

amongst you, He shall exalt; and they that are exalted, He shall abase.’⁵ According to the Bab, Shaykh Muh.ammad H .asan al-Najafi (d. 1849), the author of *Jawahir al-kalam* and the greatest Shi’i divine of the age,⁶ fell into the abyss of the most ignorant of men through rejecting the message of the Bab delivered to him by Mulla ‘Ali Bastami,⁷ while a sifter of wheat from Isfahan who had no formal education or training attained the summit of glory through his faith in the Bab.⁸ In these passages, in expounding on the concept and meaning of true knowledge, the Bab contrasts a sifter of wheat with al-Najafi to illustrate the all-encompassing spiritual revolution caused by his revelation; yet in a different work, he illustrates the same revolutionary ideas using the concept of sovereignty. Here, the Bab explains that upon rejecting him, the king of Iran, Muh.ammad Shah (d. 1848),⁹ and his prime minister, Hajji Mirza Aqasi (d. 1849),¹⁰ descended to the lowest abyss, while Mubarak, who to outward appearance, was bereft of any power or earthly rank, ascended to the heaven of glory for ‘having done good in the realm of faith’ (*bi-ma ahsana fi al-din*).¹¹

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The other fact worthy of notice is that in most of the writings in which the Bab mentions his parents, he also remembers Mubarak. As an example, we will cite here from a hitherto unknown work of the Bab, composed of some 300–400 pages, and known as *Kitab-i Si Du‘a* (‘The Book of Thirty Prayers’). As the Bab approached the age of 30, he revealed 30 prayers in honour of his 30 years. These 30 prayers were revealed daily in *Safar* (the second month of the Islamic calendar) and early *Rabi‘ al-Awwal* (the third month of the Islamic calendar) 1265 [December 1848 – January 1849]. The Bab dedicated each of these 30 prayers to one of the years of his life. The work can thus be considered a spiritual autobiography. While each prayer refers to a specific year, the overarching theme of the work is communion with God, embodying the themes of worship and devotion to the Creator that formed the essence of the Bab’s life. Among these 30 prayers, prayer number 27 (apropos his 27th year) stands out. In this prayer, the Bab provides an almost complete account of his life in a section that has been cited in the published compilation, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, without the source being identified. Excerpts from this prayer follow:

Thou art aware, O My God, that since the day Thou didst call Me into being out of the water of Thy love till I reached fifteen years of age I lived in the land which witnessed My birth [Shíráz]. Then Thou didst enable Me to go to the seaport [Búshíhr] where for five years I was engaged in trading ... I proceeded therefrom to the Holy Land [Kárbilá] where I sojourned for one year. Then I returned to the place of My birth ... Then at the age

of twenty-five I proceeded to thy sacred House [Mecca], and by the time I returned to the place where I was born, a year had elapsed ... Thus I departed therefrom by Thy leave, spending six months in the land of S.ád [Is. fáhán] and seven months in the First Mountain [Mákú], ... Now, in My thirtieth year, Thou beholdest Me, O My God, in this Grievous Mountain [Chihríq] where I have dwelt for one whole year.¹²

Here and elsewhere, the Bab notes that he remained in Maku for less than eight months. As mentioned earlier, the Kitab-i Si Du?a was revealed near the end of S.afar. The Bab says that at the time in which he is writing, he has spent one year in Chihriq. It merits noting that elsewhere in this prayer, the Bab mentions that in a few days, he will turn 30. This may appear odd at first. After all, it is well-known that the Bab was born on the first day of the first month of the Islamic calendar, 1 Muh.aram 1235 (20 October 1819), meaning that by the end of S.afar or the beginning of Rabi? al-Awwal, two months had passed since his birthday. The solution to this seeming puzzle lies in the words, 'Thou art aware, O My God, that since the day Thou didst call Me into being out of the water of Thy love ...' In this and other passages, the Bab calculates the beginning of his life from the moment of conception rather than the day of his birth. In this prayer, he begins not from the year of his birth, 1235 (rather than 1234), but from the day of conception, i.e. nine months and nine days (according to the lunar calendar which is equal to nine months in the solar calendar) before the first day of Muh.aram. At times in his writings, the Bab calculates his age from 1 Muh.aram 1235; at other times from 21 Rabi? al-Awwal 1234; and still other times from

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21 Rabi? al-Awwal 1235. In these 30 prayers, each calculation begins from 21 Rabi? al-Awwal 1235 (7 January 1820). For this reason, at the end of S.afar

when he is writing, there are still 3 weeks left before he reaches 30. This passage is in complete congruence with the Bab's words in other tablets. Moreover, this method of calculation is discussed by him in other works that are beyond the scope of the present article.

Let us return to the subject at hand. One of the interesting points about these thirty prayers, as well as other prayers revealed by the Bab, is the fact that he repeatedly prays first for his mother and father and then for the one who has raised him ('he who raised me'), beseeching God to bestow upon them His loving-kindness and most sublime bounties. The same can be observed in other prayers of the Bab. Previously, it had been assumed that in these prayers, the Bab is expressing his appreciation to first his parents and then the Khal-i A?z.am,¹³ Hajji Mirza Sayyid ?Ali, but such is not the

case. The venerable person who raised and educated him is none other than Mubarak, his Ethiopian servant whose faith and devotion caused him to ascend to the summits of glory and might.¹⁴ The special love and kindness of the Bab for Mubarak is entirely evident from prayer number 7 which is related to when he was seven years old. After praying for his mother and father, the Bab supplicates to God for Mubarak:

Send down, then, upon me, O my God, when I was seven years old and upon him who raised me on Thy behalf, whose name is Mubarak, that which becometh the splendours of the sanctity of Thy loftiness and the wonders of the might of Thy revelation.¹⁵

In this passage, the name of the person for whom the Bab repeatedly prays for and who, alongside his mother and father, is remembered and honoured as the one who raised and educated, is disclosed. The Bab in fact places Mubarak on the same plane as his father. The love and tenderness for Mubarak that runs throughout the Bab's writings is the greatest manifestation of the message of peace, brotherhood, and unity that he has brought to humanity. Following this passage, the image of a moving and beautiful memory from the Bab's life is conveyed: '... and for the bow and arrow he made for Me to play with at that age, [send him] what is in Thy knowledge of Thy grace and mercy.'¹⁶

The Bab's affection for one who served him from childhood; his remembrance of Mubarak while imprisoned in the mountains of Adharbayjan; his prayers for him and his greetings to him in his letters to his mother, wife, and uncle;¹⁷ his praise of Mubarak as one who was to all outward appearances a servant but, in reality, the king of the righteous; all beautifully serve

to demonstrate that Mubarak truly loved the Bab and that the Bab in turn had special affection and love for Mubarak. It was this mutual love that made the Bab's Ethiopian servant the pride of all the kings on earth.

Suggested citation

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Endnotes

1. This article is a translation of N. Saiedi, 'Sult. an-i h.abashi', in *Payám-i Bahá'í*, 366 (May 2010/167BE), 10–13. The notes that follow have been provided by the translator.

2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makati b-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá?*, jild-i hashtum [vol. 8], [Tehran]: Mu'assasih-yi Milli -i Mat. bu'at-i Amri , 134BE/1977–78, 150.

3. The exceptions being [N. Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabí's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932 [1996], 53–54, 62, 66, 68, 96, 129, 132–33, 148; M. H. Afán, *Genesis of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs*, trans. A. Rabbani, Leiden: Brill, 2008, index, s.v. 'Mubáarak, Hájí'; A. Mazandarani , *Kitab-i z. uhur al-h.aqq, bakhsh-i du* [vol. 2], digitally republished, East Lansing, Michigan: H-Bahai, 2000, 29, 37, 49; A. Mazandarani , *Kitab-i zuhur al-haqq, jild-i sivvum* [vol. 3], Hofheim: Mu'assasih-yi Mat. bu'at-i Baha'i -i Alman, 165BE/2008, 81, 193-4; A. Afnan, *Black Pearls*, Los Angeles, Kalimát Press, 1988, 3–18 = A. Afnan, *La'ali -i siyah*, Canada: n.p., 1992, 27–36; N. Muh.ammad-H . usayni , *H.ad.rat-i Bab*, Dundas, Ontario: Mu'assasih-yi Ma'arif-i Baha'i bih Lisan-i Farsi , 152BE/1995, 701-02; N. Muh.ammad-H . usayni , *H. ad. rat-i T. ahirih*, Dundas, Ontario: Mu'assasih-yi Ma'arif-i Baha'i , 157BE/2000, 13-4; A. Afnan, 'Ahd-i a'la: *Zindigani -i h.ad. rat-i Bab*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000, 61, 64, 74, 76, 79, 130, 133, 567 (note 75), where the story of Mubarak accompanying the Bab to visit an early Arab Babi (and later Baha'i) Shaykh Sult. an during his stay in Shiraz is recounted (the source for this account is Nabi l Zarandi 's history); A. Lee, 'Mubarak, Haji', *Encyclopedia of Africa*, eds. K. A. Appiah and H. L. Gates, Jr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, vol. 1, 197, where Mubarak's year of birth is mistakenly given as 1833; A. Lee, 'Haji Mubarak', *World Religions: Belief, Culture, and Controversy*, ABC-CLIO, 2011–, available online: <http://religion2.abc-clio.com/>; A. Lee, *The Baha'i Faith in Africa: Establishing a New Religious Movement, 1952–1962*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, 21-41 passim; A. Lee, 'Enslaved African Women

in Nineteenth-Century Iran: The Life of Fezzeh Khanom of Shiraz,' *Iranian Studies*, 45(3), 2012, 417-437 (see 432-3); N. Cacchioli, 'The Pupil of the Eye: Abolitionism, Racial Unity, and the Iconography of Enslaved Africans in Baha'i Tradition', in E. Toledano (ed.) *African Communities in Asia and the Mediterranean: Identities between Integration and Conflict*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012, pp. 237-54, see 244-45 (my thanks to Steve Cooney for this reference). For general information about slaves and the practice of slavery in pre-modern and modern Iran, see W. Floor, 'Barda and Barda-dari iv. From the Mongols to the abolition of slavery', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, available online: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barda-iv>.

4. This is a reference to Mulla Muh.ammad Ja'far Gandum Pakkun, the first Babi in Is. fahan who had the distinction of being mentioned in both the Persian Bayan and the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, trans. Habib Taherzadeh with the assistance of a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976, 83; Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1992, 79 (par. 166), 243 (note 179). See also [N. Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers* 99.

5. Translated in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 146. Cf. Matthew 5:10; Qur'an 28:5. The expression is a similar to the wording found in a number of hadiths attributed to the Shi'i Imams. See for example al-Kulayni , *al-U. ul min al-kafi* , ed. ?A. A. al-Ghaffari , 8 vols., Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1362AS/1983-84, 1:369 (no. 1); A. al-Ah.sa'i , *Kitab al-raj'a*, Beirut: al-Dar al-'alamiyya, 1414AH/1993, 131; ?A. H . . Ishraq-Khavari , *Qamus-i i qan*, 4 vols., [Tehran]: Mu'assasih-yi Milli -i Mat. bu'at-i Amri , 128BE/1971-72, 4:1827-29.

6. Muh.ammad Hasan al-Najafi 's magnum opus, *Jawahir al-kalam fi sharh. sharayi' al-islam* (The Jewels of Dialectic Theology in Explaining the Laws of Islam), a work which took him

25 years to complete, is recognized as the most popular work of Shiʿi jurisprudence in the 19th century. See Meir Litvak, ‘Iraq XI. Shiʿite Seminaries in Iraq’, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*,

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available online:

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iraq-xi-shiite-seminaries>.

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reproaches him in numerous tablets for his opposition to the Cause of the Bab.

See for

example, Baha’u’llah, *Ayat-i ilahi jild-i duvvum*: Gulchi

ni az athar-i h ad rat-i Baha’u’llah,

Langenhain: Muʿassasih-yi Matbuʿat-i Amri -i Alman, 1996, 156,

where he is referred to as

‘the first who opposed [God]’ (*awwal man aʿrada*).

7. On him, see M. Momen, ‘‘Alí Bastámí, Mullá (d. 1846)’, in *The Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*,

available online:

http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/attachments/Ali_Bastami_Mulla.pdf; M. ʿA. Faydí , *Had rat-i Nuqt ih-yi Ula*, Tehran:

Muʿassasih-yi Milli -i Matbuʿat-i Amri , 132BE/1975–76, 248–49. On his trial in Iraq, see N. Alkan,

Dissent and Heterodoxy

in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Babis, and Baha’is, Istanbul: The

Press ISIS, 2008, 43–50.

8. ‘Likewise behold this Revelation. The essences of the people have, through divinely-conceived designs, been set in motion and until the present day three hundred and thirteen disciples have been chosen. In the land of Sád [Isfahán], which to outward seeming is a great city, in every corner of whose seminaries are vast numbers of people regarded as divines and doctors, yet when the time came for inmost essences to be drawn forth, only its sifter of wheat donned the robe of discipleship. This is the mystery of what was uttered by the kindred of the Prophet Muhammad – upon them be the peace of God – concerning this Revelation, saying that the abased shall be exalted and the exalted shall be abased’ (*The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 83). Similar statements are made by Baha’u’llah: ‘Consider, how can he that faileth in the day of

God's Revelation to
 attain unto the grace of the 'Divine Presence' and to recognize His
 Manifestation, be justly
 called learned, though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and
 acquired
 all the limited and material learning of men? It is surely evident that he can
 in no wise
 be regarded as possessed of true knowledge. Whereas, the most unlettered of all
 men,
 if he be honoured with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as one
 of those
 divinely-learned men whose knowledge is of God; for such a man hath attained
 the acme
 of knowledge, and hath reached the furthest summit of learning'
 (Bahá'u'lláh, The
 Kitáb-i-Íqán 144); 'Consider how Balal, the Ethiopian, unlettered though
 he was, ascended
 into the heaven of faith and certitude, whilst Abdu'llah Ubayy, a leader
 among the learned,
 maliciously strove to oppose Him' (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the
 Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
 trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, 82).
 Baha'u'llah also
 speaks of this theme in a tablet about the 'mystery of the Great Reversal in
 the Sign of the
 Sovereign', similarly contrasting the oppression of al-Najafi and other
 ulama in Iraq and
 Iran with the acceptance of many of the masses. The tablet is cited in ?A. H.
 Ishraq-Khavari ,
 Rah i q-i makhtum, 2 vols., Hofheim: Mu?assasih-yi Matbu?at-i
 Baha'i -i Alman, 164BE/2007,
 1:423; V. Ra?fati , Yadnamih-yi misbah-i muni r, Hofheim:
 Mu?assasih-yi Matbu?at-i Baha'i -i
 Alman, 163BE/2006, 286.
 9. On him, see J. Calmard, 'Mohammad Shah Qajar', in Encyclopaedia
 Iranica, available online:
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mohammad-shah>.
 10. On him, see S. Quinn, 'Aqasi, Haji Mirza ('Abbas Irvani)
 (c.1783–1849)', in The Bahá'í
 Encyclopedia Project, available online:
http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/attach-ments/Aqasi_Haji_Mirza.pdf.
 11. Retranslated from the original Arabic following correspondence with the
 author. Personal
 communication, 11 December 2010. Cf. Qur'an 4:125.
 12. The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb 180-81.
 13. Literally, 'The Greatest Uncle', the maternal uncle of the Bab and one

of the Seven Martyrs
of Tehran. On him, see [N. Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers* 446–49.
14. According to Abu al-Qasim Afnan, Mubarak was purchased by Hajji
Mirza Abu al-Qasim,
the brother-in-law of the Báb, when he was 5 years old. According to the bill
of sale, the Bab
acquired Mubarak from his brother-in-law in 1842 when Mubarak was 19 years
of age, see
Afnan, *La?ali -i siyah* 27–28 = Afnan, *Black Pearls* 4-5. A
Research Department memorandum
dated 2 February 2000 states that this bill of sale is not held at the
Bahá'í World Centre
Archives (available online:
[http://bahai-library.com/uhj_servants_household_bahaul-](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_servants_household_bahaul-lah)
[lah](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_servants_household_bahaul-lah)). Presumably a copy exists at the Afnan Library in the United Kingdom.
Abu al-Qasim
Afnan states that the Bab acquired Mubarak in Shiraz but according to both
Mirza Habi b
Allah Afnan and Asad Allah Fadil-i Mazandarani , the Bab
purchased Mubarak in Bushihr
(M. H. Afnán, *Genesis of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs* 20
(note 61), 30, 306
(my thanks to Ahang Rabbani for this reference); A. Mazandarani ,
Kitab-i zuhur
al-h aqq, bakhsh-i du, [vol. 2] 49 (available online:
[http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/](http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol4/2tzh/2tzh049.gif)
[vol4/2tzh/2tzh049.gif](http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol4/2tzh/2tzh049.gif)). If this information is correct, Mubarak was born
circa 1823 making
it impossible for him to have aided in raising the Bab (who was born in 1819).
It is possible

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that the Bab was raised by another servant of African descent also named
Mubarak, a com-
mon name for household servants in Iran at that time (my thanks to Mina Yazdani
for this
clue) as affirmed by Dihkhuda in his *Lughatnamih*, s.v. ‘mubarak’
(available online: [http://](http://topurl.in/Mubarak)
topurl.in/Mubarak). A. Afnan, *?Ahd-i a?la* 31, includes an eyewitness
account about the
Bab’s first day of school as a child that explicitly mentions that he was
accompanied by a
servant (ghulam). It is not clear however if this is a reference to Mubarak
or someone else.
New sources need to come to light before these questions can be answered.
15. *fa-anzil allahumma ?alayya fi h i n alladhi kuntu ?indaka*

h arf al-waw wa-man rabbani
yawma?idhin min ?indika alladhi kana ismuhu mubarak ma yanbaghi
li-jalal quds irtifa?ika
wa-badayi? z uhuratika. The original for '7 years old' is h arf
al-waw (lit., the letter waw). The
numerical value of the letter waw is 6 but as the author has pointed out, in
this tablet, the
Bab gives the number 0 (represented in Persian and Arabic by a point) the
numerical value
of 1 and thus the letter waw in this tablet has a numerical value of 7. This
and the following
passage can be found in a manuscript of the first section of the Kitab-i
Si Du?a found in
the William McElwee Miller Collection of Babi Writings and Other Iranian
Texts, Princeton
University's Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, no. 30, folio 23b (available
online: [http://
libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/Babi/listing.html](http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/Babi/listing.html)), with some minor
differences
(my thanks to Steven Phelps for pointing out this manuscript to me).

16. wa-bima qad sana?a hunalika li al-sahm wa-l-qaws li-ma
ashtaghilanna bihi ma anta ta?lam
min fad lika wa-rah matika.

17. There are also indirect references to Mubarak in other letters. For
example, in a letter from
the Bab to his mother dated Thursday, 28 Sha?ban [1265 / 19 July 1849],
cited in Khushih-
ha-?i az kharman-i adab va hunar, 6, dawrih-yi bayan, Darmstadt:
Reyhani, 152BE/1995,
14, the Bab remembers those who have sought her presence (mustadrikat-i
fayd -i hud ur),
which must certainly have included Mubarak. See also an earlier letter from
the Bab to his
wife in which he expresses concern for and sends greetings to all of the
residents of his
home (sukkan-i bayt...hamigi), INBA (Iran National Baha'i Archives),
vol. 58, reprinted, East
Lansing, MI.: H-Bahai, 2004, available online
[http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/
G-L/I/inba58/INBA58.pdf](http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/G-L/I/inba58/INBA58.pdf), p. 183.

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