

The Bābī-Bahā'ī transcendence of khatam al-nabiyyīn (Qur'ān 33:40) as the 'finality of prophethood'.<sup>1</sup>

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Muhammad is not the father of any man among but he is the rasūl-Allāh (Messenger of God) and the khatām al-nabbiyyīn, (the 'seal' 'last'. 'best' 'acme') of the prophets (Qur'ān 33: 40).

Lost indeed are they that cried lies to the encounter with God (liqā'-Allāh) so that when the [eschatological] Hour comes to them suddenly they shall say, 'Alas for us, that we neglected it!' (Qur'ān 6: 31).

Then We gave Moses the Book, complete for him who does good, and distinguishing every thing, and as a guidance and a mercy; haply they would believe in encounter (liqā') with their Lord (rabb) (Qur'ān 6:155).

Whoso looks to encounter God (liqā'-Allāh), God's term (ajal) is assuredly coming (Qur'ān 29: 5).<sup>2</sup>

This paper consists of interrelated notes upon the Bābī-Bahā'ī theological transcendence of khātamiyya or the khātām al-nabiyyīn (loosely, "seal of the prophets", Qur'ān 33:40) when understood as the 'finality of prophethood'. It also surveys select qur'ānic texts about a predicted future or eschatological "Encounter with God" (liqā' Allāh) understood as an elevated messianic theophany. Often understanding the khātām in Qur'ān 33:40 to mean "last", most Muslims came to consider this verse as foundational for the post-qur'ānic doctrine of the 'finality of prophethood'; that no nabī (prophet) or rasūl/mursal (sent messenger) would appear after Muhammad, the final rasūl Allāh (messenger of God).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a slightly modified and expanded version of a few pages of my unpublished, early 1980s / 2002, University of Newcastle upon Tyne (UK) doctoral thesis (see bib. below). An English language, occasionally further updated and expanded version of these notes, can be found on my UC Merced personal 'Hurqalya Pulications' website (see bib. below).

<sup>2</sup> Most of the translations of verses of the Qur'ān cited here are those of A. J. Arberry (d. Cambridge, 1969) with occasional modifications and/or added transliteration. He often translated liqā' as "encounter".

Perhaps echoing earlier claims of Manī (d. c. 277), the son of a Parthian prince and messianic claimant,<sup>3</sup> the probably Aramaic qur'ānic Arabic loanword khātām came, throughout most of the Muslim world, to indicate that the succession of pre-Islamic prophets was "sealed up" or "ended" in Muhammad just as it had previously been in Manī and in other pre-Islamic notables or claimants to prophethood.<sup>4</sup> It was thought that after Muhammad, sometimes even after the eschatological consummation, no future prophet would appear to found a new or renewed religion. Many commentators on Q. 33:40 have it that the Islamic belief in the second coming of Jesus indicates his reappearance as a nabī (a prophet and not a Divine figure) but in a role subservient to Muhammad and Islamic law on the Day of resurrection (Zamaksharī, al-Kashshāf, III: 544-5).

The alleged 'finality of prophethood' (khatm al-nubuwwa) after Muhammad became a firmly accepted Islamic dogma. One of the traditionally 313 (or more) 'sent Messengers' (al-rasūl / mursal), the Arabian prophet is said to have completed the chain of numerous, (traditionally 124,000 or more) pre-Christian (BCE) Israelite prophets.<sup>5</sup> Muhammad was the "last-termination-finality of the never to be succeeded prophets up until the Day of Resurrection. Such was variously affirmed in thousands of Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions or ḥadīth sources, as well as in numerous expository and secondary post-Islamic literatures (see al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr on Q, 33:40).

Even though it is not at all clear that the absolute finality of prophethood was the original intention of Q. 33:40, this finality is today something firmly entrenched in both Sunnī and Shī'ī orthodoxy (Friedmann, 1986; 1989: 49ff, 64). Any hint of another post-Islamic prophetic claim or a challenge to the i'jāz al-Qur'ān (the inimitability of the Qur'ān) has generally met with dire consequences, including

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<sup>3</sup> al-Bīrūnī, Sachau, 1879:190; Widengren, 1955: 12f; Ort, L. 1967:123ff; Stroumsa, 1986; Reeves, 1996: 11, 25 fns. 52-4.

<sup>4</sup> Note also the use of 'seal of the prophets' in pre-Islamic Samaritan sacred writings such as the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE., Memar Marqeh ('The Teaching of Marqeh') where Moses is referred to as the M-Ḥ-T-M N-V-Y-Y-H ("The seal of the prophets"). See also MacDonald: 1963; text vol. I sect. V. 3, 35, p.123; trans. vol. II sect. V. 2-3 p. 201; Meeks, 1967: 221, 287 cf. p. 281-2; Stroumsa, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> On occasion Islamic tradition reckoned Moses the first of the "prophets of the children of Israel (anbiyā' banī Isrā'īl), the "last" (ākhir) of them being Jesus! (so a tradition from Ibn 'Abbās cited Majlisī, Bihar<sup>2</sup> 11:43; cf. 15:240' cf. below on the Jesus related khatam speculations of Ibn al-'Arabi).

theological castigation, the accusation of heresy, imprisonment, exile or execution.<sup>6</sup> It is yet indisputably the case, as several respected academics and others have maintained in the light of early Islamic traditions and philological commentary and analysis, that the post-qur'ānic Islamic doctrine of the 'finality of prophethood' was not originally so clearly implied in Q. 33:40. For some early champions of emergent Islam, as well as modern academics, prophethood need not have terminated or be seen to have ended for all time with the prophet Muhammad (refer, Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* vol. 2:103-4; Friedmann, 1989: 58ff, 70ff; Cecep Lukman Yasin, 2010:131ff).

The Sufi and twelver Shī'ī positions regarding past and post Muhammad divine guidance is more complicated with their rich prophetological and diverse eschatological materials,<sup>7</sup> registering future messianic-type roles occupied by Muhammad, Jesus, and the twelver Imams; most notably Imam `Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib (d. 40/661), Imam Ḥusayn ibn `Alī (d. 61/680), the Mahdi (Rightly guided one) or the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, known as the Qā'im (messianic "Ariser"). The "seal of the prophets" stamp is hardly rigidly applicable throughout the millennium and more of Shī'ī history with its evolving prophetology, imamology and eschatology. Its Imams are pictured as having a universal, pre-existent and future role transcending nubuwwa (prophethood) and centered on the related walāya (providential overseership) phenomenon. As exalted vehicles of divine guidance they, along with the Prophet Muhammad, are accorded an all-enduring role. Twelver Shī'ī traditions have it that during eschatological times, there is to be a multiplicity of prophet related and imamological "returns" or second comings. Future divine guidance mediated by a cascade of exalted individuals is anticipated in hundreds of

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<sup>6</sup> As frequently noted by Aḥmadiya Muslims and other Islamic thinkers and scholars, there exists a ḥadīth transmitted from `Ā'yisha (daughter of Abū Bakr and wife of the Prophet Muhammad), to the effect that Muslims should proclaim that Muhammad was the khātam al-anbiyā' (= khātam al-nabiyyīn) but not state that he is the 'last of the prophets' or "one after whom there would be no prophet" (Ar. lā nabīyy ba`dahu). This ḥadīth is cited by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) in his *Ta'wil mukhtalaf al-ḥadīth...* and by the polymathic Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d.905/1506) in his *al-Durr al-manthūr fī'l-tafsīr bi'l-ma`thūr*, vol. 5: 204 (refs, noted by Friedmann, 1989 : 63 + fn. 56 and 57),

<sup>7</sup> I shall frequently use the word eschatology here in the sense of having to do with the 'last times' as this future apocalyptic era is detailed in numerous Abrahamic and related sacred writings

sacred, messianic traditions relayed through the prophet Muhammad, the twelver Imams, and many others.

The influential master of Islamic mysticism, Ibn al-`Arabī (d. 638/1240) with numerous of his commentators, made much of the concepts of nubuwwa (prophethood) and wilāya ("human mediated providential guidance"). For the Great Shaykh, walāya is essentially the bāṭin (inner depth) of nubuwwa, itself of various kinds. The following (loosely translated) passages from the al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (The Meccan Disclosures) revolve around khātām (seal) concepts touching upon modes of nubuwwa (prophethood) and of wilāya (providential guidance), and must suffice to illustrate these developments:

Walāya (divine guidance) is expressive of nubuwwa `amma (general prophethood) and that prophethood which is legalistic (al-tashrī) also known as nubuwwa khāṣṣa (specific prophethood)... Muhammad is the khātām al-nubuwwa (seal of prophethood) for there is no prophethood (nubuwwa) after him. Yet after him was the like of Jesus among the ūlū al-`azm (those characterized by steadfastness) of the Messengers (al-rusul) and certain specified Prophets (al-anbiyā)... [in due course] there will be disclosed a Walī ("Chosen Intimate", "Saintly Leader") possessed of absolute prophethood (nubuwwa al-muṭlaqa)... (Futuhat, II: 24ff, 47ff; cf. I: 200, 429; Fusus, 134-6; 160, 191).

Sufi insights surrounding the khātām al-nabiyyīn and associated matters touching upon finality and non-finality, cannot be comprehensively dealt with here. The following stanzas from the Persian Gulshan-i rāz (The Rose Garden of the Secrets) of the Ibn al-`Arabī influenced Maḥ mū ḥnī `Abd al-Karīm Shabistārī (d. 740/1340) must suffice to give an indication of deeply profound khātām ("seal") related insights. They provide a glimpse into the fascinating universe of the mystical and messianic dimensions of doctrines inspired by the qur'ānic khātām ("seal") motif:

Prophethood (nubuwwat) came to be manifest in Adam, Its perfection (kamāl) was realized through the existence of the Khātām [Muhammad].

Wilāyat ("Saintly guidance") lingers behind while it makes a journey,

As a [Prophetological] Point (nuqṭa) in the world, it scribes another cycle.

Its theophany in its fullness (zuhūr-i kull-i ū) [through Him] will [erelong] be realized through the Khātām (‘Seal’).

For through him the cycle of Existence (‘ālam-i wujūd) will be completed.

His chosen ones (awliyā’) are even as his bodily organs (‘aḍw).

While he Himself is the Pleroma (kull), they constitute segments thereof.

As one intimate with the Master (khwajah), his Providence complete,

Through him will Universal Mercy (raḥmat-i ‘āmm) find realization.

An Exemplar he shall be throughout both worlds, a Leader (khalīfa) for the progeny of Adam (Gulshan, 1978: Per. 369-374 pp. 22-3, trans.Lambden).<sup>8</sup>

### **The Bāb, Qur’an 33: 40, Messianic Hopes and the Eschatological Theophany.**<sup>9</sup>

From the outset of his six year messianic career (1844-50), Sayyid ‘Alī Muhammad Shirazi, the Bāb (“Gate”, 1819-1850), in his neo-qur’ānic Qayyūm al-asmā’ (“The Deity Self-Subsisting through the Divine Names”; henceforth = QA.) dating to mid. 1260/1844, and in other early writings (see INBMC 91), challenged both the finality of prophethood and the inimitability of the Qur’ān. In complex interpretations of the qur’ānic surah of Joseph (= Q. 12), he regularly exegetically rewrote or ‘re-revealed’ verses of the Qur’ān, thus opening up new bāṭinī (“deep interior”) depths, new vistas of messianic hope and eschatological meaning. In the light of his eschatologically charged, high Shīṭī-Shaykhī imamology in other words, he modified the standard understanding of the ‘finality of prophethood’ by incorporating rewritten forms and new contextualizations of the khātām al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33:40b) verse into his first major work, the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf (Q. 12) or Qayyūm al-asmā’.

### **Khātām al-nabiyyīn in the Qayyūm al-asmā’.**

In his QA the Bāb frequently underlined an immanent yet partially realized messianism as well as the hope for the great Theophany. Qur’ān 33:40, as the following notes must suffice to illustrate, is re-contextualized and transcended:

<sup>8</sup> On Sufi aspects of the khātām al-nabiyyīn in Ibn al-‘Arabī etc., see further al-Futuhat and the Fusus al-Hikam (indexes) as well as Friedmann, 1989: 71ff + index.

<sup>9</sup> In this paper the word theophany indicates an indirect appearance or manifestation of the Godhead. The related words theophanic and theophanological, are descriptive of something that has to do with such a divine theophany.

O people of the earth! God did not create Muhammad the father of any of your men but he made him in the midmost-heart of the celestial Throne (fī kabd al-`arsh) for His greatest [eschatological] Day. God hath, in very truth, concluded this matter as something hidden and treasured-up (QA XLIV [44] :164).

Here the Bāb rewrites Qur`ān 33:40 so as to modify or pass over the note of finality which most Muslims read into the last phrase of this qur`ānic verse. Through his supernatural link with the heavenly Dhikr (messianic Remembrance) and/or the occulted twelfth Imām, the Ḥujjat-Allāh (messianic `Proof of God`), he several times radically modified any straightforward notion of the finality of prophethood and associated the Dhikr (Remembrance) with the immanent or actual liqā` Allāh/ al-Rabb, the eschatological `Encounter with God` (see further below). <sup>10</sup>

In QA IV [4] the Bāb addresses the ahl al-madīna ("people of the city", of Shiraz?), accusing them of polytheism if they acknowledge Muhammad as the "seal of the Prophets" and affirm his book (the Qur`ān), yet fail to bear witness to the fact that God also revealed the QA to the Bāb ("Our servant"; cf. Q. 2:23) which is certainly "the like of it" (the Qur`ān). In QA LXIV [64] the Bāb similarly sets down a messianic rewrite of Q.12:63 in the light of Q. 33:40. He exhorts believing Muslims gathered before Muhammad, the khātam al-nabiyyīn, to utter the following words:

O our father [Muhammad] the Dhikr (messianic "Remembrance"), is a "further Measure" (al-kail) [Q.12:53] which has been denied to us. So dispatch with us, the sign of the Dhikr for the greater magnification (li'l-takbīr al-akbar)... (QA LXIV [64]: 260).

A few sūras later in QA LXVI [66], the Bāb speaks of a "Book" (= QA) sent down to inform the people that the messianic Ḥujjat-Allāh (`Proof of God` = the 12th Imam) is closely associated with the messianic Dhikr, even as the likeness of the Ḥujjat (Proof) nigh Muhammad, the khātam al-nabiyyīn. It seems to be implied that the messianic "Hour" is about to be realized through the close relationship between the

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<sup>10</sup> In two of his six or so uses of the word liqā` for the eschatological encounter with God in his early Qayyūm al-asmā` , the messianic Dhikr (Remembrance) is closely relates to the expected Divine Theophany, the liqā` Allāh / al-Rabb (see QA XX [20] p.33; XXIX [29] p. 52; XXXVI [36] p. 65; LIII [53] p.103 and especially QA LVII [57] p. 114 and LXXIV [74] p. 169.

Dhikr (Remembrance) and the twelfth Imam or Ḥujjat-Allāh, the messianic Proof of God. In translation, this passage within QA LXVI [66], reads as follows:

“O Thou Jet-Black Tree (shajarat al-sawdā’)! ...This is a Book which We revealed, in very truth, blessed and confirmatory of the Truth (al-ḥaqq). This that the people might be informed that the [messianic] Ḥujjat of God (“Proof of God), in the mode of the Dhikr (Remembrance), is even as the likeness of His Ḥujjat (messianic “Proof”) nigh Muhammad, the khātam al-nabbiyīn (the ‘Seal of the Prophets’) for in the Mother Book (umm al-kitāb) this [eschatological] matter was mighty indeed (QA ., LXVI [66] Sūrat al-aḥadiyya, p.132).

In subsequent years (1848-50) the sometimes thinly veiled ‘messianic secret’ of the Bāb’s claim to be the Dhikr - Qā’im / Mahdī and maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God), was publicly broadcast and his more exalted claims openly promulgated (see Persian Bayān, Kitāb-i panj sha`n, etc). Through his bold claims and thousands of allegedly revealed Arabic and Persian verses, he strove to outwardly exemplify the transcendence of the narrow understanding of the khatam al-nabiyyīn of the Qur’an.

Early on in his trenchant Arabic Izhāq al-bāṭil (The Crushing of Falsehood, 1845) on the basis of his analysis of the abovementioned Qayyūm al-asmā’, the Persian Shaykhī leader Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871) not suprisingly accused the Bāb of such heresy as went well beyond the constraints of Islamic Shīṭī piety.<sup>11</sup> In more recent times, hundreds of Sunnī and Shīṭī anti-Bābī and Bahāṭī tracts citing and centering around Q. 33:40, have been penned by Muslims bent on crushing out the need for messianic reform, renewal and revolution (see for example, Yahya Noori, Khātamiyyat, many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> cent. printings). Messianic claimants (like the Bāb, Mirza Ghulām Aḥmad and Bahā’-Allāh) have often been mercilessly condemned in the light of Qur’ān 33:40. Pious religionists have been shunned and consigned to oblivion. Any proposed eschatological plan of God has been eclipsed by ‘finality

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<sup>11</sup> The full title of this Arabic work is Izhāq al-bāṭil dar radd al-Bābiyya (“The Crushing of Falsehood in refutation of the Bābī phenomenon”). It was completed on the 12th Rajab 1261/17th July 1845 or just a year after the prophetic declaration of the Bāb on May 22 [23], 1844.

fundamentalists' objecting to divinely inspired human messengers with their new hopes for humankind.

In their writings, the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh never ceased referring to Muhammad as the khātam al-nabbiyīn (Qur'ān 33:40b).<sup>12</sup> For them it did not necessitate the finality of prophethood nor outrule eschatological messianism. The Qur'ān-rooted and repeated hope for an eschatological theophany precipitating judgement, guidance, justice and millennial peace, was not compromised. Though there are numerous hadith texts interpreting Qur'ān 33:40b, with implications of finality, there are repeated injunctions in the Qur'ān against doubting the liqā'-Allāh, the eschatological encounter or meeting with God through his messianic or theophanic representative. We shall see below that according to the writings of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh, God, in His Essence (dhāt), cannot be seen or encountered.<sup>13</sup> Early on in his ministry (c. 1845 CE) in a 'Letter to Salmān', the Bāb had already confirmed that the eschaton, "The [eschatological] "Hour" (al-sa`at) had "come to pass" and that the "signs" associated with this time were being realized in a literal and/ or symbolic manner:

... these are the verses of the Tablet (al-lawḥ) which were revealed by God according to the levels of the deep inner sense of the Qur'ān (ḥukm bāṭin al-Qur'ān) perchance the people may come to faith in the [newly revealed] verses of God. Say: O thou concourse of the people of the Qur'ān! ... There hath indeed come unto thee the Dhikr (messianic Remembrance) from the

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<sup>12</sup> The XXV/25<sup>th</sup> sūrah of the QA of the Bāb is entitled Sūrat al-khāta'im, the 'Surah of the Seal / Ringstone' which is distinctly eschatological with repeated references to the messianic Dhikr Allāh (Remembrance of God), thus transcending any finality read into Q. 33:40. For other references of the Bāb to khātam/ khātam al-nabiyyīn in the QA. and elsewhere see, for example, QA IV [4] p. 9; XXV [25] p. 42f; LII [52] p.100; LXIV p. 129; LXVI [66] p. 132; LXXV [75] p.153. cf. XXIV [24] p.40; XLVII[47] p. 89; CXI [111] p.232; LXIV [64] p. 129; 'Letter to the Imam/ People of Medina' In INBMC 91: 24; Work of the Bāb in INBMC 91 p. 38-39 (= Q. 33:40 cited) and p.44 (Muhammad ... khatam al-nabiyyīn) p.50 (Muhammad ... khātam al-nabiyyīn); Khuṭba al-Jidda in INBMC 91: 67; INBMC 91 p. 95 (= Q. 33:40 cited); p. 50; INBMC 91: 115 (Muhammad khātam al-nabiyyīn). Baha'u'llah, KI., see index. e.g. ¶ 40 p. 26 trans. p.39 (= Per. khātam-i anbiyā'); ¶172 pp. 107-8, trans., 162; ¶ 178, p. 110 trans. 166-7; ¶ 181f, p. 112f, trans. 169f; ¶ 196, p. 118 trans, p. 179; ¶ 263, p. 155, trans. 233; .

<sup>13</sup> See esp. Q. 6:30, 130; 7:51, 145; 10:7,12, 15, 46; 13:2; 18:105; 23:33; 25:23; 30:8, 15; 32:10, 14; 39:71; 40:15; 41:54 and 45:34.



Baqiyyat-Allāh (occulted messianic “Remembrance of God”)<sup>14</sup> (L-Salman, INBMC 91: 52-55. Cf. Ibid p.89).

We may now pass on to examine a few Qur’ānic and other Islamic testimonies to an eschatological theophany or vision of God, the Lord, since they too are often held by the Bāb and Bahā’-Allāh to transcend the finality of prophethood.

### **The Islamic Vision of the “Lord” (al-rabb) on the Day of Resurrection.**

“God is He who raised up the heavens without pillars you can see, then He sat Himself upon the Throne... He distinguishes the signs; haply you will have faith in the encounter with your Lord (liqā’ rabbika)” (Qur’ān 13: 2).

“No indeed! When the earth is ground to powder, and thy Lord comes forth (wa jā` rabbuka ), and the angels rank on rank” (Qur’ān 89: 21-22).

“Faces [of believers] shall shine brightly (nāḍira) on that Day [of Resurrection] gazing upon their Lord (rabb)” (Qur’ān 75: 22-3).

The Islamic implications of such qur’ānic verses as have been cited above, have been well summed up in the following succinct manner by Murata and Chittick:

“We have seen that the Koran promises in no uncertain terms that people will encounter their Lord. One of the questions that theologians often debated was whether or not this encounter implied the vision of God. Most thought that it did, and they had Koranic verses and hadiths to support them. The general picture, in fact, is that the vision of God is the greatest possible bliss, and that all those taken to paradise will achieve it. However, those who remain in hell will be barred from this vision, and this will amount to the worst possible chastisement” (Murata and Chittick, 1994: 177).

In line with those Qur’ānic passages which speak of the eschatological therophany, the encounter or meeting (liqā’) with the Lord (rabb) (see Q. 13:2) and of the eschatological vision of the Lord (rabb), there are traditions ascribed to Muhammad about a latter-day vision of God as the resplendent and luminous “Lord” (rabb).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In messianic twelver Shi’ism, the title Baqiyyat Allāh (Remnant of [the true religion of] God) can refer to an eschatological figure whose advent in the latter-days was expected.

<sup>15</sup> There exist many ḥadīth about the eschatological vision of God, the resplendent Lord, in numerous respected Sunnī and Shī’ī Islamic sources. These include numerous Islamic Tafsīr literatures and, for

One such frequently recorded Sunnī tradition, is registered in slightly variant forms in the Ṣaḥīḥ (the Reliable/Sound) of Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d.256/870), Within, for example, the Kitāb al-Tafsīr (Book of Qur'ān Commentary) the following tradition narrated from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (c/ 65/584) is found:

During the lifetime of the Prophet [Muhammad] it was said, 'O Messenger of God! Shall we see our Lord (rabb) on the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyaama)?' The Prophet said, 'Yes!' (na'am); do you have any difficulty in seeing the sun (al-shams) at midday when it is bright (ḍaw') and there is no cloud (al-saḥāb) [in the sky]?" They replied, "No." He said, "Do you have any difficulty in seeing the moon (al-qamar) on the night of the full moon (laylat al-badr) when it is bright (ḍaw') and there is no cloud (al-saḥāb) [in the sky]?" They replied, "No." The Prophet said, Likewise will you have no difficulty in seeing God (Allāh) on the Day of Resurrection as you have no difficulty in seeing either of them [the sun or the moon]... (Lambden, trans. Arabic Bukhārī, 1997, al-Sahih, vol. 6, Bk. 65 No. 4581, pp. 90-92).

This above ḥadīth from the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī, further has it that "On the Day of Resurrection ... the Lord of the worlds (rabb al-'ālamīn)" will come to various ummat (religious communities) in a "form", "shape" or mode closest (adnā sūrat) to the vision of Him expected or "generated by the people themselves". It then adds that the true eschatological vision of God will be a universal, personal vision of the Qur'ānic God.

Several Sunnī traditions about the vision of the Lord on the Day of Resurrection are also found in the Kitāb al-Tawḥīd (Book of the Divine Unity) within the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī where they are considered expository of Qur'ān 75:22-23 (cited above), including the following narration from a certain Jarīr ibn 'Abd-Allāh al-Bajalī (d. ca. 51/671),

We were sitting with the Prophet [Muhammad] and he looked at the moon (al-qamar) on the night of the full moon (laylat al-badr) and said, "You shall see your Lord (rabb) just as you see this [full] moon (al-qamar), and you will have

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example, the ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim (d. 875 CE), Ibn Mājah (d. 886 CE), al-Tirmidhī (d. 815 CE), Abū Dāwūd (d. 888 CE) and al-Nasā'ī (d. 915 CE), as well as in the early al-Muwattā' ("The Approved") of Imam Mālik ibn Anas (d.179/795).

no difficulty or trouble in observing Him (ru'yatihi)... (Lambden, trans Arabic Bukharī, 1997, al-Sahih, vol.9, Bk. 97 No. 7434. p. 318).

More categorically, Jarīr ibn `Abd-Allāh al-Bajalī is again cited by al-Bukharī as narrating that the Prophet said:

"You will indeed see your Lord (rabb) with your own eyes" (satrūna rabbakum `iyyān<sup>an</sup>) (Lambden, trans Arabic Bukharī, 1997, al-Sahih, vol. 9, Bk. 97 No. 7435. p. 318),<sup>16</sup>

In certain of these and other early, related traditions, the expected normally formless Lord (rabb) is to appear on the Day of Resurrection in human-like ("anthropomorphic") "form" (ṣūrat). In some texts this has messianic and theophanological implications. Within Islamic theological writings, it is admitted that God may manifest Himself in whatever manner he pleases; as, for example, a human-like Deity (human beings are in "His image" Gen. 1:27) redolent of divine, supernatural beauty (al-jamāl). In some traditions God, the latter-day Lord, is pictured as taking on beautiful bodily forms, like that of the youthful prophet Jesus or Muhammad. Even the archangel Gabriel is said to have assumed the stunningly beautiful form of the merchant Diḥya al-Kalbī (d. c. 45/618; see Lammens and Pellat, "Diḥya", in EI<sup>2</sup>). According to Islamic sources, God, the Lord, may thus exhibit outstandly beautiful features, appearing at times as an adolescent "beardless youth" (al-shābb / amrad)<sup>17</sup> or as an "Ancient of Days old man or Shaykh. According to Anas ibn Mālik (d. 91-93 /708-10), Muhammad himself is said to have stated,

I saw my Lord (rabbi) in the most beautiful form (aḥsan sūrat) like a youth with abundant hair (ka'l-shābb al-mūfiri) on the throne of grace (kursī karāmat),

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<sup>16</sup> Refer further to the similar traditions about the vision of the Lord on the Day of Resurrection recorded by al-Bukharī in the Kitāb al-Tawḥīd (Book of the Divine Unity), from Jarīr (No. 7436, pp. 318-9), from 'Ata' ibn Yazid al-Laithi as narrated from Abū Hurayrah (No. 7437, p. 319-322), from 'Aṭā' bin Yazid several times from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (No. 7438, p. 322+ No. 7438, p. 322), etc

<sup>17</sup> The prophetic tradition relayed from `Ikrima picturing the "Lord" as a "beardless Youth" (al-shābb) can be found in various hadith collections and in numerous Sufi and other sources including the writings of the great mystic Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240). See his al-Futuḥāt al-makkiyya ("The Meccan Disclosures") vol. I: 97, 755; II: 377, 426; III: 111, 330, IV: 182, 474 etc. For further details and references in early Islamic literatures, Ritter, 2003 esp. Ch. 26 p. 460f.

with a golden rug (*firāshun min dhahab*) spread out around Him... (cited Ritter 2003: 459).<sup>18</sup>

Bābī and Bahā'ī sacred writings often underline the fact that God can never be directly seen or incarnated as a human being (Q. 6:103, Q. 112). Yet, He can be visioned or “seen” after the “image” of his divine Manifestation who is often pictured in human, super-human or in diverse symbolic and supernatural terms. Without incarnation, the formless, yet imaged divine “Beauty” according to Abrahamic religious sources, suffuses the whole of creation and may be visioned. Bahā'-Allāh and his successors taught that past prophets visioned the eschatological Lord as the human-like “Glory” (*kavod*) or the divine Splendour of God (see Ezekiel 1:26f and 10; Revelation 1:12ff), as an archangelic being such as Michael (Heb. = “One like unto God”), or as the Danielic “Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7 : 7, 9, 22; 1 Enoch 46:1; 71:10). The symbolic language of Abrahamic sacred scripture and numerous post-biblical Jewish writings, have the great Messenger founders and expected manifestation of Divinity, as being portrayed in elevated human and/or Divine terms. Though never to be taken literally, the sacred writings of the world's religions, including Islamic ḥadīth texts, sometimes picture God in elevated “human” terms. Eschatological portraits of Divinity with messianic implications are sometimes viewed by Bahā'īs as glimpses of the “Glory-Beauty” (*Bahā'*) of the person of Bahā'-Allāh. The eschatological ‘coming of God’, the Lord, is demythologized in Bābī-Bahā'ī texts relative to messianic, prophetic fulfilment (see further below).

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<sup>18</sup> Traditions relayed from Ibn `Abbas (d. c. 68/687), the ‘Father of Tafsir’, have it that on the night of his *Mi`rāj* (ascent through the heavens), Muhammad saw Jesus as a snow-white (*bayḍā'*) *shābb* (youth) with curly or long hair. Also worth noting here are the observations of the 8th Imam `Alī al-Ridā' (d. 201/818), on a possibly originally Sunnī registered tradition (summed up by Hisham ibn Salim, Salīḥ al-Taḳī and al-Maythamī) about an alleged vision of Muhammad picturing God as a youth of thirty years but ‘hollow’ down to the navel) then of solid form, apparently for standing upright (see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kafī*, Pt. II. Sect. 10, Hadīth 266).

### The Eschatological Encounter / Meeting with God, the Lord. <sup>19</sup>

Great messianic, theophanological importance was given by the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh to the qur'ānic references to liqā'- Allāh, the latter day meeting or encounter with God (including Q. 6:31; 130, 154; 7:51,147; 10:7ff; 13:2 etc.).<sup>20</sup> In the Qur'ān itself the eschatological Day of Judgement or Resurrection (yawm al- qiyāma), is referred to as the yawm al-talāqi, the “Day of the the Encounter” with God (see Q. 40:55). This future era of the interface, beatific vision or meeting with the Divine is referred to around twenty-four times in thirteen different surahs (chapters) of the Qur'ān (see above and Kassis, Concordance, 744). In the Bābī-Bahā'ī viewpoint, the Qur'ānic liqā'-Allāh is not simply an individual post-death or afterlife beautiful experience, but an individual and/or collective end-time experience of God through his latest Messenger, the eschatological Manifestation of God who represents the Godhead in the worlds of creation.

Though present in earlier writings dating prior to 1848 (after 1260 AH/1844 CE), the Bāb gave clear elucidation to the meaning of the Qur'ānic promise of the liqā'-Allāh (Encounter / Meeting with God). This most notably in his Persian and Arabic Bayāns or scriptural 'Expositions' set down around 1848 (see especially sections III.7).<sup>21</sup> His terse Arabic Bayan III: 7 may be loosely translated as follows:

The seventh gate [Unity III: 7] concerns the Day of Resurrection (yawm al- qiyāma) just as you have come to understand. From the onset of its dawning forth through the Sun of Glory (shams al-bahā') until the time of its setting, is better in the Book of God than any period of “Night” (al-layl), as is evident to

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<sup>19</sup> While numerous other translations are possible, the centrally important qur'ānic Arabic phrase liqā' Allah will usually be translated here with the suitably neutral “encounter” / “the encounter with God” (so Arberry). Among possibilities, the translation “the meeting with God/ the Lord” is especially appropriate to its Bābī-Bahā'ī historical and theological senses.

<sup>20</sup> For a complete list of references for the qur'ānic liqā' Allāh, including nominal and verbal uses of the root letters (l-q-w) see Kassis, Concordance, 744f.

<sup>21</sup> A 1913 French translation by Nicolas of Per. Bayān III: 7 can found in volume 2 (pp. 28-31) of his 4 vol. translation of the Persian Bayān (see bib. below). Following Gobineau in his 1865 *Les Religiones...* (for Ar. Bayān III: 7 see p. 484 within the 'Ketab-e-Hukkam' [sic.] for the Arabic Bayān), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1866, pp. 461-543), the same French writer Nicholas also translated Arabic Bayān III:7 in his 1905 translation, *Le Bayan Arabe* (see this translation on p. 114). An Azālī printed edition of the Persian Bayān was first printed in the 1960s (see bib. below).

such as comprehend. Indeed! God did not create anything save for this Day of Resurrection, for thereon all are destined for the liqā' Allāh, the Encounter with God, consonant that is with such action as accord with His good-pleasure.

On the Day of Resurrection this [liqā' Allāh] will be outwardly realized (zāhir<sup>an</sup>) ... Whosoever attains the Encounter with Him [God] (liqā'ihī) hath assuredly attained the Encounter with Me (liqā'ī) [the Bāb] though one should not be content with this if one has not had personal experience thereof. Wherefore, should thou be mindful of this quintessence of the [eschatological Day of the] Hereafter (ḥarf al-ākhir) and be conscious of thine own limitations (Ar-Bayān III: 7, text in al-Ḥasani, 84).

Here the yawm al-qiyāma (Day of resurrection) is identified by the Bāb with the "Day" of the liqā'-Allāh, the Encounter with God. It commences with the rising up of the manifestation of God as the radiant "Sun of Bahā'-Glory" which eclipses the phase or era of the "nighttime" of the darkness of unawareness or irreligiosity. The personalistic theological actualization of the liqā' Allāh (encounter with God) on the 'Day of Resurrection', is the faith-generating encounter or meeting with the Bāb himself, along with the practise of such deeds as are befitting of his new era and are acceptable to God.

The Arabic summary prefixed to Persian Bayān III: 7 places the messianic successor to the Bāb, man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest) at the centre of the eschatological Encounter/Meeting with God (liqā' Allāh):<sup>22</sup>

The seventh gate of the third unity concerns that which God hath revealed concerning the meeting with Him (liqā') or the meeting with the Lord (liqā' al-rabb). This since the intention is the person of man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest) for God in his Essence (dhāt) cannot possibly be seen.

The main text of Persian Bayān III: 7 continues by underling the incomprehensibility and indescribability of the Ultimate Divine Essence (dhāt-i azal), Godhead or the Real (ḥaqq). The scriptural mention of His liqā' (the Encounter) is outwardly possible

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<sup>22</sup> The messianic phrase man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest) was very frequently used by the Bāb in his later writings to designate his successor or future successors. For Baha'is this title was taken as a reference to Bahā'u'llāh himself (see further below).

through only through His Manifestation (zāhir bi-zuhūr-i ū) by which is intended the “Point of Reality” (nuqṭat-i ḥaqīqa) which “hath ever been and will forever remain the Primal Will of God (mashiyyat-i avvaliyya)”. The Qur’ān, the Bāb continues, makes mention of both the liqā’ Allāh (the Encounter with God) and the liqā’-i Rabb (Encounter with the Lord). This through the aforementioned Primal Will of God (mashiyyat-i avvaliyya) centered in the Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of God (rasūl Allāh). In stages, or little by little, there is a further descent of this primordial Reality (centered in Muhammad) until everything (har shay’) is affected by the powers of the encounter; though, he adds, there is no obvious evidence for this, save what God himself discloses of the descending ramifications, the shadows of that Primordial Reality (ḥaqīqat-i avvaliyya). This divine phenomenon is evident in the Reality (ḥaqq) of the rightly-guided twelver Imams, for “whomsoever hath known them hath indeed known God”. The liqā’ Reality of the encounter descended in a similar manner through the knowledge or gnosis (‘ilm) of the Bāb as a “Gate” (bāb-i maftūḥ) swung open. A new fullness of Divinity was made possible through the youthful Sayyid of Shiraz.

The “Pre-Existent Reality” also made possible the liqā’ Allāh (Encounter with God) relative to the Reality (ḥaqq) of the person of faith or believer (mu’min). The believing soul is able thereby to attain a state of “bliss” or “happiness” (surūr), which is described as the very bliss or happiness of Muhammad the Messenger of God, further said to be tantamount to the “bliss” or “happiness” of God Himself (surūr-i khudā). On the other hand, the believing soul may come to experience a state of “lamentation” or “sadness” (ḥuzn) which is again said to be tantamount to the “lamentation” or “sadness” (ḥuzn) of the Prophet Muhammad and thus of God Himself. The goal of the true believer is to attain to the “Primordial Divine Reality” through the persons of the Gates of imamological or eschatological guidance (ḥaqīqat-i avvaliyya-yi abwāb-i hudā). In this way every soul may attain their ultimate goal relative to the mystery of the liqā’-Allāh (the Encounter with God).

The case of the effect of these primordial liqā’-Allāh (Divine encounter) generating divine forces on the wayward unbeliever is said to result in nothing but “hell-fire” (al-nār). The encounter with God becomes an act of eschatological judgement resulting in archetypal “happiness” (al-surūr) or “sadness” (al-huzn), the paradise of “heaven” or the depths of “hell”. Any person who attains to the post-

Babi, messianic man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest), has truly experienced the great liqā' Allāh / liqā'-i rabb, the fullness of the Encounter with God or the Presence of the Lord. <sup>23</sup>

### **The Persian Dalā'il-i sab`a (Seven Proofs).**

The Bāb registers the theological centrality of the liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God) in his Persian Dalā'il-i sab`a. After celebrating the exalted status of the Prophet Muhammad, he underlines the fact that all were created for the purpose of the eschatological liqā' (Encounter/Meeting), though not for actualizing any direct relationship with God, the apophatic, Eternal Divine Essence (dhāt-i azal). Rather, it revolves around an interaction with His agent of communication, the Divine Manifestation of Reality (mazhar-i haqiqat). On this level nothing can establish the depth of His gnosis ('irfān) though this matter is known by virtue of His own Logos Self (bi-nafsihi). The rulers or kings of the Islamic domains during the Qajar period, in their wastefulness and self-centeredness, are said by the Bāb to have failed to appoint any agent to inform everybody about an immanent or actual fulfilment of the liqā' (Encounter with God) for which all were created (Per. Dalā'il, 31ff).

### **The Futurity of Prophethood and Divine Guidance.**

It is today a central Bābī-Bahā'ī teaching that future divine messengers (al-rusul) or mazhar-i ilāhī (divine manifestations) will, for many thousands of years, found and progressively renew the eternal religion of God. The Bāb's claim to be the Sunni-Shī'ī messiah, the Qā'im/Mahdī and one in whom the liqā' Allāh (Encounter/Meeting with God) finds fulfilment, did not prevent or inhibit his also predicting numerous future messianic advents of the perhaps originally Sufī figure man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God shall make manifest), in all of which the liqā' Allāh (Divine Encounter) would find successive fulfilments (Goldziher, 1921 tr. Lambden & Walker 1992). This is indicated in a passage from the Bāb's late Kitāb-i panj sha'n ('Book of the Five Grades', 1850 CE) where the following words could be

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<sup>23</sup> I have consulted the original texts of Persian Bayan III: 7 in Minasian Coll. Ms. 741, pp. 156-168; INBMC 24: 161-2; Azalī ed. 81-82. cf. also Nicholas 1913, II: 28-31. See further, Browne, 'A Summary of the Contents of the Persian Bayān' (on Per. Bayan III: 7) in Momen ed. 1987.



taken to indicate an infinite number<sup>1</sup> of future theophanies of the Bābī theophanic messiah, man yuzhiru-hu-Allāh:

.. And after the Bayān comes [the theophany of] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (He whom God will make manifest) [1]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [1] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [2]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [2] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [3]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh, [3] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [4]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [4] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [5]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [5] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [6]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [6] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [7]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [7] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [8]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [8] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [9] ... (K. Panj-Sha`n, 314-5, cf. 397).

There is a similar passage of the Bāb to the above in his earlier Arabic *al-Dalā'il al-Sab`a* (Seven Proofs, c. 1849). Commenting on the Qur'ānic statement of Muhammad about past prophets (*al-nabiyyīn*; cf. the *khatam al-nabiyyīn* of Q. 33:40), he emphasizes that this indicates their essential oneness in promoting a single religion or Cause of God (*amr wāḥid*). This oneness continues from the Islamic era until that of the Bāb as the "Point of the Bayān. Thereafter from the Point of the Bayān it continues until the era of the first messianic man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God shall make manifest)" and subsequently to another man yuzhiru-hu Allāh and yet another man yuzhiru-hu Allāh. This messianic theophany, the Bāb then states, will continue on "unto the end (*ākhir*) which knoweth no end (*ākhir*)" (*Ar. Dala'il*, p. y = 10).

The position of the Bāb is thus the exact opposite of the Islamic proponents of the doctrine of the finality of prophethood. The mention of nine or of an endless succession of theophanies of man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (He whom God will make manifest), most likely indicates their endless future realization. Towards the end of his life in his *Haykal al-dīn* (Temple of Religion, 1266/1850), the Bāb made increasing mention of "He whom God will make manifest". He variously indicated the time of his messianic advents at after nine (=1269/1852), nineteen (= 1279 =1862-3) or between 1511 (*abjad* of Ar. *ghiyāth* = 'the Assistance') and 2001 years (*abjad* of Ar. *mustaghāth* = 'The One Invoked for help') from 1260/1844. These latter figures were understood by Bahā'-Allāh as either numerically and/ or messianically suggestive Names of God, sometimes indicative of the nine (1844-1852-3 CE) or

nineteen year period (1844-1863 CE), sometimes of non-chronological import. Certain of these diverse messianic datings are also viewed as allusions to the times of further future, post-Bābī-Bahā'ī era theophanies (see Bahā'-Allāh, Lawḥ-i Khalīl Ibrahim Muballigh Shirazi, pp.1-30; 'O Thou Creator' Hebrew Univ. ms.).

### **Khātamiyya and the Liqā' Allāh in the writings of Bahā'-Allāh**

“The mystery of this theme (khātamiyya, “the sealedness of the prophets”) hath in this Dispensation (zuhūr)... been a sore test (mumtaḥan) unto all mankind” (KI: ¶ 172-3, pp. 107-8 trans. 162).<sup>24</sup>

It has been indicated above that the Arabic word khātam in khātam al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33:40) need not signify "seal" implying "last" of prophets. For Bahā'īs it more appropriately indicates Muhammad as the best, the supreme "acme of the prophets" during the era before the yawm al-qiyāma (Day of Resurrection) when the liqā' Allāh, through a messianic maḥzar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God), would be realized. Like the Bāb, Baha'-Allāh in his Kitāb-i īqān ('The Book of Certitude) specifically deals with the issue of the khatam al-nabiyyīn (seal of the prophets) in the light of the liqā' Allāh (encounter with God).

The deep theological senses of the eschatological realization of the liqā' Allāh/al-Rabb and of the future vision of the Lord God, are central to the religion founded by Bahā'-Allāh. He proclaimed the depths of this subject in the light of his theophanological claims expressed in many of his major books and scriptural Tablets. He presented his Bahā'ī religion as being established on the Day of God, the era of the presence, meeting or encounter with God (liqā' Allāh). Bahā'-Allāh many times states that the era of the liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God) was and will be realized through the messianic Parousia (presence) of the theophanic maḥzar-i ilāhī (Divine Manifestations) who renew religion from age to age. Today the liqā' Allāh (Divine Encounter) is thought by Bahā'īs to have come about through the persons and religious teachings or missions of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh, They are both seen to represent the indirect theophany of the unknowable Godhead on the Day of God (yawm Allāh). Throughout the forty-year period of his prophetic mission (1852-1892),

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<sup>24</sup> Note the following almost parallel passage in the Persian Seven Proofs (Dalā'il-i sab`a) of the Bāb : “The people of the Bayān ... will be sorely tested (mumtaḥan) in man yuḥziru-hu Allāh (Him whom God shall make manifest) (Per. Dala'il, 45).

Bahā'-Allāh often referred to, and commented upon, the liqā'-Allāh, the Encounter-Meeting with God. Only a few scriptural texts dealing with this important subject can be surveyed here.

### **Rashḥ-i `amā' ("The Sprinkling of the Theophanic Cloud", 1852-3).**

In the fourth couplet of his early poem, the Rashḥ-i `amā', there is reference to "a Wave of the Ocean of the Meeting with God' (mawj-i liqā)" through which "the Sea of Purity (baḥr-i sifā)" cried out. This perhaps indicates the realization of the eschatological divine theophany through the liqā' Allah (Encounter with God) in the Bab and/ or Bahā'-Allāh himself.

### **Lawḥ al-Ḥurūfāt al-muqaṭṭa`āt (Tablet on the Isolated Letters, c. 1858).**

Another early writing of Bahā'-Allāh dealing with the issue of the khātām al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33:40b) is his testimony to the theophanic mission of the Bāb in his Lawḥ al-Ḥurūfāt al-muqaṭṭa`āt. The Bāb, it is said, came with all manner of "dazzling proofs", though the people "waxed proud" in their denial. This despite the qur'ānic promise of the liqā'- Allāh (Meeting-Encounter with God). When God sealed prophethood (khatama al-nubuwwa) through Muhammad (Q. 33:40) "he gave the servants the glad-tidings of the encounter with Him [God]" and the matter was "definitively resolved" (khatama al-makhtūm). In the person of the Bāb, "God came [unto them] in the shadows of the clouds (fī ḡulal al-ghamām, Q.2:210), breathed into the Trumpet of the Cause (nafakha fī ṣūr al-amr; cf. Q.18:99; etc), split the Heaven asunder (inshaqqat al-samā' cf. Q.55:37; 69:16; 84:1) and crushed the mountains to dust (Q.56:5; 69:14, etc). At this, symbolically speaking, all "retreated back upon their heels" (cf. Q.3:144; 6:71) (Ma'ida, IV: 65). In the Lawḥ-i Ḥurūfāt, Bahā'-Allāh continues to argue that in spite of the theophany of the Bāb, the people acted like Jews and Christians. They continued to await the realization of the promises and the eschatological liqā' Allāh (Divine advent).

### **Tablet to `Alī Muhammad Sarrāj (c.1867 CE)**

In his decade or so later and lengthy Persian Tablet to `Alī Muhammad Sarrāj (c.1867 CE), Bahā'-Allāh himself mentions the subject of the obscurity of eschatological prophecies in Abrahamic religious scripture. He highlights the

supremely clear implications (aşrah al-kalimāt) of finality in the khātam al-nabbiyyīn (Q. 33:40) but thinks it has become an unfortunate, unacceptable veil, inhibiting post-Islamic faith in another supreme agent of God. Despite its implications of finality, Baha'u'llah has it that pure-hearted persons still came to true faith in the Point of the Bayān (bi-irfān nuqṭa-yi bayān = the Bāb). Indeed, he adds, such pure-hearted persons so comprehended the matter of khātimiyyat ("sealedness") that they would happily acknowledge the appearance of a "prophet" (nabī) "from the beginning which has no beginning unto the end which has no end" (Lawḥ-i Sarrāj, Ma'ida, VII: 28ff).

For the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh, the qur'ānic khātam al-nabiyyīn in no way rules out the theophany of divinity on the eschatological "Day of God" (yawm Allāh). Even if it is taken to outrule the finality of the appearance of a post-Muhammad nabī (prophet) or even rasūl (sent one), it does not negate an eschatological theophany. Both the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh claimed to be fully human yet fully divine maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestations of God) in a way that transcends issues revolving around the various limiting meanings of the khātam al-nabiyyīn. In fact Bahā'-Allāh so transcended these matters that in numerous theophanological passages he presents himself as the divine figure who commissioned or sent out the nabī (Prophets) and rasūl (Messengers) of the pre-Islamic era. In an important Arabic Tablet of the Acre period, Bahā'-Allāh defends himself against accusations that he has contradicted the Muslim understanding of Q. 33:40b by stating:

You have assuredly confirmed [the truth] by what you have announced [in citing Q. 33:40b]. We do indeed testify that through him [Muhammad] messengership and prophethood (al-risāla wa'l-nubuwwa) were sealed up. Whomsoever after him [Muhammad] makes claim to such an elevated station is indeed in manifest error.... The carpet of prophethood (bisāt al-nubuwwa) has been rolled up and there has appeared the one who sent them out (arsal) [Bahā'-Allāh] in manifest sovereignty... (Untitled Tablet to Ḥasan or `Lawḥ-i Khātam al-nabbiyyīn').

**Jawahir al-asrār (“The Gems of the Mysteries” (c.1861)).<sup>25</sup>**

The Arabic *Jawāhir al-asrār* (Gems of the Mysteries) of Bahā'-Allāh was written in Baghdad in c. 1277/1860-61 in response to questions posed by Sayyid Yūsuf Sidihi (Isfahanī), a pupil of the high-ranking Shī'ī cleric, the one-time marja' al-taqīd (supreme Shī'ī authority), Shaykh Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (d. Najaf 1864). It contains ten or eleven references to liqā' (the encounter with God) and comments upon the theology of its end-time realization. The addressee is described as one “certain about the “Encounter with their Lord” (liqā' rabbihim) at a time when the wayward failed to attain unto faith in the Bāb as “His Beauty” (jamāl) on the “Day of His Encounter” (yawm liqā'ihī) (*Jawahir*, 7, 25, cf. trans. *Gems*, 7, 40).

Referring to Muhammad as the illustrious “Point of the Furqān [Qur'ān]” capable of enabling his followers to enter the jannat al-liqā, the “Paradise of the Divine Presence/ Encounter”, Bahā'-Allāh describes the subsequent “Paradise on the Day of God” (jannat fī yawm Allāh) as supreme or “greater than every other Paradise” (a`zam min kull al-jinān). This is indicated by the fact that, prior to it, God “sealed the station of prophethood” (khatama maqām al-nubuwwa) through Muhammad as indicated in Qur'ān 33:40. After specifically citing this Qur'ānic verse, Bahā'-Allāh straightway reminds his readers that God promised in the Qur'ān that they would all attain the liqā' (the Divine Encounter/Presence) on the Day of Resurrection” (yawm al-qiyāma). By this and by means of the Qur'ānic verses about liqā', the greatness of renewed eschatological religion (‘azimat zuhūr al-ba`d) as the supreme “Paradise” is indicated. Having made this point, Bahā'-Allāh registers the following blissful clarificatory salutation:

“Blessed be he who knoweth of a certainty that he shall attain unto the presence of [encounter with] God (bi-liqā'ihī) on that Day when His Beauty (jamāl) shall be made manifest” (*Jawahir*, 36ff, trans. *Gems*, 42ff),

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<sup>25</sup> Here I shall cite the page numbers of the 2003 Arabic printing (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) and the 2002 *Gems* translation (see bib.). References to liqā' (encounter) can be found on the following pages Ar. 7/*Gems* 7; Ar. 18/*Gems* 21; Ar. 34/*Gems* 40; Ar. 36/ *Gems* 42-3 (twice); Ar. 37/*Gems* 43-4 (twice); Ar. 39/ *Gems* 47; Ar. 40/*Gems* 48; Ar. 49/ *Gems* 58; Ar. 62/ *Gems* 73.

Holding back from citing all the numerous and elevated Qur'ānic references to the liqā' Allāh/al-rabb, to which he assigns a tremendous importance, Bahā'-Allāh singles out Qur'an 13:2 which he quotes in full. Finally, but not exhaustively in this connection, it should be noted that in the Jawāhir al-asrār Bahā'-Allāh several times associates the liqā'-Allāh with the coming "Day" of the "latter resurrection" (qiyāmat al-ukhrā). As in the Bayān, he closely associated this with the messianic figure man yuzhīru-hu Allāh ("Him whom God shall make manifest" (see Jawahir, 49, 62. trans. Gems, 37, 73). In this connection a beatitude is pronounced upon the person who experiences the liqā'-Allāh through this Bābī messiah:

"So Blessed be (tūba) the one who experiences his presence and attains unto the Encounter/Meeting with Him" (liqā')!" (ibid).

### **The Kitāb-i īqān (Book of Certitude)**

The around 1862 CE Persian Kitāb-i īqān (Book of Certitude) of Bahā'-Allāh, contains many paragraphs clarifying theological issues, especially those surrounding the khātam al-nabiyyīn and the expected qur'ānic liqā' Allāh/al-Rabb, the encounter/meeting with God. Such as view the eschatological liqā' (Encounter) as naught but a general or fully theophanic Divine tajallī (divine "Self-manifestation", "effulgence", "glorious theophany", etc cf. Q. 7:143) are offered a messianic perspective. The Kitāb-i īqān was written in reply to questions posed by a maternal uncle of the Bāb named Ḥajjī Mīrzā Sayyid Muhammad (d. 1293/1876') and known as Khāl-i Akbar (The Greatest Uncle). He had specifically enquired about the traditional Islamic "signs" of the eschatological manifestation or theophany (zuhūr). This in the light of the messianic claims of the Bāb, including a clarification of khātam al-nabiyyīn and of the Qur'ānic liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God).<sup>26</sup>

This question of the theophany, the liqā' with God on the Day of Ressurrection, is mentioned around 37 times in the 'Book of Certitude'. Six or so of these references are found within cited qur'ānic verses, including Qur'an 2:188; Q, 29:23; Q, 2:46, 239; Q. 18:110 and Q. 13:2 (see esp. KI: ¶ 148-9; pp. 92-3, trans. 136f). In the Kitāb-i īqān, Bahā'-Allāh himself notes that there are references after

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<sup>26</sup> For some further details about the Kitāb-i īqān see bibliography, Quinn + Lambden Elr. article.

Qur'ān 33:40b to the future promise of the liqā'-Allāh and states that there is “nothing more exalted (a`ẓam) or more explicit (aṣraḥ)” than liqā' (the encounter with God/ attainment unto the divine Presence) in the Qur'ān (see esp. Q. 39:71; 40:15; 41:54, etc., Kassis Concordance, 743ff and refer KI: ¶ 181 p.112, trans. pp.169-70).

Numerous paragraphs in the Kitāb-i īqān deal directly or indirectly with the challenging subject of khātamiyya, the issue of the “seal of the prophets”. Bahā'-Allāh states that people generally failed to understand the meaning of this subject. They were severely tested when this phrase obscured and challenged their understanding. This to the degree that many were deprived of the ever-unfolding providence of God through the coming of the Bāb. The exalted reality of the person of Muhammad, Bahā'-Allāh argues in the light of various Islamic traditions, was historically “timeless”, both “first” and “last” and not at all something “sealed”. The prophet is said to have declared his identity with all past prophets or messengers such as the first Adam, Noah, Moses and Jesus. Since Muhammad regarded himself as Adam, the “First of the Prophets”, it is not at all surprising that he legitimately saw himself as the “Seal of the Prophets”. This latter phrase was never meant to outrule the eternal succession of prophets who offered divine guidance. Like God Himself according to Qur'ān 57:3, the great Prophets are ever and always both the “First and the Last” (KI: ¶ 172ff., p.107ff., trans. p. 162ff).<sup>27</sup>

It is on these lines that Bahā'-Allāh in his Kitāb-i īqān and elsewhere, argues that khatām al-nabiyyīn was an important epithet of Muhammad. It underlines the elevated nature of the Arabian prophet but does not imply the absolute finality of prophethood. Understood with the sense of utter finality, Bahā'-Allāh states that khātām al-nabiyyīn degenerates into one of the hubristic subuḥāt al-jalāl (“veils of glory”) which can severely hinder the realization of unfolding reality (KI: ¶ 175, p. 109, trans. 164-5).

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<sup>27</sup> Bahā'-Allāh further counsels the followers of the Bāb not to be veiled by khātām al-nabiyyīn (seal of the prophets) type veils in the era of messianic fulfilment, the time of the mustaghāth (“He who is Invoked”) which Baha'is regards as the person and dispensation of Bahā'-Allāh (KI: ¶ 256, p. 152 trans. 229-230). See also, furthermore, KI: ¶ 177-8, pp. 110-111, trans. 166-7 where the khātām al-nabiyyīn phrase is linked with the hubris of the wayward `ulamā' (divines) as the suhuḥāt al-jalāl (“veils of glory”) mentioned within the ḥadīth of Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakhaī (d. c. 81 / 701). Details cannot be given here.

Introducing the person of the Messengers or Manifestations of God and their ongoing rejection throughout history by their wayward contemporaries, Bahā'-Allāh refers to the eschatological liqā' ("the Divine Encounter" / "Presence") as "the very essence of the liqā' Allāh of God Himself". Clarifying the Persian text here, Shoghi Effendi had it that the Divine Messengers are "His Face (liqā')" (liqā'-i ū), the very "the Face of God Himself" (ʿayn liqā' Allāh) (KI ¶ 3 p. 2, trans. p. 3). The person of the Manifestation of God is presented as the quintessential embodiment of the liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God), the divine Theophany. The importance of this theological interface between God and his Messenger (traditionally between "Him/It" and the subordinate "Him/It"), is repeated throughout the Kitāb-i īqān as the following few notes much suffice to further illustrate.

### **Islamic and Pre-Islamic Liqā' (The Divine Encounter/Presence).**

Observing the Jewish rejection of Jesus who is referred to as the "Beauty of Jesus" (jamāl-i ʿIsavi), Bahā'-Allāh states that the people failed to attain the liqā'-Allāh, the encounter with God, through this "youthful Nazarene" (javān-i nāširi). Worth noting in this connection, is the fact that various texts within the Gospels as well as many other New Testament writings and related apocryphal texts, apply prophecies of the Hebrew Bible about a Divine advent, the coming of of God, the Lord (Gk, kyrios) himself, to Jesus.<sup>28</sup> For Bahā'īs the liqā' Allāh (encounter with God) was realized at the time of the advent of all pre-Bābī-Bahā'ī Manifestations of God including Moses, Jesus Muhammad and many others. They hold that the latter-Day liqā' Allāh through the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh, was echoed in the past though more fully fulfilled in recent times when the promised "Day" is believed to have come to pass (KI: ¶ 17 pp. 11-12, trans. 17-19).

Within the sacred books of the past, all were promised the liqā' Allāh (Divine Encounter/Presence) and the ongoing receipt of deep knowledge ʿirfān (\*gnosis") through Him, through the recognition of Him (KI: ¶ 148 p. 91 p. 136-9). Such has been fulfilled in the past and is expected again; like the first and the second advents of Jesus. Bahā'-Allāh explains that devout Muslims had attained the nobility of the encounter with God (liqā' Allāh) through the reviving, "sanctified breaths" (nafaḥāt-i

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<sup>28</sup>. See below and, for example, Adams, 2006.



qudsiyya) of Muhammad. They may now anticipate the challenge of the eschatological liqā' Allāh in the Babi-Bahā'ī era of the Day of Resurrection (KI: ¶ 170, p.106 trans. 159-60).

Though, from the Bābī-Bahā'ī point of view, most Muslims came to reject or misinterpret meaning of the attainment to the liqā' Allāh (“encounter/ presence of God”), it is an encounter referred to in the ‘Book of Certitude’ as “the utmost degree of ever-abiding grace” (fayḍ-i fayyāḍ-i qidam), the very “fullness of His absolute bounty” (kamāl-i faḍl-i muṭlaq) bestowed upon humankind (KI: ¶ 148, p. 91 trans. 136-7). Having said this Bahā'-Allāh cites five confirmatory qur'ānic ‘Liqā'-Allāh verses’ (Q. 29:23; 2:46, 49; 18:111 and 13:2) some touching upon its past rejection and/or its future realization. He comments that “No theme hath been more emphatically asserted in the holy scriptures (kutub-i samāvi)” (KI: ¶ 148-9, p.92 trans. 138f).

Bahā'-Allāh rejected the interpretation of liqā' Allāh as an eschatological tajallī Allāh (“the effulgence of God”) on the qiyāmat or ‘Day of Resurrection’. Such an understanding of Divine Self-revelation is in fact only a general divine disclosure, something already evident within everything as a “Universal Revelation” (tajallī-yi ‘āmm). God is actually ever-present. On this level everything is actually a “locus” (maḥall) and manifestation (maḥzar) of the divine tajalli (Effulgence/ Theophany) of the “Sovereign of Reality” (sulṭān-i ḥaqīqi), expressing elements (āthār) deriving from the Sun of the divine Theophany, the “Source of all splendour” (shams-i mujalla).<sup>29</sup> On this general level these divine effulgences or reflections, originated with or are centered within the elevated Deity-reflecting Messenger or ‘Manifestation of God (maḥzar-i ilāhī) (KI: ¶ 149, p.92 trans. 139-141).

To attempt to clarify this further, Bahā'-Allāh argues that the eschatological liqā' Allāh (the Divine Encounter/ Presence) cannot, as some Sufis have maintained, merely be an expression of the “Most Holy Outpouring” (fayḍ-i aqdas), a specific or direct Divine Self-revelation (tajallī-yi khāṣṣ) of the unknowable Essence of God

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<sup>29</sup> The tajallī (loosely, “theophanic effulgence”) related verbal noun mujalla (‘the manifest Theophany) – there are many possible translations - has profound theological significance in the writings of Bahā'-Allāh. It is found for example, in the opening basmala of one of his important ‘Riḍwān Tablets’. See for some details, Lambden Hurqalya website at : <http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/430>

Himself.<sup>30</sup> If the liqā'-Allāh, on the other hand, were to be considered to be an indirect or secondary Divine revelation (tajallī-i thānī), a “Holy outpouring” (fayḍ-i muqaddas), this would not be expressive of the qur'ānic eschatological liqā'-Allāh (encounter with God) since it would be something that has long been realized within the realms of being, “in the realm of the primal and original manifestation of God (‘ālam-i zuhūr avvaliyya)” through His Chosen Messengers.

This latter mode of tajallī (Divine effulgence) applies to the supremely elevated persons of the divinely inspired Manifestations of God, His Prophets (anbiyā') and chosen ones (awliyā') who reveal “the unchangeable attributes and names of God”. They most perfectly represent God for humanity. It is thus the case that attaining the presence of these holy Luminaries (liqā'-i anvār-i muqaddasa), the liqā'-Allāh, the encounter or “Presence of God” Himself is attained. In its fullness, however, the Divine “encounter” or “presence (liqā') is possible only on the Day of Resurrection (qiyāmat), which is the Day of the rise of the Personal representative of God Himself (qiyām nafs Allāh) through His all-embracing Revelation”, His latest eschatological manifestation or theophany (KI: 150f, pp. 93-4 trans. 141f.). As the Bāb had frequently stated, the liqā' of the Divine Manifestation is the essence of the liqā' Allāh (KI: ¶ 170, p.106 trans, 159f.). The promise of the eschatological liqā', the encounter/presence of God is, in reality, attainment unto the jamāl (“Beauty”) of the maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God) in the person or temple of His theophanic Manifestation (dar haykal-i zuhūr-i ū) (KI: ¶ 182, p. 170, trans. 106).

### **Kitāb-i Aqdas (“The Most Holy Book”).**

A centrally important reference to the liqā' Allāh/al-Rabb is found in the c. 1873 ‘Most Holy Book’ of Bahā'-Allāh. This encounter, it is stated, is possible on the eschatological “Day of God” being the cause of great rejoicing. We thus at one point read in this weighty Arabic text :

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<sup>30</sup> Examples of the kind of tajalli (“Theophanic”) theology spoken about here, can be found in select writings of Ibn al-'Arabī and such of his disciples as Muhammad Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091 / 1680), (see the opening pages of his Kalimāt-I maknūna, “Hidden Words...” referenced in the bibliography below.

The Promised One (al-maw`ūd) hath appeared in this glorified Station, whereat all beings, both seen and unseen, have rejoiced. Take ye advantage of the Day of God (yawm Allāh). Verily, to meet Him (liqā`ihi) is better for you than all that whereon the sun shineth, could ye but know it" (Aqdas ¶ 88).

### **Lawḥ-i Jawhar-i Ḥamd ("Tablet of the Essence of Praise"),**

In his late Acre period Lawḥ-i Jawhar-i Ḥamd ("Tablet of the Essence of Praise"), Baha'u'llah has much to say about Babi-Baha'i theology (see INBMC 35: 161-168). As in his Jawāhir al-asrār, he quotes Q. 13:2 and comments in some detail about the liqā' al-rabb ("encounter with the Lord") as the meeting with the eschatological maẓhar-i ilāhi ("Manifestation of God"). The Pre-Existent Divine Essence (dhāt-i qidam) has never nor will ever be attainable through His Hidden and Sanctified Attributes at the time of the liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God). As in the Kitāb-i īqān, Bahā'-Allāh states that such as are unaware of deep truth (`irfān) in their tafsīr (commentary upon this qur'ānic verse), inappropriately view the liqā' (Divine encounter) as being indicative of a general Divine Effulgence (tajallī-yi ū) on the Day of Resurrection. The Day of Resurrection (qiyāmat) is actually the time of the rising up of the Manifestation of the Logos-Self of God (qiyām-i maẓhar-i nafs Allāh) who is both the Qā'im (the `Supportive' messianic Ariser) and the Qayyūm or subordinate deity Self-Subsisting (Jawhar, 18-19).<sup>31</sup>

### **The Lawḥ-i Shaykh or `Epistle to the Son of the Wolf'**

In his c. 1890 Lawḥ-i Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Mujtahid-i Iṣfahānī [Najafī] or as Shoghi Effendi entitled this quite lengthy Persian work of Bahā'-Allāh, the `Epistle to the Son of the Wolf', there is an important reference to Muhammad as the "seal of the Prophets" (khatam al-nabiyyīm) and to his prediction of the eschatological vision of the Lord (see the Qur'ānic refs. cited above):

"What explanation can they give concerning that which the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad) ... hath said? : "Ye, verily, shall behold your Lord

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<sup>31</sup> On the subject of the messianic Qā'im and the Divine Qayyūm see the Lambden Hurqalya webpage at : <http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/258/>

(rabb) as ye behold the full moon (al-badr) on its fourteenth night” (ESW: 50/ trans. Shoghi Effendi, 41-2).<sup>32</sup>

In later paragraphs of this ‘Epistle to the Son of the Wolf’, Bahā’-Allāh cites and succinctly interprets a cluster of fifteen qur’ānic verses (in Persian termed the āyat-i liqā’, ‘the verses of the Encounter’)<sup>33</sup> most of which contain a reference to the liqā’ (“encounter”. etc) with God. They are seen as expressive of the latter-day promise of the divine theophany or “Presence” of God/the Lord”,<sup>34</sup> a presence actualized on earth and the realms beyond through the divine Manifestation of God. God Himself cannot be literally seen. He states that the promise of the liqā’ (encounter / meeting / presence) of God, the Lord, is explicitly recorded in all past sacred scriptures or books. It has a personal, individualistic or Logos-centered interpretation (maqṣūd-i liqā’ liqā’ nafsī ast) closely related to the one who is the Qā’im-Maqām, the divine Messenger, His “Viceregent” amongst men (so Shoghi Effendi, see ESW: 139/ trans. 118).

### **The Biblical and Post-Biblical ‘Coming of God’.**

Perhaps informing the above-cited qur’ānic verses and traditions about an eschatological advent of Divinity, the Hebrew Bible and many post-biblical Jewish literatures contains texts indicative of an eschatological theophany (“coming of God”) of the person of the Divine or as “God”, the “Lord” in his “Glory” (Heb. kavod Ar., Bahā’). Praying in Aramaic that Jesus Christ as the “Lord” might soon return or come again as a divine figure, early Christians uttered the exclamatory μαράναθά, maranatha (“Come, Lord!”) prayer (Aramaic Mar = Greek Kyrios = Lord ; see 1 Cor.

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<sup>32</sup> As we have already observed, there are several versions of this and similar prophetic traditions (ḥadīth) in Sunnī canonical books of tradition as in a few related Shī‘ī writings. The full forms of several of them (see below) can be found in the Saḥīḥ (the reliable, ‘Sound’) Sunnī collections of al-Bukharī and Muslim.

<sup>33</sup> The fifteen Qur’ānic verses are (loosely referenced in the order in which they are cited) : Q. 13:2; Q. 29:5; Q. 29: 23; Q. 32:10; Q. 41:54’ Q. 10:7; Q. 10:15; Q. 6:154; Q. 18;105; Q. 20: 9-14a; Q. 30: 8; Q. 83:6; Q. 32:23; Q. 89:21-22; Q. 61:8; Q. 28:29-30.

<sup>34</sup> Shoghi Effendi often translated liqā’ as “Presence” in the KI and elsewhere. See ESW: 135-138; trans. pp. 115-118),

16:22; cf. Zech 14:5; Jude 1 Enoch 1:9' Didache 10:6).<sup>35</sup> Some such biblical texts are cited by Bahā'-Allāh in many of his alwāḥ (scriptural writings or 'Tablets') as being predictive of himself as a divine Manifestation (not the essence of God Himself):

“Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. 3 Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence” (Psalm 50:2-3).

“... the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints [holy ones] with thee. (Zech 14:5b).

“And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it... Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him” (Isaiah 40: 5, 10 cf. Rev 22:20).

Like Jesus Christ in the Gospels and Christianity, the Bāb and Baha'-Allāh have been regarded in Bahā'ī sacred writings, as manifestations of the “Lord” or “Lord God”,<sup>36</sup> the latter as the master, owner or “Lord of the Vineyard” (refer Mark 12: 9; Matthew 21:40; Luke 20: 15b).<sup>37</sup> These end-time theophanological predictions are of central interest providing important background to the Qur'ānic Liqā' Allāh.

### **The Lawḥ-i Liqā' (“Tablet of the Meeting with God”) of Bahā'-Allāh.**

In a volume of scriptural Tablets (alwāḥ) of Bahā'-Allāh compiled by the Persian Bahā'ī apologist `Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī (d. 1972), there exists an Arabic text provisionally entitled Lawḥ-i Liqā' (“Tablet of the Meeting with God”; see Mā'ida, VIII: 167-168). It opens with a prefixed “He is [God is] the Eternal (huwa al-baqī)” and continues:

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<sup>35</sup> An important article touching upon aspects of this subject is Edward Adams, ‘The “Coming of God” Tradition and its influence on New Testament parousia texts’ (see bib.).

<sup>36</sup> The Bāb in his writings identifies himself with the “Lord” (rabb) in the light of the eschatological theophany and the Qur'ānic liqā' (“encounter / meeting”) verses. He noted that the numerical equivalence of his parentally bestowed name `Alī Muhammad (= abjad numerical value 202) with that of the Arabic “Lord” (Rabb: r =200 + b =2, total 202) (see Per. Dala'il, p. 54 etc.).

<sup>37</sup> See the New Testament references to the “Master/Owner/Lord of the Vineyard” in the synoptic versions of the ‘Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen’ and their Baha'ī interpretations at <http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/3071/>

This is a communication [book] which We [Bahā'-Allāh] made to be the Meeting with Us (liqā'i-nā) for such as have drawn nigh unto God during these days in which countries (bilād) have been revitalized through attainment unto that which was revealed in this Tablet (al-lawḥ) before the Divine Throne. It was revealed for such as find themselves in doubt about the Meeting with their Lord (liqā' rabbihi). Such persons are among those who have turned away from God, exalted be He, the Cleaver of Dawns [Dawn-Breaker] (fā'iq al-aṣbāḥ).

There follows an address to Bahā'ī believers as “birds of Paradise” who, having heard “the Call of the Beloved One (nidā' al-maḥbūb)”, travelled to attain his presence. Their proximity to the imprisoned Bahā'-Allāh in the Acre prison caused “the denizens of the Supreme Concourse” (ahl al-malā' al-a'lā) to rejoice, despite their being debarred from attaining unto the Meeting with God (al-liqā'). Their inability to meet him directly also caused “lamentation” or “weeping” (huzn) from the celestial inmates of “the Cities of Eternity” (madā'in al-baqā'). Yet, Bahā'-Allāh comments :

How wonderful is this happiness (al-surūr) and this sadness (al-ḥuzn) for the both of them have been realized on the Day of God (yawm Allāh), the Powerful, the Mighty, the Chosen” (L-Liqā', Ma'ida VIII:169; cf. Persian Bayān III:7).

Probably referring to the Azalī Bābīs who prevented the Bahā'īs from the union of liqā' (the Encounter with Bahā'-Allāh), they are referred to as persons who “delude themselves before My Self at both eventide (al-'ashiyy) and in the early morning (al-ibkār)”. A comforting beatitude is uttered upon those that attain the Divine presence: “Blessed be unto thee in that thou hast entered into the city (al-madīna) [Acre] and have attained that which was intended by thy Lord, the Mighty, the Bestower.”

The Bahā'ī debarred ones Bahā'-Allāh adds, will yet experience a divine epiphany by virtue of their spiritual joy generated by “proximity”, their countenances manifesting “Glad-Tidings (al-bishārat) and Radiant-Joy (al-ibtihā) (cf. Q, 75:22-3)”. This such that every person among them will have their proximity accepted or be saluted (al-taslim) resulting in their spiritual contentment (al-riḍā'). Not only have these Bahā'ī pilgrims attained their goal, but they themselves have been circumambulated from on high. Bahā'-Allāh informs them that :

Thou art in the shadow of My Providence and the edifice of My Mercy (qibāb raḥmatī) since God hath circumambulated about thee! O ye possessors of insight!”

They did indeed, it is added, attain the liqā’, the Meeting with Him [Bahā’-Allāh] and circumambulated about the Ka`ba of His religious Cause. They spiritually attained unto “His Countenance”.

### **Bahā’-Allāh and Modes of the Eschatological Liqā’-Allāh**

For 19<sup>th</sup> century Bābīs and Bahā’īs, travelling to meet the Bāb and/or Bahā’-Allāh was the fulfilment of their eschatological liqā’ Allāh, their experience of the Divine Encounter/Presence. We may note here that the great British Persianist Edward G. Browne (d. 1926) was, to his astonishment, advised by certain of his Bābī-Bahā’ī contemporaries in Persia to “travel to `Akkā’ (Acre) and “see God”.<sup>38</sup> After the execution or martyrdom of the Bāb (1850 CE) and the passing of Bahā’-Allāh in 1892 CE, it was obviously not possible to outwardly attain the liqā’-Allāh as the direct encounter with the founder prophets who claimed to be latter-day Manifestations of God. Yet, there are statements of Bahā’-Allah about other modes of attaining or precipitating the Presence or ‘meeting with God’ (liqā’-Allāh).

We have seen above that within the massive corpus of his Persian and Arabic writings, Bahā’-Allāh variously interprets the Qur’ānic liqā’ (“encounter-meeting”). In his Lawḥ-i Liqā’ (“Tablet of the Meeting with God”) he at one time (perhaps late 1860s or early 1870s) interpreted the fulfilment of this eschatological hope in ways other than through a personal encounter or meeting with him in his current place of confinement. Indeed, it is alleged that the liqā’ Allāh promise can be fulfilled through experiencing the potency of inspired, revealed scriptural Tablets, and amongst other ways, through the individual receipt of such an item of revelation. There are likewise statements of Bahā’-Allah to the effect that his devotees should teach his religion and thereby precipitate the wider possibility of the liqā’-Allāh (Encounter with God) among humankind:

We decree in this Tablet that most of the [Babi-Baha’i] friends should write Istidlaliyya (‘apologetic testimonia’) tracts (lit. ‘tablets’ alwāḥ) in establishment

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<sup>38</sup> See Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 1893: 492. Quinn. “Every Shade of Piety and Impiety”, forthcoming. Browne did indeed eventually travel to Acre in the early 1890s. Four or more times, he met the founder of the Bahā’ī religion and left for posterity his now very famous pen-portrait.

of this Cause and send them unto the [various] countries perchance thereby none should be veiled from attaining the Encounter-Meeting with God (liqā'-Allāh [through Bahā'-Allāh], the Mighty, the Beauteous" (Arab. text AQA 4:195, trans. Lambden).

In one of his lengthy and important untitled writings communicated through his one-time amamuensis Mirza Khadim-Allah, Mirza Āqa Jān (d. 1901) Bahā'-Allāh sums up key aspects of his 1863 Baghdad declaration. Supplementary to his interdicting (murtafi') jihād as "holy war", his setting the minimal era of his religions dispensation (zuhūr) as a millennium, and claiming to manifest (tajallī) all the Divine Names upon all things, he seems to refer to another mode of fulfilment of the anticipated liqā'-Allāh on the eschatological "Day of the Encounter" (yawm al-tilqā) when he adds a further equally important directive. This fourth directive has it that whenever the name of anyone (asami), living or dead, is mentioned before the Person or Countenance of Bahā'-Allāh (tilqā'-i wajh), they have thereby attained the Presence of God,<sup>39</sup> the pre-existent King (mālik al-qidam = Bahā'-Allāh) (refer trans. in 'Days of Remembrance', Sect. 9. p. 49). Attaining his presence, the tilqā'-i wajh (lit. encountering his face) could be fulfilled through an individual being mentioned by name in his presence. Many could not encounter, meet or approach the imprisoned founder of the Bahā'ī religion, but individuals could (during his lifetime) have been mentioned before him.

### Concluding Summary Notes

This paper has attempted to sum up and clarify a few aspects of the Bābī and Bahā'ī interpretations of Qur'ān 33:40 in the light of the expected Abrahamic eschatological theophany which, in the Qur'ān, is the liqā' Allāh/ al-rabb on the Day of Resurrection. Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī and thousands of other Muslim exegetes, have restricted the khatāmiyya, the sealed nature or (for some) "finality" or prophethood, to the era preceding the end-time Day of Resurrection :

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<sup>39</sup> The genitive Persian or Arabic phrase tilqā'-i wajh, meaning before the Face/ Countenance' or 'in the Presence' is fairly common in the writings of the Bāb and Bahā;-Allāh. These phrases need not always have this theologically loaded liqā' (divine encounter) implied or rooted sense.



“the messenger of God and khatam al-nabiyyīn (“the seal of the prophets”) [Q.33:40] was the one who sealed prophethood for he sealed up this matter. Thus, no one of you should open it up after him [Muhammad] until the [eschatological] onset of the “hour” (qiyām al-sa`at)” (Al-Tabarī, Tafsir on 33:40, initial exegetical paraphrase).

The Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh claimed that with their prophetic commissions, activities and declarations in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (1844-50 and 1863-92 CE), the long-awaited “Hour” of the Day of Resurrection and Judgement had been set in motion or come to pass, and that the era of Israelite-type prophets / prophethood had ended. The encounter or meeting with God/ the Lord through His divine representative was now possible in literal, allegorical and other senses. This initiated an age of fulfillment. Former notions of prophetological khātimiyya, or being “sealed up” in finality were bypassed or transcended. Muhammad was indeed the “last prophet” to come before the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh who opened the long-rusting gates or renewal, thereby heralding millennial peace and justice. They proclaimed that many Abrahamic scriptural promises had been, or would ere long be fulfilled, in an ongoing era of judgement and beatitude. They announced that God had once again visited his creation through his human yet superhuman messengers capable of communicating divine revelations (waḥy) and mystical insights (‘irfān).

Bahā'-Allāh interpreted the fulfilment of the ‘encounter with God’ (liqā' Allāh) in at least three ways: (1) meeting him in his place of imprisonment or residence, (2) receiving a scriptural Tablet from him, and (3) being mentioned by name in his presence. The Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh proclaimed that God had, through their persons and prophetic missions, again passed indirectly by, lived among them and spoken anew to humankind (cf. Exodus 33:22). Yet, they never compromised the Biblical and Qur'ānic theological axiom, that God Himself, in His absolute, transcendent Essence (dhāt), can neither be directly seen, encountered, incarnated or comprehended. Today, experiencing the millennial liqā'Allāh (Divine Presence), means coming to faith in the Bāb, Bahā'-Allāh and such previous founder Prophets as Zoroaster, Moses, the Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. This involves transcending notions of both a one time commencement and a subsequent cessation of divine guidance through Prophets and Messengers of God and such sages and saints as come under their shadow. It is the belief of Bahā'īs that the

fanaticism generated by time-bound religious triumphalism and fixity, should give way to new visions of religious interdependence and unity.

Though they have not been surveyed in detail here, Bahā'ī arguments against the 'finality of prophethood' usually operate on a somewhat more basic level than the elevated theophanological challenges set down in the writings of the Bāb and Baha'u'llāh. In modern Bahā'ī apologetics a distinction is often made between a possible future rasūl ('sent Messenger') as a founding maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God) and the role of the (lesser) nabī or secondary prophets. Diverse lexical and Islamic understandings of the implications of the Arabic root letters kh-t-m khātām/khātīm, etc are frequently commented upon in the light of the possible non-finality of prophethood. The Islamic understandings of Q. 33:40b might, it is sometimes held, outrule the further appearance of Israelite type nabiyyīn (prophets) but this phrase does not negate future appearances of rasūl or mursalīn (sent messengers) the like of which is indirectly hinted at in the 'liqā' Allāh verses (understood messianically, see above) and, for example, more directly in the following qur'ānic verse:

O children of Adam! There shall come among you mursalīn (sent messengers) from among yourselves rehearsing my signs unto you... (Q. 7:43)

Many thousands of eschatological traditions were assiduously compiled into sometimes bulky Istitdālīyya tracts (prophetic testimonia) by 19th-20th century disciples of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh. Considerable attention was given to overcoming any finality implied by Q. 33:40b.<sup>40</sup> Some, at Bahā'-Allāh's command, followed the lead of the Bāb's Dalā'il-i sab'a (Persian Seven Proofs) and his own Kitāb-i īqān (Book of Certitude). This with a view to arguing that all manner of messianic predictions and apocalyptic "signs", had come to pass (cf. INBMC 80). Bābīs and Bahā'īs have claimed that for many thousands of years, divine messengers (rusul) or maẓhar-i ilāhī (divine Manifestations) founded and will progressively renew the eternal religion of God.

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40 See Gulpaygānī, K. Farā'id, index; Ishrāq Khavarī, QI: 383ff; al-Tibyān wa'l-burhān, I:59ff Rawshānī, Khātamiyyat; Momen 1999: 34f, 87ff.

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BPT = Bahāṭī Publishing Trust;

BWC = The Bahāṭī World Centre (= BWC), Haifa, Israel.

L = Lawḥ (pl. alwāḥ), a scriptural writing or sacred 'Tablet'

MMMA = Majmu'ah-yi millī-yi maṭbu'at-i amrī (Iranian BPT.).

INBMC = A privately published (in the mid. 1970s.) series of bound photocopies of mss. (in 100+ vols.) of the writings of the Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh and others.

Q. = Qur'ān

QA = Qayūm al-asmā' (see Bāb below).

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- `Letter to Salmān’ in INBMC 91: 52-56.
- K-Panj-S = Kitāb-i panj sha’n. (“The Book of the Five Modes”), np.nd. [Tehran Azali ed. mid.1960s]
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- L-Jawhar-i Ḥamd ("Tablet of the Essence of Praise") in INBMC 35:161-168.
- L-Khātām = Lawḥ-i Khātām al-nabiyyūn. (ms) = an untitled Tablet to a certain Ḥasan containing important statements touching upon the Qur'ānic `Lawḥ-i Khātām al-nabbiyīn' and related matters.
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