>93</sup> *Baq*, 159-60. On *shabah*: The beings of the pleroma of the *lahut* are visible only in their apparitional forms, which are the receptacles of their theophanies (*Corbin*, 63; cf. Huwayzi, 'Abd `Ali, *al-Kitab Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalayn*, 5 vols. Qum: n.p., 1383/1963-1385/1965, Vol. 1, 56-57, #142-44). The words are a prayer; the names of the six (above) and an invocation of these names. #149: God created the light of Muhammad before the heavens and the earth and the throne and *the kursi* and the tablet and the pen and paradise and hell. 149, (cont. p. 58) contains reference to ring of Solomon (Bahrani, *Burhan*, vol. 1, 86, #2 as Huwayzi #3): Adam was expelled on 1 Dhu al-qa'da, and on the 8th of Dhu al-Hijja Gabriel sent him to Minna. See now Amir-Moezzi, *Cosmogony* cited above.

<sup>94</sup> *Baq*, 198-99. The last two sentences are perhaps a reference to a specific controversy. Unfortunately, the details of this are unknown to me.

calling for visible Form, while the station of Fatima corresponds exactly to this visible Form: "[The logos] is like the archetypal body, the inner astral mass of the sun, invisible to human perception, in relation to the visible Form, which is its *aura*, brilliance and splendor.... this is why Fatima has been called by a solar name: Fatima al-Zahra ... the totality of the universe consists of this light of Fatima...."<sup>95</sup> Fatima is furthermore the soul (*nafs*, "Anima") of the Imams, "she is the Threshold or Gate (*bab*) through which the Imams effuse the gift of their light" she is "all thinkable reality." "Her eternal Person, which is the secret of the world of the Soul, is also its manifestation (*bayan*), without which the creative Principle of the world would remain unknown and unknowable, forever hidden."<sup>96</sup> The Bab's commentary on 2:66 is similar:

“And We made it a punishment exemplary for all the former times and for the latter, and an admonition to such as are godfearing.”  
[Qur'an 2:66]

God tells about the evildoers who are opposed [to the true *walaya*] namely, that they allude to God by means of a triple allusion (*isharat al-tathlith*).<sup>97</sup> God says that they are apes referring to those who turn to the sign of their own *tawhid* with worldly eyes (*bi'lnazar al-imkani*).... Those who "fear" what God commanded vis a vis drawing near to [Fatima] by attaining the depth of the Fatimid Exclusive Unity (*lujjat al-ahadiyat al-fatimiya*) without modality or allusion (*bila kayf aw ishara*),<sup>98</sup> and fear what God commanded, namely that none would draw near to her/it [*lujja* is feminine] except by clinging to knowledge of Fatima (*bi'l-i`tigad fi ma`rifat Fatima*). This itself is impossible in the contingent world, except to the degree that she appears to whatever is other than her by means of whatever is other than Him. And she is the Primal Command (*al-amr al-awwal*; cf. Amanat's "primal truth"), and nothing else. Therefore God made His admonition compelling for the godfearing.<sup>99</sup>

In his discussion of the various levels of the "return" to God (*thumma ilayhi turja una*, Qur'an 2:28), the Bab says that God created Fatima from the light of His essence (*nur dhatihi*) and that all the prophets have their beginning, and therefore their return in the Depth of the Exclusive Unity which Depth was "invented" (*ikhtira`*) from the light of the body of Fatima. "And as for the generality of believers, God originated them from the shadows of the

<sup>95</sup> Corbin, 64.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>97</sup> Baq, 200. This is possibly an allusion to the first three Sunni caliphs whom the Shi'a consider usurpers of 'Ali's position and breakers of the divine covenant.

<sup>98</sup> That is through pure contemplation, without images or thoughts contaminated by "the world." This is a reference, one of many throughout the work, to the famous *Hadith Kumayl*.

<sup>99</sup> Baq, 199-200.

realities of the prophets (*zill haga'iq al-anbiya*). So their return is to these."<sup>100</sup>

The beginning of the Act (*al-fi'l*) is the Depth of the Exclusive unity (*lujjat al-ahadiya*) and its return is to it. And the beginning of passivity (that which is receptive of act: *infi'al*) is the sea of the inclusive unity (*tamtam al-wahidiya*), and its return is to it. And for each grade there is a station in [the cosmic process of] Origin and Return.<sup>101</sup>

Another interesting appearance of Fatima in this commentary is her identification with the Tree that Adam and Eve were commanded to avoid at Qur'an 2:35. Here the Bab says that the Tree is "absolute contingency – because all of the manifestations (*tajalliyat*) are enfolded in it. "Tree," *shajara*, it will be noted, is feminine, so that the Arabic reads "enfolded in her." This is perfectly analogous to the Imams being enfolded within Fatima as discussed earlier. Continuing, the Bab says, "As for Adam, God created the beginning of his existence from the superabundance of the luminous rays of the body of Fatima."

And a [created] thing may not "draw nigh" to [anything] beyond its origin. So, when Adam "drew nigh" to the Tree of Reality shining forth from Fatima by means of the "drawing nigh" of existence, he disobeyed his Lord, because God commanded him to not to approach it, except through an instance of ecstatic consciousness (*al-wijdan*). At the time of such an experience, the "thing drawn nigh unto" is the Tree itself and nothing other than it.<sup>102</sup>

Adam's disobedience is also related to Fatima in the commentary at Qur'an 2:6: "Verily as for those who disbelieve, it is all the same to them whether ye warn them or ye warn them not, they will not have faith." Adam's repentance after his expulsion from the Garden is the result of his having been made aware of the generosity of Fatima. Adam had shown covetousness, one of the three sources of *kufr* according to Ja'far alSadiq, when he wanted to eat from the Tree.

The first disobedience of Adam was his desire for the Tree of the Divine Inclusive Unity. Indeed, his desire was the very creation of

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 154. Here it is perhaps an affirmation of the agency and efficacy of the specifically Shi'i form of "enlightenment" referred to by Corbin as "instase". Cf., in this regard, Fritz Meier's definition of *wijdan* as "being touched inside". Meier, Fritz. *Die "fawa'ih al-gamal wa fawatih al-galal" des Nagmuddin al-Kubra*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1957 *fawl* 41 & 95; 101 German text. The terms *wijdan*, derived from *wujud* "finding" denotes "ecstasy" in Arabic and "conscience" in Persian. I have combined the two meanings here in "ecstasy of consciousness" – a paradoxical event of awareness in which there is no distinction between object and subject, and therefore – according to the implied syllogism – no awareness. *Wijdan* can also connote an intensification or "thickening" of the experience of being/existence analogous, perhaps, to poetry (*Dichtung*) as a thickening of the experience of language. The language here is also another explicit reference to the *Hadith Kumayl*.

this Tree! Otherwise, he would have remained a dweller in the Divine Exclusive Unity, not desiring anything else. He would not have abandoned the Garden of Muhammad and his Family. At the time of this desire came shirk. And when this desire came about he abandoned the Garden and the Divine Will became attached to the Divine Purpose, and this is Eve and Adam. God created her from the Divine Will for the comfort of Adam. When he disobeyed, he left the Garden of the Divine Ipseity (*huwiya*) and he entered the black sea of this world below-a veritable fire of duality where even the qualities of submissiveness and humility fight with one another. He perceived the generosity (*jud*) of Fatima. Then he lamented and he affirmed to God his belief in al-bada' [viz., the distinctively Shi'i belief that God can change His mind, or "start anew"] and attested to the prohibition of wine and he wept thirty days, then he repented towards God by clinging to the love of the recognition of the Family of God. God accepted his repentance, and thus did Adam become one "of those who do good."<sup>103</sup>

### Love and Authority

We close this survey of Fatima in the Bab's *tafsir* with the subject that opened the study, namely *walaya*, "spiritual authority," and its dimension of love (*mahabba*). At verse 3 of *Surat al-Baqara*, the subject of Absolute Walaya is encountered. Here the Qur'anic statement "those who perform the prayer" is said by the Bab to imply general obedience to Muhammad and his Trustees (or: Legatees, *awsiya*) and his Progeny (*nabt*) through the *Most Great Absolute Walaya* (*al-walaya almutlaqa al-kubra*). While in other statements *Absolute Walaya* was linked to 'Ali alone,<sup>104</sup> here it includes all of the Imams. In the same section *walaya* is identified with *tawhid*, affirmation of the divine unity. The Bab says that the act of prayer (*salat*) "from beginning to end" is the "form for affirming divine uniqueness" (*surat al-tafriid*), the "temple (*haykal*) for affirming the divine unity (*tawhid*)," and the "visible form (or: pre-vivified form, *shabah*) of *walaya*." This being the case, only the actual bearers of *walaya* are able to perform it properly because it is the foremost station of distinction between the Beloved (*mahbub*, i.e., God) and the lover. The Family of God (*al Allah* = Muhammad, Fatima, and the 12 Imams) are the true bearers of the meaning of the divine love mentioned in the famous hadith *qudsi*: "I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created mankind in order to be known." This love (*mahabba*) was manifested (*tajalla*) by God to them by means of their own selves (*la-hum bi-him*), to such a degree of exclusivity

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46 Cf. Tusi, *al-Tibyan*, vol. 1, pp. 59-60: This verse was revealed about Abu Jahl according to al-Rabi' b. Anis, and al-Balkhi and al-Maghribi chose this; according to Ibn Abbas, it was sent down about the Jewish leaders around Mecca; some say it was sent down about the Arab idolators. Tabari chose Ibn 'Abbas: "We say rather that the verse has a general meaning."

<sup>104</sup> Baq, p. 195.

that this divine love subsists only through them, and pure servitude appears only in them.

The Bab continues to say that the Family of God are the places (*mahall*) where servitude and all lordship (*'ubudiyat and rububiyat*) distinguish themselves, implying that it is through their act of servitude that they have been invested with the rank of lordship in relation to others.

Whoever, then, confesses the truth of their *walaya* in "the region of pure servitude" has in fact performed the prayer according to all the stations of the Merciful One. And he who performs the prayer [this way] also "pierces the veils of glory" (*subuhat al-jalal*) and enters the house of glory (*bayt al-jalal*), where such a one will eternally dwell in the protecting shade of their *walaya*.<sup>105</sup>

At verse 62, the term *Absolute Walaya* is associated again with the entire Family of God, because they are sanctified servants who do nothing of their own wills, but rather the will of God: "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness – their reward awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow."

The "works of righteousness" mentioned in this verse therefore are described as being represented, par excellence, by the act of recognizing the *Absolute Walaya* of the Family of God; and "their reward awaits them with 'Ali." In the context of the verse itself, the suggestion is that non-Muslims are implicated in the responsibility of recognizing the authority of 'Ali and the Family of God. This may offer an indication of the way in which "absolute" (*mutlaq*) is to be understood. It should be noted that the last phrase of the above verse is repeated at Qur'an 10:62, where it is specifically "the friends of God" (*awliya' allah*) who will neither grieve nor sorrow. Such cross references and correspondences are most certainly not accidental, particularly in this case where the later verse corroborates this interpretation by virtue of its vocabulary (*awliya'plural of wali*).<sup>106</sup>

Love as a synonym for *walaya* is of course not new with the Bab, but it is important that this aspect of *walaya* be constantly kept in mind as a means of holding the other connotations of the term, such as "authority" and "power," in perspective. This equivalence led Corbin to state that Shi'ism is pre-eminently a religion of spiritual love<sup>107</sup> – a very large assertion that must be considered in the somewhat ratified context of Corbin's preoccupations. However, insofar as devotion to the *walaya* of the Imam represents, in essence, an act of love, the assertion seems to stand.

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<sup>105</sup> This is perhaps an example of the antinomian motif so prominent in certain so-called extremist Shi'i texts and teachings.

<sup>106</sup> *Baq*, 195-96.

<sup>107</sup> E.g., *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., i, 285-303 and iii, 210.

In the commentary on Qur'an 2:23, "love" is again associated with *walaya*. The Bab says:

None can attain to the Depth of the Exclusive Divine Unity (*lujjat al-ahadiya*) except by means of his ('Ali's) *walaya*. It is the goal (*maqsud*) of your existence (*wujudi-kum*), because God has made you for the sake of this love (*mahabba*). And He has put His life (*hayat*) and His might (*'izz*) in it, to the extent that such is possible in the contingent world – if only you understood .

Love is related to the idea of knowledge/*ma' rifa* (gnosis), by virtue of the "theosophical" axiom: the more one knows the more one loves, and the more one loves the more one knows. This axiom is represented in the Islamic instance by the *Tradition of the Hidden Treasure*, quoted above: God's love or desire to be known set the terms of spiritual development for "all time." True knowledge is attained through love and devotion, and if this devotion be tested through hardship, the love, and therefore the attendant knowledge (or vice versa) is the purer. All of the Family of God suffered, but perhaps none more than Fatima, who as the mother of all suffers doubly. In his commentary on Qur'an 2:25, the Bab states that "the Garden," that is, Paradise, is indeed the love of the visible form of Fatima (*mahabbat shabah Fatima*).

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before." For they are given things in similitude (*mutashabihan*); and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein forever. [2:25]

For the people of inner knowledge "God gave glad tidings to those who believe" in Muhammad and do righteous deeds with regard to his Trusteeship by means of allegiance to 'Ali. For them await gardens, and these [gardens] are the love (*hubb*) of Fatima underneath which are rivers, meaning the two Hasans [ i.e., al-Hasan and al-Husayn). ... the fourth [river] is of red wine, flowing for the fragmentation (*kasr*) of all things and their refashioning (*sawgh*) according to the divine signs and tokens. And by it the love bodies (*al-ajasad ab-mahabba*) of the Shi'a of the Pure Family of God are reddened. And God fashioned in this river the forms of the believers. And God wrote at its head; "Love of the Shi'a of Ali is My fortress (*hisni*). Therefore, he who enters My fortress is secure from My chastisement." Every one who drinks from a river: they say, "This is that" in which God has put all the lights of the four signs [i.e., *tawhid*, *nubuwwa*, *imama*, *shi'a*).... And there for them shall be

spouses purified and virtuous ... And they shall dwell forever in the love of Fatima.<sup>108</sup>

Given the dramatic role played by Tahirih – as the reappearance of Fatima in the formation and development of the Babi religion, such words as these of the Bab's give us an enhanced understanding of the sources of her authority and influence and raise the question, Must a challenge to the status quo entail a break with the past?

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108 *Baq*, 87: "love of the form of Fatima" (mahabbat shabah Fatima). Additional works consulted include: Abu Lawz, Yusuf. *Fatima Tadhhabu Mubakkira ila al-Huqul*. Damascus: Ittihad al-kuttub al-arab, 1983.; 'Adawi, Muhammad Mustafa, *al-Qissat ar-Raha li's-Sayyida Fatima az-Zahra* (Cairo, n.d.). Translated in Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958, 217-22.; Bani, Omol. *Fatima statt Farah: Erfahrungen einer Frau in der iranischen Revolution*. Tübingen: Iva-Verlag, 1980. Bayat, Mangol. *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982, 1-58; Bursi, Rajab al-. *Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar Amir al-Mu'minin*. Beirut: n.p., 1979. Furat al-Kufi, Furat ibn Ibrahim. *Tafsir Furat al-Kufi*. Ed. Muhammad `Ali al-Ghurawi Urdubadi. Najaf al Matba'a al-Huyderiya 1353/1934.; Gerstle, C. Andrew. "Text as Performance: Tragedy in Japanese Drama." In *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, ed. Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner. Singapore: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994, 205-28; Hajajji-Jarrah, Soraya. "Women's Modesty in Qur'anic Commentaries: The Founding Discourse." In *Women and the Veil in North America*, eds. Sajjida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough. Toronto: Women's Press, 2003.; Hermansen, Marcia K. "Fatimeh as a Role Model in the Works of Ali Shari'ati." In *Women and Revolution in Iran*, ed. Guity Nashat. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983., 87-96; Khamis, Muhammad Atiya. *Fatima al-Zahra*. Cairo, 1965.; Todd Lawson, Akhbari Shi'i Approaches to Tafsir." In *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul- Kader A. Shareef. New York and London: Routledge, 1993, 173-210.; Massignon, Louis. "Der Gnostische Kult der Fatima im Shiitischen Islam." In *Opera Minora*. Beirut: 1963a, vol. 1, 514-22."La mubahala de Medine et l'hyperdulie de Fatima." In Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*. Beirut: Dar el-Maaret Liban, 1963, vol. 1, 592-618.Massignon, Louis. "L'Oratoire de Marie a l'Aqca, vu sous le voile de deuil de Fatima." In Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*. Beirut: Dar el-Maaret Liban, 1963, vol. 1, 592-618.Massignon, Louis. "L'Experience musulmane de la Compassion ordonnee a l'Universel a propos de Fatima et de Hallaj." In Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*. Beirut: Dar el-Maaret Liban, 1963, vol. 3, pp. 642-53; *The Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. Translated from the French with a biographical foreword by Herbert Mason. 4 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982; Milani, Fadil Husayni al-. *Fatima al-Zahra umm abiha*. Beirut: Dar al-Ta'rif lil'matbu'at wamuassasa Ahl al-Bayt, 1979; Qazwini, Muhammad Kazim al-. *Fatima al-Zahra min al-Mahd ilal'-Lahd*, Beirut: Dar al-Sadiq,1977; Rashti, Sayyid Kazim. *Sharh al-Qasida al-Lamiya*. Tabriz; litho., n.p.,1270; Stumpel, Isabel. "Tahira Qurrat al-'Ain." In *Iran im 19 Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i Religion*, ed. Christoph Burgel and Isabel Schayani. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998, 127-43.Tabrisi, Abu `Ali, al-. *Mamma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr wa Dar al-Kitab al Lubnani, 1377/1957.