Baha'u'llah's Seclusion in Kurdistan

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Historians have always experienced difficulty in reconstructing the precise nature of the events that led to Bahá'u'lláh's two-year retirement to Iraqi Kurdistan (1854-1856). Accounts of His daily life in that region also remain, for the most part, sketchy.

Much of this ambiguity may be due to two distinct factors. First, until recently few scholarly attempts were made to provide a clear and concise picture of the events surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's decision to withdraw from the Bábí community of Baghdád. Second, most of what is known today about Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Kurdistan relies either on His own personal accounts or on inferences made from His works penned during that period.
None of Bahá'u'lláh's followers shared His self-imposed exile and, consequently, no comprehensive history of those days is left to posterity.
However, recent publication of several scholarly works have paved the way toward shedding more light on this rather obscure period in Bahá'í history.
The purpose of this paper is to draw upon these new sources and present a logical framework for a better understanding of this significant phase in the metamorphosis of the Bábí religion into the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'u'lláh's Exile to Iraq

Following the failed attempt on the life of Násirí'd-Din Sháh, the King of Persia, by a small band of radical Bábís, the entire Bábí community went under suspicion. The would-be assassins were immediately arrested and the more well-known figures were fervently sought.

At the time of the assassination attempt, Bahá'u'lláh, who had recently returned from pilgrimage to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbilá, was in Afcha, a summer resort near Tehrán. Although He condemned the actions of these radicals, He realized that He might be sought by the government officials as a Bábí leader and He chose to surrender Himself to the authorities. He was taken to a prison where He remained for four months (the Siyyah Chál, or "Black Pit"). During that time, according to His later testimony, He had several mystical experiences which convinced Him that He was the One whose appearance the Báb had foreseen and who was destined to become the next leader of the Bábí movement.1

In the meantime, at the insistence of Mírzá Májíd-í-Ahi, the Secretary to the Russian Legation in Tehrán and brother-in-law of Bahá'u'lláh, Prince Dolgorki, the Russian Ambassador, pressured the government of Násirí'd-Din Sháh to either produce evidence against Bahá'u'lláh or to release Him.2 In absence of any proof, Bahá'u'lláh, Who was initially condemned to life in prison, was forced by the King to choose a place of exile for Himself and His family.

Prince Dolgorki encouraged Bahá'u'lláh to emigrate to Russia but the latter chose Iraq, probably for a number of reasons. For instance, Najaf and Karbilá, two major centers of Shí'ah pilgrimage, were located in Iraq.* Also, Iraq's vicinity with Persia (Iran) made it possible for Him to keep a close eye on the events in Persia and stay in touch with other active Bábís. In addition, the presence of a multitude of Shí'ahs in Iraq provided Him with fertile ground for spreading the teachings of the Báb in those regions.

A group of Bábís chose to follow Bahá'u'lláh into exile in 1853. Among them was His half-brother Mírzá Yahya, otherwise known as Subh-i-Azal ("Morn of Eternity"), whom the Báb had appointed to head the Bábí movement after His death. (* Islám, like Christianity, is divided into two major denominations, the Shí'ah sect being centered in Iran and the Sunní sect in Iraq. The recent conflict between the two countries was due in part to this division, much as was the case in the wars between the Catholics and Protestants in Christian Europe several centuries ago.)

Bahá'í accounts claim that the Báb's appointment of Azal

(who was thirteen years younger than Bahá'u'lláh) was only nominal, as he was only in his teens at that time. The purpose behind this was to divert the attention of the opposition from Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of the Bábí dispensation, Whose rising prominence was endangering His life.

The arrangement was suggested by Bahá'u'lláh to the Báb, Who approved it. Beside Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, only two other individuals, Mírzá Musá (Aqáy-i-Kalím), Bahá'u'lláh's full brother, and a certain Mullá Abdu'l-Karím-í-Qazvíní, who was later martyred in Tehrán, were aware of this arrangement.3 However, following the Báb's martyrdom, the question of succession came to cause much disturbance among the faithful. It ultimately came to result in a permanent rift between Bahá'u'lláh and Azal.

Azal's Leadership

While future historians may need to further clarify the exact nature of Azal's nomination, there is little doubt at this time that, following the Báb's execution in 1850, the generality of Bábís came to regard Azal as the Báb's successor. At the time of the Báb's execution, Azal had gone into hiding in the mountains of Mázíndarán and later managed to flee Persia and join Bahá'u'lláh's family in Baghdád a few months after the arrival of the latter in 1853. The events transpiring in Baghdád during the next few years indicate that Azal was not a particularly effective leader.

Bahá'u'lláh and Azal were of significantly different temperaments and abilities. As a consequence, they had sharply contrasting leadership styles which soon became evident. Whereas Azal was normally withdrawn and retiring, Bahá'u'lláh was energetic and active. Understandably, those who came to support them had opposing views of the other leader's attributes. What Bahá'ís regarded as Azal's cowardice was to Azalis his caution as the surviving head of the movement, and what the latter considered Bahá'u'lláh's ambition was to Bahá'ís His love and concern for a community that, because the martyrdom of the Báb, was demoralized and disintegrating. Nevertheless, it is clear that Azal's continuous insistence to remain in hiding or seclusion was the last thing a struggling community needed.4

The severity of persecutions of early 1850's had driven the Bábís in Persia underground. Only the small community in Iraq could hope to preserve and spread the message of the martyred Báb. However, at this crucial juncture, Azal chose to distance himself from others. According to contemporary accounts, he changed his identity and appearance on several occasions and even threatened

to
excommunicate anyone who might reveal his identity or whereabouts.5

His unforceful response did not sit well with many Bábís. Some saw no difference between the 'hidden Azal' and the Shíah's Hidden Imám.* Consequently, dissatisfaction with Azal's leadership began to mount. In the meantime, he continued to maintain the militant policy of the more
radical elements of the Bábí movement and encouraged his supporters to, whenever appropriate, attack the "hated" Shíahs and even went so far as dispatching an assassin for a second attempt on the life of Násirí'd-Din Sháh.6 In contrast to Azal's seclusive but radical attitude, Bahá'u'lláh began to actively encourage a pacific policy which became an attractive alternative to the more moderate Bábís. (* Shí'ah tradition holds that twelve Imáms, or holy leaders have appeared since the time of Muhammad. According to tradition,
the twelfth and last of these Imáms wandered into a cave and was never seen again. The Shí'ahs believe that, like Elijah, this "Hidden Imám" would one day reappear. The name 'hidden Azal' was used by some as a callous joke.)

In view of the disasters of early 1850's, Bahá'u'lláh supported a conciliatory attitude toward others and pushed for major reforms in the character
and behavior of the Bábís. He even attempted what to radical Bábís was the unthinkable rapprochement with the Persian government and its representatives in the Ottoman Empire—the same government they held responsible for the execution of the Báb and fierce persecution of their fellow-believers. This policy shift was welcomed by some but
incurred the wrath of Azal and those who were content with the status quo. It also
contributed to the growing polarization within the ranks of Bábís over the next few years.

In the meantime, while Azal continued to be reclusive, Bahá'u'lláh began to write proliferately and remain publicly visible and easily accessible to
those who turned to Him for guidance and leadership. He also showed marks of a competent leader by establishing an organized network of communication which linked the fragmented communities of Persia and Iraq. Under His supervision, the
Bábís of Persia would travel to Iraq, if necessary in the guise of Shí'ah pilgrims, bring Him letters and questions from other believers, and depart with His replies. He also had couriers assigned specifically to undertake
such travels and visit the local communities en route, thus bringing together

various communities and groups. Ultimately, this network seems to have succeeded in reviving the cohesiveness of the Bábís as a religious group and significantly contributed to ascendancy of Bahá'u'lláh over Azal. It also generated a loyal band of followers for Bahá'u'lláh inside Persia who, by their partisanship, tended to devalue the overall status and leadership abilities of Azal.7

Concurrently, inside Persia some well-known Bábís began to show discontent with Azal's leadership. Others found his writings uninspiring and severely inadequate and began to challenge his authority. A few went so far as refuting his claims to successorship, advancing counter-claims, and disseminating their own writings.8

Still others began to turn to Bahá'u'lláh for spiritual guidance. One such individual was Hájí Mírzá Kamálu'd-Dín-i-Naráqi who initially asked Azal to enlighten him on the Qur'ánic verse "All food was allowed to the children of Israel except that which Israel made unlawful for itself." Azal wrote a commentary on this verse which Naraqi apparently found inadequate. The latter then presented the same question to Bahá'u'lláh. In response, Bahá'u'lláh wrote what is today known as the Tablet of All Food (or "Lawh-i-Kullu't-Tá'am").

The Tablet of All Food

The presence of "hierarchies" or "degrees" of existence in the universe may be foreign to some readers. Bahá'ís believe the existence of such hierarchies are an essential prerequisite for the appearance of order and perfection in all the worlds of God, including this world. "For existing beings could not be embodied in only one degree, one station, one kind, one species, and one class...." 9

'Abdu'l-Bahá expounds that, in this world, the essential hierarchy of existence is manifested through the appearance of the mineral, vegetable, animal, and human kingdoms (vertical degrees of difference). By the same token, one can observe the existence of such differences in the degrees of perfections among the members of the same kingdom (horizontal differences). Similar hierarchies are imperative for the appearance of order and perfections in the afterlife. 10

In the Tablet of All Food, which is penned in a highly mystical language,* Bahá'u'lláh states that there are many spiritual worlds in the next life, and the above-mentioned Qur'anic verse has infinite meanings in each of these worlds most of which man could not comprehend in this earthly life. He then proceeds to identify four such worlds and describe some of the meanings of

certain words in the verse.

An example of this is found in His examination of the mystical significance of the word "food". He notes that, at the highest spiritual level, it signifies the throne of "Hahut" (Divine Oneness) where God's unapproachable Essence exists. This is a world which is completely beyond human understanding and even the prophets have no access to it. (* The style of Bahá'u'lláh's writing was incomparable in its range and was specifically tailored to the capacity of the reader. Works such as the Tablet of All Food and The Seven Valleys were written in a style familiar to readers from a mystically oriented Sufi background.)

The word Hahut is constructed according to the same pattern as similar Arabic words with spiritual connotations such as Lahut (divinity). Its meaning is probably based on the first letter Ha, which stands for "Huwiyyah" (God's self-identity).11
The following description of God from one of Bahá'u'lláh's writings perhaps best fits the world of Hahut.

"From time immemorial, He, the Divine Being, hath been veiled in the ineffable sanctity of His exalted Self, and will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence..." 12

Next in the hierarchy of spiritual worlds is the world of Lahut (Divinity) which He describes as the "Heavenly Court." This realm is "perhaps the world of God in relation to His Manifestations and Chosen Ones"13 where His omnipotence drives the prophets to pronounce their utter nothingness in relation to Him. The well-known Qur'anic verse "He is God, there is no God but Him" may well apply here.

The world of Lahut emphasizes God's unity and uniqueness. Only the most purified souls could understand this world.

The next lower world is Jabarut (Divine Dominion), where prophets and chosen ones are allowed to use theophanic language and identify themselves with God "on the level of His attributes."14 They can identify themselves closely with God, claim unity with Him, and speak with His voice and authority.15 The realm of Jabarut seems to be the plane of prophets and chosen ones in relation to the world of creation:

"When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things verily I am God!"16

The realm of Malakut (Divine Power or Kingdom) is next, described by

Bahá'u'lláh as the "Heaven of Divine Justice" inhabited by souls who have detached themselves from the riches of the material world. In addition to these worlds, Bahá'u'lláh identifies another world as Nasut (physical beings) which is the lowest in the hierarchy and is defined as the "Heaven of Bounty." Compared to the other worlds, the world of Nasut is in a state of subsistence because it has come to existence and continues to exist only through God's "bounty." Bahá'u'lláh states that should this bounty be replaced, even for a moment, with God's "justice" the world of Nasut would completely cease to exist.17

The exquisite beauty and insight of this Tablet left no doubt in the mind of Naraqi as to Whom he should follow.

Bahá'u'lláh read this commentary to Naraqi, but did not give it to him.18 While it is not precisely known why He did so, His purpose may have been to avoid further hostilities between Himself and Azal and greater divisions among the faithful. Nevertheless, Naraqi evidently was so impressed with Bahá'u'lláh's explanation that he immediately pledged allegiance to Him. The news of this event further damaged Azal's credibility and increased Bahá'u'lláh's popularity.

Azal's Reaction

Azal was alarmed by the rising prestige of his half-brother. He was also becoming disheartened by the growing number of defections and opposition from well-known figures in the movement. Therefore, aided by a close companion, Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahani (referred to by the Guardian as, "the Antichrist of the Bahá'í dispensation"), he initiated an organized campaign to regain his credibility. This involved, among other things, efforts to discredit Bahá'u'lláh and represent Him as someone who was attempting to "usurp" his position.

Bahá'u'lláh, in His turn, was becoming increasingly saddened by those in the community who were spreading rumors against Him and who failed to see the clear indications of His superior knowledge and ability as well as His sincere concern for a disunified community. Soon His close associates began to observe in Him signs of pending withdrawal. His attendant, Mirza Aqa Jan, heard Bahá'u'lláh refer to those who considered themselves to be His enemies shortly before His retirement, likening them to the unfaithful of the past who, "...for three thousand years have worshiped idols, and bowed down before the Golden Calf." Now, too, they are fit for nothing better.

"What relation can there be between this people and Him Who is the Countenance of Glory?

"What ties can bind them to the One Who is the supreme embodiment of all that is
lovable?"19

Retirement to Kurdistan

On the morning of April 10th, 1854, to their utmost surprise, Bahá'u'lláh's household awoke to find Him gone. He had left Baghdad for the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih in the heart of Kurdish Iraq.

In one of His later writings, He thus explained His reason for leaving Baghdad:

"The one object of Our retirement was to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto Our companions, the means of injury to any soul, or the cause of sorrow to any heart."20

Abu'l-Q'asim-i-Hamadani, a Muslim, was the only person who accompanied Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdad and remained aware of His whereabouts in Kurdistan. Evidently, Bahá'u'lláh gave this individual a sum of money and instructed him to act as a merchant in that region. Hamadani occasionally visited Bahá'u'lláh and brought Him money and certain goods. Bahá'u'lláh who was intent upon living a life of complete solitude decided to conceal His true identity by dressing in the garb of a poor dervish and assuming the fictitious name of Darvish Muhammad-i-Irani. He only took with Himself one change of clothes and an alms-bowl or kashkul which is typically carried by dervishes. (Bahá'u'lláh's kashkul is preserved in the Bahá'í International Archives at Haifa, Israel.)

In the first phase of His retirement, He lived on a mountain named Sar-Galu, about 3 days of walking distance from Sulaymáníyyíh in the Iraqi Kurdistan.21 Milk and rice were His main sources of sustenance there, which He evidently obtained by occasionally traveling to nearby towns. 22 His dwelling place was sometimes a cave and at other times a rude structure of stones that was also used as shelter by peasants who, twice a year (during planting and harvest), traveled to that area. 23

It is not entirely known how Bahá'u'lláh's days were spent in Sar-Galu. Some Bahá'í accounts suggest that He was going through the same purification process which all prophets must go through before revealing their mission.24 Thus, He is believed to have been mostly engaged in writing and chanting prayers in the wilderness and reflecting upon the events that had transpired and possibly what the future had in store.

One thing is, however, clear. He was extremely distressed during this period. In a letter to His cousin Maryam, written after His return to Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh stressed His utter loneliness in Sar-Galu by stating that

His only companions in those days were the 'birds of the air' and the 'beasts of the field.' 25 Additionally, in the Kitab-i-Iqan which He wrote later, He described His state of mind in that region as follows:

"From Our eyes there rained tears of anguish, and in Our bleeding heart there surged an ocean of agonizing pain. Many a night We had no food for sustenance, and many a day Our body found no rest. Alone, We communed with Our spirit, oblivious of the world and all that is therein...." 26

For some time, Bahá'u'lláh was successful in completely severing ties with the outside world, but this did not last long. Either the travelers who passed through or the migrant farm workers who visited the Sar-Galu mountains must have come into contact with Him or observed Him living a life of asceticism which was favored by the mystics (Sufis) who resided in those regions and related their observations to others. Consequently, through word of mouth, His fame as a detached Soul who had chosen to live in wilderness and eschewed human society began to spread to neighboring towns.

Shortly thereafter, Shaykh Isma'il, the leader of the mystic Naqshbandi Sufi group, came into contact with Bahá'u'lláh. It is not known how the two first met. What is clear, however, is that soon the Shaykh developed an attachment to Bahá'u'lláh and, over time, persuaded Him to leave Sar-Galu and take residence in his seminary (or takyah) in the city of Sulaymáníyyih. Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Sar-Galu lasted less than a year, from April of 1854 to sometime in 1855, although the exact date and circumstances of His departure from Sar-Galu remain unknown.

Around the same period new developments took place in Baghdad and Persia which were indicative of further radicalization of Azal and his supporters. Some of the more learned Bábís who had found Azal's leadership wanting began to challenge him by advancing counterclaims to leadership and disseminating their own writings. It is believed that at one time, as many as twenty-five individuals had advanced some type of claim to spiritual authority.27 Among them were Mirza Assad'u'llah-i-Khuy surnamed Dayyán (Judge) by the Báb and Nabil-i-Zarandi (the author of The Dawn-Breakers).

Probably the most serious challenge came from Dayyán. His threat became

even more serious when a cousin of the Báb, Mirza Ali-Akbar, began to openly support him and to defy Azal. The latter felt so threatened by this new development that he first condemned Dayyán in one of his books "The Sleeper Awakened" (or "Mustayqiz") and then sentenced both him and the Báb's cousin to death.

Mirza Muhammad-i-Mazandarani, a devoted follower of Azal, set out for Persia to carry out the sentence, but Dayyán could not be found in his native Adhirbayjan. Shortly after Bahá'u'lláh's return from Sulaymáníyyíh, however, the assassin succeeded in completing his mission by murdering both Dayyán and the Báb's cousin in Baghdád.28 Before Bahá'u'lláh's return, and to the dismay of many, Azal also forcibly married the Báb's widow in Iraq. When Bahá'u'lláh later learned of this union, He severely censured it. Azal's main motive in entering this marriage may have been to enhance his credibility as the Báb's rightful successor. Later, he even allowed his chief accomplice, Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahani, to marry the same widow. 29

For the time being, however, Bahá'u'lláh remained unaware of these developments. He had recently started the second phase of His self-imposed exile in Sulaymáníyyíh.

Sulaymáníyyih

At the time of Bahá'u'lláh's seclusion Sulaymáníyyih was a town of about 6,000 inhabitants, the majority being Sunní Kurds. This group was hostile toward Muslims of Shí'ah background (such as Persians) whom they regarded as seceders from Islám. Nevertheless, Bahá'u'lláh seems to have been quickly accepted and respected by the local people. This may have been due to His attire and lifestyle as a dervish and the reverence that the venerable Shaykh Isma'il displayed toward Him by personally inviting Him to the town.

For a short while, no one suspected Bahá'u'lláh to be possessed of any wisdom or learning. However, this did not last. One day, a student of Shaykh Isma'il who attended to Bahá'u'lláh's needs, accidentally came upon a specimen of His calligraphy — an art which Bahá'u'lláh, like most children of nobility in Persia, had learned in childhood. His penmanship was of such high quality that it took the student by complete surprise. He decided to show it to his instructors and fellow students. The seminary was also bewildered. They had not expected such penmanship from an uneducated hermit. Examples of Bahá'u'lláh's writing style soon became available in town through His correspondence with certain Sufi leaders in the area.30 Thus, His true

identity
and aristocratic past soon became known to the Naqshbandi mystics as well as the
general populace.

Life Among the Sufis

The Naqshbandi order was originally founded in Central Asia by Bahá'u'd-Din Muhammad-i-Naqshbandi (1317-1389 A.D.). Later, the order broke into two main factions. One was the Mujaddidiyyah order which was established by an Indian thinker, Ahmad-i-Sirhindi (1564-1624 A.D.), and which flourished in India.
The other was the Khaledíyyíh order which was founded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Diya'u'd-Din Khalid-i-Shahrizuri (d. 1827) and which spread in Iraq and Syria.31

Sirhindi, a Muslim elite, vehemently opposed the religious laxness he observed in
the thinking of most converts from Hinduism to Islám in India. He advocated strict observance of Islámic laws. He also wrote extensively against both Shí'ism and Hinduism and rejected the doctrine of "existential monism" (Wahdat al-wujud) which was promulgated by the renowned Muslim mystic Ibn-i-Arabi.32

He attacked attempts by some Indian Muslims to reconcile Ibn-i-Arabi's idea of existential monism with the Vedantic school of Hinduism, which held that the ultimate goal of one's spiritual destiny was complete "physical" reunion with the
essence of Brahma (God). Ultimately, his ideology came to have great impact on the
rest of the Muslim world. Sirhindi also advanced certain claims. For instance, he
claimed to be the Qayyum33 (the Herald of the Qa'im or Promised One); the Perfect
Man who acted as God's intermediary among the faithful.34

Shaykh Khaled-i-Shahrizuri, a native of Iraqi Kurdistan, was among the thinkers whose line of thought were influenced by Sirhindi. Around 1811 to 1812, he traveled to Sulaymáníyyih and spread His teachings in that region.
Like Sirhindi, Khaled also claimed to possess supernatural or mystical powers. His
influence lives on to this day in Sulaymáníyyih and Baghdád as well as in Damascus, Syria, where he spent the last seven years of his life. Following Khaled's death, the Naqshbandis in Kurdistan began to refer to themselves as the Khaledíyyih (followers of Khaled) and call Shaykh Khaled by the surname Mawlana ("our lord").

The Bábís and Naqshbandis represented two distinct reformist
trends in the nineteenth-century Middle East. They both favored elimination of non-revelatory accretions to the pure Faith of Muhammad. For instance, the

tradition of blind imitation (Taqlid) practiced by Shi'ahs was attacked by both groups as was the doctrine of existential monism. Therefore, the Khaledis should have readily accepted many of Bahá'u'lláh's theological interpretations. However, the Bábís and Naqshbandis disagreed as to the extent of reforms needed in Islam. While the Naqshbandis were content with certain theological and ritual reforms within a strictly Sunní school of Islam, the Bábís were convinced that nothing short of the messianic advent of the Promised Mahdi in the person of the Báb could remedy the ills of Islám and of mankind in general.35

Shortly after the true identity of Bahá'u'lláh was revealed, the Khaledi seminary became engaged in the study of Meccan Victories (Al-Futuhat al-Makkíyyah), the well-known work of the renowned mystic thinker Ibn-i-Arabi. In response to a request, in the course of several interviews, Bahá'u'lláh answered the seminary's questions regarding certain abstruse passages in this book and even made corrective remarks concerning some of Abn-i-Arabi's beliefs. For example, He may well have objected to Arabi's advocacy of the doctrine of existential monism. The Khaledis perhaps readily accepted His assertions as they themselves believed in the eventual spiritual (as opposed to physical) reunion of man with his Creator.

Shaykh Isma'il, the Khaledi leader, evidently was impressed enough by Bahá'u'lláh's comments to request that He compose an ode (or qasidah) in the same style as a famous mystic work, Ibn-i-Farid's Poem of the Way (or Nazmu's-Suluk). Bahá'u'lláh complied with this request and wrote a very long poem of some 2,000 verses, but He chose to preserve only 127 of those verses and destroyed the rest of the poem, presumably because they expressed His messianic feelings too forcefully.36 Today this work is known among Bahá'u'lláh's faithful as the Poem of the Dove (or Al-Qasidah-al-Warqa'iyyah).

In this poem, Bahá'u'lláh displays the ability to express Bábí theological beliefs in Sufi terminology. This is not surprising, however, in view of the fact that Sufi works were popular in Persia and, over the centuries, had left a lasting impact on the culture and literature of that country.
Persians of nobility, such as Bahá'u'lláh, were raised on such Sufi classics as Rumi's Mathnawi and Attar's The Speech of the Bird (or Mantiqu't-Tayr). Moreover, Sufism had experienced a revival in 19th century Persia and was highly favored in the court circles which included the family of Bahá'u'lláh.37

Also, Sufi expressions which emphasized personal transformation of character

enabled Bahá'u'lláh to richly describe His doctrine of spreading Bábism through the force of example rather than militancy, as had been the case with the supporters of earlier religions. He continued to use this mixture of Bábí and Sufi terminology until the period preceding the year of the public declaration of His Station in 1863, during which time He gradually began to adopt a distinctly different style. In addition to the Poem of the Dove, Bahá'u'lláh wrote several works of note with highly mystical flavor before 1863. Among these were the Hidden Words, the Seven Valleys, the Four Valleys, and the Book of Certitude (or Kitáb-i-Iqán).

Even though there are similarities in both style and content between Bahá'u'lláh's Poem of the Dove and Ibn-i-Farid's Poem of the Way, there are also significant metaphysical and theological differences between the two. For instance, in the course of his poem, Ibn-i-Farid, who adhered to existential monism, claimed to have physically seen the "Essence" of the Beloved (God) and ultimately, through a chain of events, experienced moments of reunion with Him. Bahá'u'lláh does not make such a claim anywhere in His poem, as God's essential nature is beyond human comprehension. Instead, He employs messianic themes and refers, in veiled language, to an exalted station of Prophethood for Himself, which Ibn-i-Farid does not.

Bahá'u'lláh's Return to Baghdád

The exact circumstances surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's return from Sulaymáníyyíh are not entirely clear. It is known that late in 1855, Hamadani, Bahá'u'lláh's Muslim companion, was returning from Persia and heading to Sar-Galu with some goods for Bahá'u'lláh, but was attacked by thieves and fatally wounded. Before his death, he bequeathed all his possessions to the mysterious Darvish Muhammad-i-Irani. About the same time, reports of a mysterious darvish from Iran had begun to reach Baghdád. Hamadani's death left little doubt for Bahá'u'lláh's family as to the true identity and whereabouts of Darvish Muhammad, since the former had also disappeared in Baghdád at about the same time as Bahá'u'lláh two years previously. They rightly concluded that the mysterious dervish must be none other than Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

At this time, in the absence of effective leadership, the morale of the Bábí community had deteriorated considerably, much as was the case with their ancient counterparts during the absence of Moses. This decay caused such stress for the family of Bahá'u'lláh that they finally convinced His brother Mírzá Musá to try to find Bahá'u'lláh and ask for His return. Thus, Mírzá Musá requested his Arab father-in-law, Shaykh Sultan, to locate

Bahá'u'lláh and bring Him back to Baghdád. Even Azal now wanted his half-brother to come back, though it is not clear why. Perhaps, in light of the growing number of defections and rival claimants, he felt Bahá'u'lláh might be willing to lend some of His prestige to his sagging leadership.38

Azal's supporters, true to form, offered a different interpretation of the events that led to Bahá'u'lláh's return, trying to convince others that Bahá'u'lláh left Sulaymáníyyíh in 1856 at the command of Azal. They also maintained that Bahá'u'lláh considered Himself to be under Azal's authority. This, however, is clearly false, as is demonstrated by such works of Bahá'u'lláh as the poems Rash-i-Ama (Sprinkling of Essence) and Al-Qasidah-al-Warqa'iyyah (Poem of the Dove), which were produced around the time He received His Revelation.

The first of these two poems is perhaps the earliest of Bahá'u'lláh's known works; penned in 1853 in the dungeon in Tihrán known as the "Black Pit". Together with the second poem, the two provide irrefutable evidence that Bahá'u'lláh had messianic expectations and had received supernatural intimations long before He returned to Baghdád.

It is assumed that His return from Sulaymáníyyíh was due to such factors as the plight of the leaderless Bábí community of Baghdád. He Himself seems to have taken Shaykh Sultan's mission as a sign that God wanted Him to return.39

It took Shaykh Sultan and a companion approximately two months before they located Bahá'u'lláh in the vicinity of Sulaymáníyyih. After a while, Bahá'u'lláh consented to depart for Baghdád, where He arrived in March 19, 1856. His stay in Kurdistan took exactly two lunar years.40

Following His return, Bahá'u'lláh maintained correspondence with some Sufis in Kurdistan. Two of His well-known works were written in response to questions posed by such individuals. The Seven Valleys was penned in reply to a query of Shaykh Muhyí'd-Dín, the judge of the town of Khaniqayn in Kurdistan, and the Four Valleys was written in response to questions by Shaykh Abdu'r-Rahmán, the leader of the Qadiriyyih Sufis. He continued to be respected by many Sufis in Kurdistan long after His return and, even today, some of the inhabitants of Sulaymáníyyih still possess samples of Bahá'u'lláh's works with which they refuse to part at any price.41

Bahá'u'lláh's return to Baghdád signaled the beginning of a new era in the Bábí movement. It initiated a period marked by His growing prominence as the head of the Bábí community and

simultaneous decline in the fortunes of Azal.

After a seven year span that witnessed a gradual but notable transformation in the
character and attitudes of the community, in 1863, Bahá'u'lláh
publicly declared Himself the Promised One. In a relatively short period of time,
the faithful who resided in Persia and the neighboring regions gave allegiance to
Him and became designated as Bahá'ís, or followers of Bahá.

Notes

1) Taherzadeh, Adib, Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. I. Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1974 p. 10.

2) Balyuzi, M. H., Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory. Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1980, p. 99.

3) Taherzadeh, pp. 53-54.

4) Smith, Peter. The Bábí & Bahá'í Religions: From
Messianic Shí'ism to a World Religion, Cambridge: The University Press, 1987, p. 59.

5) Ibid, p. 60.

6) Ibid.

7) Ibid, p. 62.

8) Taherzadeh, p. 202.

9) 'Abdu'l—Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 129.

10) For more information, refer to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 129-131 and pp. 235-236.

11) Cole, Juan R. "Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandi Sufis in Iraq." In
Cole, Juan R. & Moojan Momen, From Iran East & West: Studies in
Bábí and Bahá'í history. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press,
1984, pp. 12-13

12) Taherzadeh, p. 58

13) Ibid, p. 59

14) Cole, p. 13

15) Taherzadeh, p. 59

16) Ibid.

17) Ibid.

18) Balyuzi, . 113.

19) Effendi, Shoghi. God Passes By. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979, p. 119.

20) Ibid.

21) Balyuzi, 116.

22) Taherzadeh, 61.

23) Effendi, 120.

24) Ibid., 121.

25) Ibid., 120.

26) Taherzadeh, 61.

27) Ibid., 68.

28) Ibid., 251.

29) As the vast majority of Bábís came from Muslim backgrounds, many of them tended to retain the traditional Muslim attitudes towards women as property. In Azal's case, he had obviously ignored the impropriety of these marriages. Fortunately, the widow of the Báb was to eventually be placed under the protection of Bahá'u'lláh and to be rid of the machinations of Azal and his followers.

30) Taherzadeh, p. 62.

31) Cole, p. 5.

32) This is a belief that God is part of man and that recognizes no distinction between the divine, human and material realms.

33) Bahá'ís believe Bahá'u'lláh was the true Qayyum who was heralded by the Qa'im (the Báb).

34) Cole, pp. 5-6.

35) Ibid., pp. 5-7.

36) Ibid., p. 92.

37) Ibid., p. 21.

38) Ibid., p. 20.

39) Effendi, p. 126.

40) The calendar used in Muslim countries is based on a number of orbits of the moon around the earth, as opposed the western calendar, which is based upon the earth's orbit around the sun. This makes the Muslim calendar shorter than that used in the West.

41) Balyuzi, p.118.

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