

3 Renewal of covenant

Concidentia oppositorum and the primal point

*Truly, the Imam as manifestation is the point at which pairs of antithetical terms originate.*¹

This chapter continues the study of the technical terms with which the Báb refers to himself and the source of his inspiration. While the terms studied in the previous chapter—“remembrance” and “gate”—have enfolded in them connotations that point to a drama on the historical plane, the terms chosen for study here point to a more rarified realm, a region to which general access would seem to be prohibited. This is the space defined by the distance obtaining between God and “his” manifestation, the Imam. The controlling metaphor—the Point—would indicate that this distance is the smallest possible, if not, indeed, virtually nonexistent. The chapter is also intended to contribute to the scholarly discussion of a certain type of literature esteemed and treasured in the Shi‘i tradition and a genre about which opinions have varied greatly as to its “orthodoxy.” The example mentioned most in what follows is the *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya*. It and others like it have been studied for what it may tell about the way in which Shi‘i Muslims have heard the voice of their Imam. Basically, the voice is one of theophany: divine manifestation, revelation, apocalypse.² Here I draw attention to the relationship between the Báb’s notoriously difficult style in the *Qayyūm al-asmā’*, among other of his writings, and various sermons and statements attributed to members of the *ahl al-bayt*. Of singular importance is the above-mentioned “Sermon of the Two Gulfs” (*Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya* or *Khuṭbat al-taṭanjiyya*), which is described below along with a few excerpts presented in translation. Together with emphasizing the importance of the sermon for a study of the Báb’s writings, this chapter emphasizes the presence in the *Qayyūm al-asmā’* of the motif of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, in distinctively Shi‘i form, as an expression of the “apocalyptic imagination” that suffuses the work as a whole.

The title “Point of the B [of the *basmala*]” *nuqṭat al-bā’*, mentioned earlier, is one of the more straightforward instances of the use of the word “point” in this commentary. Whatever its full implications might be, we at least know from it that the point, or dot under the Arabic letter *bā’* is intended (see graphic representation below in Chapter 4), and that tradition presents the

Prophet as having discussed its significance. One example is in the following lengthy excerpts from *Mashāriq*. In separate sections on the *bā'* and the "point", Bursi says the following:

The First Emanation from the exclusive unity (*al-aḥadiyya*), is the unique point (*al-nuqta al-wāḥida*). From it, the hidden *alif* is manifested (*zahara*). It is composed of three points: the first contains knowledge, intellect and the holy spirit, its representative letter is the *alif*, from it begins and ends all things that have been given existence; the second is the breath of God which which is mentioned in Q. 15:29: AND WHEN I HAVE FORMED HIM FULLY AND BREATHED INTO HIM OF MY SPIRIT, FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM IN PROSTRATION. Its representative letter is the *bā'* and it is the veil (*al-hijāb*), and the visible dimension (*al-zāhir*) of the [second] point, and its body (*al-jasad*). It is concerned with exoteric authority and its reality is prophethood (*nubuwwa*). It is from this reality that all things that have been given existence actually appear. Its inner significance is mentioned in the words of the Prophet : "It is from the *bā'* that existence has appeared and by means of its point that the worshipped and the worshipper are distinguished." A Sage once said: "It is by means of the letter *bā'* that those who know know; there is no created thing but that the *bā'* is written upon it." As when, if you say "God" (*Allāh*) you have also said all of the other divine names, or if when you write an *alif* you also write all of the other letters, and when you say "one" you also say all of the other numbers, and if you say "*al-nuqta*" all of the possible worlds of the cosmos are present. Or, if you say light (*al-nūr*), existence is distinguished from nonexistence, if you say light of light (*nūr al-nūr*) you have pronounced also the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-a'zam*) for he who knows and understands. . . The third point is the spirit of the divine cause (*rūḥ al-amr*), from it proceeds the energy of existence to the world of forms. It is an allusion to the manifestation of the divine actions. The One Real God thus causes created things to exist, otherwise He would be delimited, and is not of them, otherwise he would be numbered. Rather, He appears in them through the light of his beauty and he separates himself from them through the perfection of his power. He maintains them and transcends them (*qā'im bihā qayyūm 'alayhā*). Because the Truly One, exalted be He, is indivisible, "un-numberable", being un-numberable, cannot be limited. Unicity is inherent in Him (*fa-l-wāḥida lāzima lahu*).³

A brief summary of the spiritual and cosmological significance of the point is found earlier in *Mashāriq*:

As for understanding the point . . . it is essential for knowledge of all kinds and for penetrating obscure mysteries. Just as a word is composed of letters and letters end in the *alif* and the *alif* ends in the point (*nuqta*), the point is in all of them and it expresses and symbolizes the descent

of absolute being, as the outer is dependent upon the inner. From beginning til ending, that is the appearance of the divine ipseity (*al-huwiyya*) which is the starting point of all existence, and can neither be alluded to nor symbolized.⁴

The divine is hidden in creation the same way the point is hidden in script. It should be remembered that this is not just any script, but the Arabic script which is a sacred script, sacred as the actual words of the Qur'an it came into being to record. And, of course, the identification flows in the other direction as well: the universe is also divine speech, creative and created through the operation of the inscrutable and transcendent "being beyond being."⁵

This passage is important not only for what it says about the letter "b" and its point (*nuqta*) but also for the way in which it expresses a characteristic cosmogony, inherited by the Shaykhiyya and certainly at work in the writings of the Báb. Most strikingly is the way in which the station of the point is connected here with the divine names *al-qā'im* and *al-qayyūm*. The first title, famous also as one of the names of the expected hidden Imam, means "maintainer" and "he who rises" or "he who resurrects." The second divine name, which constitutes part of the title of the present work, is much more difficult to translate. On its own, it means "self-sufficient" but when cast in the combination *Qayyūm al-asmā'* it is not immediately obvious how to understand it. There is a structural component, important to recognize: the word *Qayyūm* (counting the *yā'* only once) shares the same numerical value as the word *Yūsuf*, Joseph: $Yā' = 10$, + $wāw = 6$, + $sīn = 60$, + $fā' = 80 = 156$: $qāf = 100$ + $yā' = 10$, + $wāw = 6$ + $mīm = 40 = 156$.⁶ Bausani translated the title of this work as "*Colui che s'erge sugli Attributi*," a serviceable English translation for which is "He who rises up on the attributes."⁷ However, a more accurate translation of the title, at least in English, emerges from taking into account the theological and theosophical context as: He is the source and sustainer of the divine names.⁸ It is essential to recognize that the divine attribute, *al-qayyūm*, enjoys special status as indicating self-sufficiency. As such, it is the one of the very few of the numerous attributes and names that are thought not to be shared or sharable by humans. Another example is *al-ghanī*, precisely the wealthy or self-sufficient. Thus the title indicates both this self-sufficiency and distinctiveness. As such, it could be understood as "He who sets himself apart from all other names."

The Báb employs the term *nuqta* in several other ways throughout the commentary; the following represents a comparatively small number by way of illustration. These show that the word is used by the Báb, in what might be thought an original way, to allude to the spiritual rank for which the tafsir as a whole is a proclamation. In the first chapter the Báb describes himself as the "fire in the drop of water (*nuqṭat al-mā'*) prostrating to God."⁹ In chapter 13, *Sūrat al-Firdaws*, the Báb paraphrases Qur'an 12:11–12 as follows:

And when they said: *O our father! . . . Send him with us tomorrow so that he may abide in the point of ice of the frozen mountain around the point of union, and that he might cause the point of fire to appear from the mountain of justice around the water of virtue.*¹⁰

In chapter 29, *Sūrat al-Hūrriyya*, the following is found:

O peoples of the earth! Cleave ye tenaciously to the Cord of the All-Highest God, which is but this Arab Youth, Our Remembrance – He Who stands concealed at the point of ice amidst the ocean of fire.¹¹

In chapter 46, *Sūrat al-Mir’āt*, the Báb writes, in paraphrase of Qur’an 21:30:

We have made all living things from water, according to what God decreed in the Mother Book, from the precincts of the fire from (*‘an*) the point of water.¹²

In chapter 48, *Sūrat al-Nidā’*, is found:

O people of the earth! Follow the fire and him who is in the precincts of the water. Verily, he speaks on the authority of God and it/he/He is the truth: “There is no god but Him. So cling to the Cord of God, all of you. He is the truth, in the primal book of God (*fī kitāb Allāh al-bad’*) and is concealed with the truth in the point of the fire.”¹³

In chapter 58, *Sūrat al-Ḥuzn*, we read:

And verily God desires [to proclaim] through this Gate, the secret of the fire in the point of water. Do not commit *shirk* in the service of God, your Lord, the Truth with *the* Truth, at all.¹⁴

In chapter 81, *Sūrat al-Kāf*, the Báb writes:

O people of the Cloud! Harken to the call of God in this *tafsīr* from the point of water flowing from the spring of *Kāfūr*, with the truth, upon the mighty truth, wondrously new.¹⁵

In chapter 83, *Sūrat al-Bā’*, the following is read:

That is from the story of the township, we recount it to you. Some of them are in the precincts of the water and some of them are in the precincts of God. Indeed, they were burned, in very truth, in the point of fire.¹⁶

Finally, in chapter 110, *Sūrat al-Sābiqīn*, we find:

The Remembrance of God is not like (*laysa ka-mithl*; cf. Qur'an 42:11) any one of your 'ulama'. By thy Lord! Verily, he is the truth coming from God and is a ḤANĪF MUSLIM. And he embodies the straight religion, in the point of the fire in the precincts of the water—straight."¹⁷

A similar group of verses is found which employ the word *quṭb*—pole, axis—in a cognate manner. The term *quṭb* is of course one with a rich history both in Islam in general, and particularly in Sufism. For example, *quṭb* is the title given in the Sufi tradition, to the one who heads the hierarchy of saints (*nuqabā'*, *abdāl*, etc.).¹⁸ As for Shi'i Islam, it should be recalled that in the canonical collection of the sayings of 'Ali, the *Nahj al-Balāgha*, it is found in the important *Khuṭbat al-shiqshiqiyya*, where 'Ali likens his rightful position in the community to the axle (*quṭb*) of the millstone. This position, according to Shi'i Islam, was one that Abu Bakr recognized, but proceeded to usurp anyway: "While he knew very well that my relationship to [the caliphate] was like the place of the axle in the millstone" (*wa-innahu la-ya'lam anna maḥalli minhā* (i.e., the caliphate) *maḥall al-quṭb min al-raḥā*).¹⁹ Corbin has discussed the implications of *quṭb* in several contexts, some of which, by way of introduction to the following examples of the Báb's writings, will be summarized.

First of all, the Imam as *quṭb* distinguishes what Corbin repeatedly refers to as "Shi'ite gnosis" thus highlighting a difference from Sunni veneration of the person of the Prophet.²⁰ As "pole," along with other designations such as "guide" or "witness," the Imam is a point of metaphysical focus for the believer.²¹ The Imam as pole also represents a means for the believer to avoid the "double trap" inherent in the affirmation of divine unity. That is, the metaphysical danger that the *shahāda* poses of either attributing God with existence or nonexistence. As pole, the Imam represents all that can be known by the believer of such things as God, and is thus the place where everything begins and ends.²²

Another aspect of *quṭb* is brought out in connection with the Imam as the Face of God, or the aspect under which God reveals Himself. This Face is that which allows man, insofar as his own self-knowledge permits, to present himself to God. Thus the Imam, as an esoteric principle, occupies a "polar" position in this transaction between God and Man.²³

Suhrawardi (*al-Maqtūl*, 587/1191) made much of a spiritual hierarchy headed by one who functions as *quṭb* who is ever-present in the world, albeit invisible. As such, this *quṭb* is the caliph of God.²⁴ This correspondence between what the Ishraqis termed *quṭb*, and what is termed *imām* by Shi'is, is one of the major reasons that the writings of Suhrawardi gained such popularity in a Shi'i milieu. This milieu may be characterized as one in which the function of the Imam was essentially metaphysical and mystical, thus obviating any necessity for him to be publicly recognized.²⁵

According to Ibn Abi Jumhur (d. after 1501), the Twelfth or hidden Imam is the pole during the period of occultation:

In him every Imam and every pole converge, from the East to the West, from the Earth to Heaven. . . . The world continues to be preserved only as a function of the existence of the Perfect Man (viz, the Imam). . . . This shows us that in the twelve Imams, from the first to the last, all of the religions are manifested in both their exoteric and esoteric dimensions. . . . If the Imams are absent, then the universe ceases to be. . . . Because it is by means of them that all begins, and it is to them that all return.²⁶

Of more immediate relevance to this work of the Báb's, Corbin points out that the Shaykhis insist that in every age there exists a "Salman"—the typological figuration or "spiritual reincarnation" of the early Persian companion of the Prophet, Salman al-Farisi—who functions as the earthly pole or nadir, of the Imam, who is the heavenly pole. This "Salman" is thus a "burning wick," the flame of which is "none other than the communication of the invisible Fire."²⁷ This presents another aspect of those dual usages so peculiar to the Báb's commentary (to be examined below), from which it would seem that this "Salman" is joined with the Imam himself in the person of the Báb. But Corbin notes that this figure, also designated by the Shaykhis variously as *nāṭiq waḥīd* (unique speaker), the "perfect shi'i," and the supreme *bāb* (= gate of access) to the Imam, must by its very nature remain anonymous.

None of them (i.e., the Shaykhis) ever claimed that he was [the *bāb*], neither did they claim to be recognized as such. Far from it! They affirmed his *existence*, because it is impossible that the world, earthly humanity, be deprived of it. But they also affirmed the impossibility of his manifestation. That is to say, the impossibility that [mere] men be capable of recognizing him, of identifying or proclaiming his name. His person and his name remain the secret of the Imam . . .

Whoever proclaims himself publicly to be the *bāb* of the Imam, has automatically put himself outside Shi'i Islam, because in so doing he has profaned the fundamental secret, violated the *ghaybat* [Occultation] and broken the eschatological expectation. No school has insisted with more force than shaykhism on this point. This is why Babism and Baha'ism, whatever interest they may otherwise have when considered in themselves, can only appear as the negation of Shaykhism.²⁸

This statement sheds important light on the Báb's employment of the term "pole" *quṭb* in its various contexts throughout the commentary. It is precisely because those statements may be read as speaking of an actual concrete appearance of a *bāb* or *quṭb* in the person of the author that the Babi movement quickly separated itself from the tendencies developing in "post-Rashti" Shaykhism. This, as has been noted elsewhere, is the phase of Shaykhism that influenced Corbin's own understanding of that school's eschatological views.²⁹ That Rashti himself seems to have countenanced the

eventual appearance of an actual Imam, or at least the advent of a new cycle of history, was pointed out in the previous chapter.

The conclusions suggested here about the precise nature of the Báb's claims in this commentary are really not dependent upon whether or not Rashti ultimately expected an actual appearance of an Imam. Rather, they depend only on the obvious centrality in the writings of Shaykh Ahmad and Rashti of repeated allusions to such symbols of authority as *bāb*, *imām*, *walāya*, and so on, quite apart from considerations of whether or not these two authors were primarily interested in the esoteric, as opposed to the exoteric, implications of such terms. Many examples exist in Islamic history in which entire movements acquired identity from allusive or ambiguous references to such ideas as, for example, the spiritual authority implied in the term "seal of the saints, guardians" (*khātim al-awliyā'*).³⁰

In the following examples from the Báb's commentary, the word *quṭb* appears to be used in much the same way as *nuṭṭa*.

In chapter 1, the *Sūrat al-Mulk*, the following, which incorporates some of Qur'an 18:47, is read:

We have set the mountains in motion upon the earth and the stars upon the Throne around the Fire in the Pole of the Water in the presence of the Remembrance by [the will of] God, the Truth.³¹

In chapter 58, the *Sūrat al-Huzn*, the Báb writes:

And verily God knows that your obedience during both night and day, and to the Pole of the Fire in the precincts of the Water, is to God, the One, the Ancient, He other than Whom there is no god.³²

In chapter 74, *Sūrat al-Kahf*, we read:

Say: "All are at the Gate and have been remembered." And: "Verily, verily I am the Fire in the Pole [Midst/Center] of the Water, taking [men] to account concerning the [divine] cause. And in the estimation of God, the Truth, I have been mentioned."³³

In chapter 79, *Sūrat al-Kalima*, is read:

Say: I am that statement – *the Reality* (*al-hāqqā*, cf. Qur'an 69:1–3) in the precincts of the Water, and am also that statement—THE JUDGMENT TO COME (*al-kalima al-qāri'a*, cf. Qur'an 69:4; 101:1–3) in the precincts of the Fire at the Center (*quṭb*) that speaks of the divine glory by the permission of God, the Sublime. In truth I am praiseworthy.³⁴

In chapter 81, the *Sūrat al-Kāf*, the following is found:

VERILY, WE HAVE ESTABLISHED THE THRONE UPON THE WATER (Qur'an 11:7), and the air around the Fire, and the Fire in the centre of the water (*fī quṭb al-mā'*) . . .³⁵

In chapter 99, *Sūrat al-Jihād*, we read:

Verily the Remembrance wants to connect you to his word of justice, by our permission. He is the Fire that has been established in the center of the water (*al-ladhī qad kāna fī quṭb al-mā' ma'mūran*).³⁶

A similar group of verses employs the word *markaz*, “center,” “post,” “rank” or “station.” In chapter 24, *Sūrat al-Qadar*, we read:

O people of the earth! The night has indeed ENSHROUDED and the day has indeed APPEARED RESPLENDENT [cf. Qur'an 92:1–2] in the rising of the Sun with the truth. This day it is visible in the midst of its zenith (*fī markaz al-zawāl*) in the precincts of the Water, upon the Water, around the Fire.³⁷

In chapter 109, *Sūrat al-'Abd*, we read:

O people of the Cloud! Know ye that this Arab youth is speaking the truth in the center of the water (*fī quṭb al-mā'*) from the midst of the Fire (*min markaz al-nār*): “There is no god but Him, the Mighty. And He is God, Mighty, Ancient.”³⁸

These kinds of statements are among the most cryptic in the Báb's commentary and are perhaps the main reason this work has been characterized as, among other things, an “unintelligible rhapsody.” However, a study of such statements in connection with other passages in the commentary suggests that while they are undoubtedly obscure and very difficult to translate properly, they may be seen to conform to the inner logic of the work as a whole. They represent features of the way the words of the text “hang together.”³⁹ For example, in chapter 76, *Sūrat al-Waraqā*, the following more or less explicit statement is read:

O Qurrat al-'Ayn! Mankind WILL ASK THEE CONCERNING DHŪ AL-QARNAYN. SAY: (Qur'an 18:83, n.b. the Qur'an continues here with I SHALL RECITE UNTO YOU A REMEMBRANCE OF HIM. The Báb however stops the Qur'anic citation at the point indicated, possibly taking for granted that the rest of the verse will have been stimulated to life by the allusion, and continues with:) “Yea, by my Lord! I am the king of the two beginnings (*mālik al-bad'ayn*) in the two eras (*fī al-qarnayn*). And I am the exalted era in the two bodies (*al-qarn al-rafī' fī-l-jismayn*) and VERILY, VERILY I AM the Fire in the two waters (*al-nār fī al-mā'ayn*), and VERILY, VERILY,

I AM the Water in the two fires (*al-mā' fī al-nārayn*). So hearken ye to my call from this double Mount (*fī dhālika al-ṭūrayn*): So WE ESTABLISHED JOSEPH IN THE LAND (Q. 12:56) and have given him a single letter of the name of the Remembrance—this Arab youth, in very truth.”⁴⁰

This last example is characteristic of several passages in the commentary, which space does not permit to be listed in full. An extended example is reproduced at the end of this chapter. The point to be made here is that the opposing elements of fire and water, as only two examples, stand for the Báb himself as Imam. An Imam who as *quṭb*, *nuqṭa*, or *markaz*, represents the focus of all cosmology, eschatology, and ontology; in a word, *walāya*. *Walāya*, in turn, is the touchstone by which all things are found to be true or false, good or evil. The frequent invocation of these opposites, whether as elements such as fire and water, or moral and religious principles such as “faith” (*īmān*) and “disbelief” (*kufr*), has as one of its functions the designation of the Báb as the “point” from which these things acquire reality or existence. Those many passages that employ several dual substantives have a similar function. Because of the overwhelming abundance of such terms and expressions in this work, it is not really possible to attempt a discussion of them in any detail.

The frequent, incessant, perhaps hypnotic, reference to such words as *nuqṭa*, *quṭb*, and *markaz*, however allusively employed, would quite naturally evoke in the minds of such persons as Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, and other Shaykhis or Shi'i gnostics, the figure of the Imam, specifically the twelfth Imam. This figure is depicted in a particular type of imamology, which developed out of the meditation on such texts as the *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya*. This text was the subject of a long commentary by Sayyid Kazim Rashti. This imamology, which speaks of the Imam as the coincidence of opposites, will be better understood through a brief description of the sermon and Rashti's gloss.

Before turning to this subject however, it will be of some interest to note another aspect of the idea of the coincidence of opposites and its connection with eschatology, as demonstrated in an article by Eliade.⁴¹ The author has isolated several instances of the theme from mythic and religious history. His focus was on the myth of androgyny, but in the course of his discussion many other examples are cited, such as the theme of reunion, the polar opposition of heaven and earth, water and clay, old and new, up and down, sun and moon, and other opposites that are found in works of alchemy. His conclusion on the matter is stated succinctly, and in the present context, most appropriately. For him the coincidence of opposites represents:

The eschatological syndrome *par excellence*, the sign that Time and History have ended—it is the lamb and the lion, the infant playing with the snake. Conflicts, that is contraries, have been abolished. Paradise is recovered. This eschatological image demonstrates perfectly that the

coincidentia oppositorum does not always imply “totalization” in the concrete meaning of the term. It can likewise signify the paradoxical return of the world to a paradisiacal state. The fact that the lamb, the lion, the child, and the snake *exist*, means that *the World is*, that there is a Cosmos and not Chaos. But the fact that the lamb lies down with the lion and the child sleeps near the snake, suggests that it is no longer *our* world, but Paradise. Briefly, it signifies a paradoxical World, since it is empty of those tensions and conflicts that define the Universe.⁴²

In the present context, such imagery and symbolism bespeak the descent to earth of heaven, in the form of the Imam. It will be recalled that Shaykhi works (as well as Isma‘ili works) speak often of two cycles of history, one of concealment (*satr*) and one of disclosure (*kashf*). It is also important to note that one of the main objections to Shaykhi theology has been against that school’s understanding of the Hereafter, or Paradise, which the Shaykhis identified as the recognition of the *walāya* of the Imam, and their further insistence that Paradise and Hell are realized through the actions of men and have no real identity beyond this.⁴³ The Báb, in his voice as Qa‘im, would therefore function as marking the end of the previous cycle (Eliade’s “Time and History”), and the “descent to earth” of Paradise, in the person of the Imam to whom love (*maḥabba*) or the “act” of friendship (*walāya*) is owed. At the same time, this Qa‘im is the personification of Hell (*al-nār*), insofar as he is not recognized or accepted. As has been seen, such ideas have their basis in the Akhbari literature.⁴⁴ The matter is elucidated in Rashti’s commentary on the *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya*, to which we now turn.

Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya

The single most revealing clue to the proper understanding of the way in which the Báb himself perceived his own station, or the true voice of this work, resides in the many references, both oblique and explicit, to the *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya* in his tafsir on the sura of Joseph. This sermon has been mentioned in previous pages, but it is now time to consider it in some detail. One of the major works of Sayyid Kazim Rashti, to whom the Báb refers in an earlier work as his “dear teacher,” was a lengthy commentary on this sermon attributed to the first Imam ‘Ali. The piece is known by the above name because of the distinctive way in which the unusual Arabic word *tuṭunjltaṭanj* is used in the text.⁴⁵ We are fortunate to have a discussion of the obscurities the sermon presents by Henry Corbin, who studied it with his students during one of his courses at the *Ecole pratique des hautes études* during the academic year 1969–70. Until very recently, Corbin was the only Western scholar to have studied this work.⁴⁶ The following is a synopsis, by way of a rather free translation, of Corbin’s discussion of the sermon and Rashti’s commentary.⁴⁷

The point to be made is that the Báb’s so-called “galimatias”⁴⁸ does have a direct relation with the *khuṭba* and its special logic. The Báb’s preoccupation

with this sermon has obvious traces in his other work, beginning with a few passages in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara*, and more importantly in numerous dual usages in the *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf* where the reference is either explicit or implicit. Such a connection, it is argued, sheds considerable light on the nature of the Báb's claims, however obscure and/or confused these might otherwise appear to the uninitiated, those scholars and other readers who might have been unaware of the kind of literature this difficult sermon represents and, through emulation, presents itself as being in conversation with. The conclusion offered is that the tafsir of the Báb represents not only the "new book, difficult for the Arabs" (mentioned above from a hadith) which the Qa'im is expected to promulgate in Mekka, but also it proclaims the distinctive authority (*imāma*) to which the Báb was laying claim. The text of the *khuṭba*, as it appears in the *Mashāriq* by the fourteenth-century Shi'i scholar Rajab Bursi is reproduced in appendix together with the chapter from the Báb's tafsir in which the emulation of the style of the *khuṭba* reaches its highest intensity.⁴⁹

The *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya* is attributed to the first Imam, 'Ali. The *khuṭba* itself is rather long and, according to Corbin, one of the most difficult and complex imamological texts.⁵⁰ It is not found in the *Nahj al-Balāgha*; the earliest mention of it is in the work of the twelfth-century Shi'i scholar, Ibn Shahrashub.⁵¹ A characteristic passage runs:

I am the one who hopes and the one hoped for; I am abiding over the two gulfs (*tuṭunjayn*); I am he who gazes towards the two Wests and the two Easts [cf. Qur'an 55:17]; I have seen the mercy of God and Paradise is the vision of the eye.⁵²

Elsewhere in the sermon we find the following:

I know wondrous things about God's creation—things which none but God knows. And, I know what was and what will be and what was with those who preceded at the time of the first *dharr* belonging to the first Adam (*Ādam al-awwal*) . . . God hid its full knowledge from all of the prophets except the master of this *sharī'a* of yours (i.e., Muhammad) . . . Then he taught me his knowledge and I taught him my knowledge . . . through us perishes he who perishes and through us is saved he who is saved . . .⁵³

A final example:

I am the master of the first flood and I am the master of the second flood⁵⁴ I am the master of the flood of 'Arim [Qur'an 34:16]. I am the master of the hidden secrets. I am the master of 'Ad and the gardens. I am the master of Thamud and the signs. I am the one who destroys them. I am the one who agitates them. I am the place to which they return. I am their destroyer. I am their manager. I am the one who builds

them up. I am the one who flattens them. I am the one who causes them to die. I am the one who gives them life. I am the First. I am the Last. I am the Seen. I am the Hidden. [cf. Qur'an 57:3] I was with generation (*kawr*) before generation (*dawr*). I was with age before aging. I was with the Pen before there was a Pen. I was with the Tablet before there was a Tablet . . .⁵⁵

The sermon is one of a number in which what Corbin calls “theosophical imamology” finds its most accomplished, condensed, and obscure expression.⁵⁶ Among such sermons or hadiths included in this category is the first one discussed in this article by Corbin,⁵⁷ which presents a conversation between the divine nature (*lāhūt*) and the human nature (*nāsūt*) of the Imam. As mentioned above, it may be that the dialogue presented in this sermon offers another clue to the elusive problem of the “voice” speaking in the Báb’s commentary. Signs of such an internal dialogue may be found in the Qur’an itself (most dramatically in the “*qullSay!*” verses), but the phenomenon is clearly present in, for example, the Persian mystic, A’la al-Dawla Semnani (d. 1336). Landolt’s study of the letters exchanged between Semnani and his master, Nur al-Din Esfarayini (d. 1327), sheds light on this question:

In these letters of Semnani, it is often Esfarayini who speaks in the first person when the voice of the master is announced as *eshārāt āz ‘ālam-e loṭf*, this voice gives to Semnani explanations of the advanced mystical doctrine . . . Esfarayini had written. But no one, including Esfarayini, doubts that it was in fact Semnani, that is the spiritual reality of Semnani, who had given a subtle response to Esfarayini, and not the other way around. In other words, the spirituality of Esfarayini, or the absolute Master, has become that of Semnani[.]⁵⁸

In a similar way, the spirituality of the Imam (or the supreme “Shaykh” of Shi’i Islam) has become the spirituality of the Báb. Where the object of contemplation for Semnani was the spiritual form of his master,⁵⁹ the object of contemplation for the Báb was the Imam, or any one of the members of the *ahl al-bayt*. The phenomenon would appear to be the same.

Another similar address is the so-called *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*, possibly identical with a *Khuṭbat al-Iftikhār*, mentioned by Ibn Shahrashub and on which the founder of Alamut, Hasan-i Sabbah, is said to have written a commentary.⁶⁰ Part of the text of this sermon is found in the *Kitāb al-Kashf*. In it ‘Alī declares from the pulpit:

“I am the Christ who heals the blind and the leprous, creating birds and dispersing clouds.” Meaning [says the commentator]: “I am the second Christ (*al-masīḥ al-thānī*)—I am he and he is I.” At this a man stood up and asked: “O Commander of the Faithful, was the Torah written in a

foreign language or in Arabic?" 'Ali said: "[In a] foreign language, but its meaning is Arabic, namely that the Christ is the *qā'im bi-l-ḥaqq*, and the king of this world and the next. The Qur'an itself confirms this in the verse: *Peace be upon me the day I was born, and the day that I die, and the day that I am raised up alive.* [Qur'an 19:33] Thus 'Isa ibn Maryam is of me and I am of him, and he is the Most Great Word of God (*kalimat Allāh al-kubrā*) and he is the one who testifies and I am the one testified to."⁶¹

Because such material is not found in the canonical *Nahj al-Balāgha*, compiled by al-Sharif al-Radi (1015), some have insisted that such statements attributed to 'Ali are forgeries by men like Rajab Bursi.⁶² Two factors must be taken into consideration here. First, it has been pointed out that even if such sermons were not really spoken by the Imam, they nevertheless spoke, at some moment, in and to the Shi'i conscience, and this is what is phenomenologically important.⁶³ Elsewhere Corbin states that such material was left out of the *Nahj al-Balāgha* precisely because it presents "certain resonances with Isma'ili Imamology."⁶⁴ It is clear from the commentary on the *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya* by Kazim Rashti that one of the "moments" at which such material "spoke" to a receptive audience is the one that has the greatest importance for this discussion, namely mid-nineteenth-century Iran.

To begin with, the title itself is strange. The adjective is derived from the word *taṭanj*, *ṭatanj*, or *ṭatanj*, and the text itself offers no lexicographical or etymological clues about the word. The two commentaries on it mentioned by Corbin do not agree on its orthography, but both insist that the word is a synonym for *khalīj*, "gulf." The title can therefore be translated as "The sermon between/on/of the two gulfs." The Persian translation and commentary, completed in 1680, by al-Hasan al-Khatīb al-Qari',⁶⁵ does not, according to Corbin, go very far in illuminating the main message of the sermon. Corbin has relied on the commentary by the Báb's former teacher, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, a commentary which he describes as "very dense, proceeding, following his habit, directly to the deepest depth of speculative difficulties and in doing so, opens the door to spiritual practice."⁶⁶

The meaning of the title of the sermon is somewhat clarified by Rashti's comments on the statement: "I am he who abides over the two gulfs (*anā al-wāqif 'alā al-taṭanjayn*); I am he who faces the two Wests and the two Easts" (cf. Qur'an 55:17). This is likened by Rashti to another statement attributed to 'Ali, a variant of which is quoted by the Báb in *Baqara*.⁶⁷ "My *zāhir* is *walāya*; my *bāṭin* is an unknowable mystery." Rashti says: "The outer meaning (*zāhir*) of this sermon is the explanation of the divine creative activity; its inner meaning (*bāṭin*) is the secret meditation of this activity." Presumably, the two gulfs, then, are the gulf of the exoteric and the gulf of the esoteric. But, as we shall see, the pair of gulfs is susceptible to several other interpretations. In his commentary, Rashti constructs a table of fourteen complementary pairs of *zāhir* and *bāṭin*, which comprehend all

metaphysical levels and cycles of divine manifestation. Note that the number fourteen is the number of the members of the “family of God”: Muhammad, Fatima, ‘Ali and the subsequent eleven Imams.

The first major theme of the sermon is that of the apophatic theology (*tanzīh*), so characteristic of the Shaykhi school. Rashti says, “This sermon indicates a kind of transcendence of the Creator, which is incomprehensible to the creation.” This transcendence is suggested in such words of the Imam from the Sermon as, “I am he who hopes and I am he who is hoped for.”⁶⁸ Corbin says that this transcendence, which is the profession of a divine oneness (*tawhīd*) beyond names and attributes, ultimately establishes a metaphysical void, but a void in which, paradoxically, divine manifestation is produced.⁶⁹ The “pleroma” of the fourteen Pure Ones is constituted through their practice of *tawhīd*, which is also their denial to themselves of the rank of godhead. This *tanzīh* excludes the possibility of any divinity being shared by Man, while at the same time, the Creator causes Man to realize his true self. Rashti says, “This sermon, and those like it, explain the manner in which a created thing always ends in its like, the reason why the description of anything results only in more description.”⁷⁰ This closed circuit, comments Corbin, is its own justification, because by its very existence, its opposite, that is absolute transcendence, is indicated. Paraphrasing Rashti, Corbin says that those who deny the authenticity of such sermons do so precisely because they are incapable of understanding such absolute transcendence; rather, they fall, unwittingly, into the error of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), and the disintegration of the Unique, also known as “polytheism” (*tashrīk*).⁷¹

It is said that the sermon was delivered by ‘Ali somewhere between Medina and Kufa. For Rashti, these two cities refer to a mystical and symbolic topography. Medina is the city of the Prophet, or the place of revelation (*tanzīl*), while Kufa can be either the Land of paradise or damnation, depending upon one’s acceptance or rejection of ‘Ali’s Imamate. That is to say, it is the place of the true meaning (*ta’wīl*) of the revelation. Here part of Q. 57:13 is cited: . . . THE INWARD (*bāṭin*) WHEREOF IS MERCY, AND AGAINST THE OUTWARD (*ẓāhir*) WHEREOF IS CHASTISEMENT. Thus Kufa typifies the two gulfs mentioned above: one is the “gulf of mercy” (*taṭanj al-rahma*) and the other the “gulf of wrath” (*taṭanj al-ghadāb*). Both flow from the greater Sea of Mercy (*baḥr al-rahma*), which here is the true meaning (*ma’nā*) in a metaphysical sense, of the person of the Imam.⁷² It is important to pause here and point out what would otherwise remain a hidden significance in the citation of the Qur’anic verse quoted above. While Rashti’s immediate audience would have been expected to immediately grasp such significance, it is certainly not possible to assume that the contemporary English reader would. The verse itself is discussing the judgment day, and begins: ON THAT DAY SHALL THE HYPOCRITES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, SPEAK UNTO THOSE WHO HAVE ATTAINED FAITH: “WAIT FOR US! LET US HAVE A RAY OF LIGHT FROM YOUR LIGHT!” BUT THEY WILL BE TOLD: “TURN BACK AND SEEK A LIGHT OF YOUR OWN!” AND THERE UPON A WALL WILL BE RAISED BETWEEN THEM [AND THE BELIEVERS], WITH A GATE IN IT: WITHIN IT WILL BE MERCY AND OUTSIDE OF IT

WILL BE CHASTISEMENT. This verse, apart from affirming the apocalyptic duality of faith and belief, so characteristic of the Qur'an and, especially Shi'i Islam, also contains references important for the Báb's proclamation. The explicit reference to "waiting" ("Wait for us!": *unzurūmā*) is of course a reference to a classical Shi'i topic. But apart from this, the explicit mention of a "gate" (*bāb*) could not be more apropos (the word occurs only ten times in the Qur'an in the singular). Such textual cross-fertilizations and intra/intertextual allusions are not perceived by the apocalyptic imagination as accidental. We know, for example, that the Báb composed a commentary on one verse of Rashti's commentary on this *khuṭba*.⁷³ Unfortunately, this commentary is not available to me, but it would be no surprise to discover that the portion commented on by the Báb was precisely the one under discussion here.

The Imam, according to Rashti's explanation, occupies the position of "pole" (*quṭb*), as the physical and metaphysical manifestation (*mazhar*) of the name of Divine Mercy. This is, of course, another frequent image in the *Qayyum al-Asmā'*, as was discussed and demonstrated above. This universal mercy comprises both gulfs. The one on the right, the Eastern or superior gulf, is designated by several names: *baḥr al-ṣād*,⁷⁴ the *nūn* (as in the divine command "*kun!*"), the gulf of "sweet water," and so forth. Note that the graphic representation of these letters may be seen as suggesting a gulf. It should be noted also that the grapheme *wā-alif-wāw*  represents perfectly the abider over the two gulfs. This grapheme is indicated in the cryptogram of the Greatest Name:



In this cryptogram which is seen by the tradition as the mysterious Greatest Name of God (*ism allāh al-a'zam*),⁷⁵ the second element, reading from left to right, is actually an inverted Arabic "w" or *wāw* indicating reversal and return, according to Rashti, who wrote a short commentary on this cryptogram.⁷⁶

The reversed *wāw* (*wāw munakkas*) is an allusion to the Proof, Ibn al-Hasan [i.e. the Qā'im] . . . The mystery of the reversal (*sirr al-tankīs*) is his (the Qā'im's) return after concealment and his appearance after being hidden . . . And the *alif* [viz, the vertical line in  which is the way the letter "w" is spelled in Arabic] is the Qā'im [lit: "the one who stands up"], the "one who presides over the two gulfs" (*al-wāqif bayn al-ṭaṭanjayn*) and the one who simultaneously separates and connects the two worlds (*barzakh*) and the one who will purify the earth of all defilement.⁷⁷

The other, to the left, is the opposing "sea," *sijjīn*, the "left hand," and "the hand of justice". In order to understand the thoroughness of this schema, of which Rashti sketched a diagram on the margin of his commentary, the first hadith (on *'aql*) of the first book of *Kāfī* is cited.⁷⁸ The Eastern gulf

represents the stages of the saga or epic tale of the Intellect: the stages of its descent and rise back to its Source. Opposite this is the Western gulf, which represents the counter-development of Ignorance (*jahl*, also from the same hadith). This antithesis points to the following conclusion: The divine command, perceived by the Intellect, causes it at the lower limit of its descent to return to its Principle. The very same command, perceived by Ignorance, causes it to return to its origin “in the deepest region of its pit.” Thus two opposite, but symmetrical, curves are presented: one of knowledge, the other anti-knowledge. In the Eastern, or right gulf, occurs the advent of the degrees of being, including the form and matter which are involved in the cycle of descent of the Intellect from the “throne” through all the various heavens and elements. This continues until it attains the Earth, where the cycle of its ascent begins, and in the course of which this same Intellect travels through all the realms of nature, until it arrives at the Angel and the Perfect Man.

This cosmology includes twenty-eight degrees, each of which is symbolized by one of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. The Western, or left-hand gulf, represents an inverted cosmology. It is an “anti-world,” the theatre in which the “counter epic” of Ignorance is played out. Each degree of this process is represented by an inverted letter of the Arabic alphabet.⁷⁹

The Imam wishes to say that he is the Pole (*qutb*) who dominates the two gulfs and determines the curve of their respective circle. He is he by whom is manifested divine Mercy, and by whom is manifested its opposite.⁸⁰

Corbin translates directly from Rashti’s commentary as follows:

In him are produced the differentiation of created things; it is from him which precedes the origin of blessedness and the origin of damnation; it is by him that the difference between the one and the other acquires reality.⁸¹

“The Imam, as divine manifestation (*mazhar*), is the point from which the various pairs of antithetical terms proceed.” For Corbin, the Imam thus depicted represents a modification of the ancient Manichean principle of Zervan (“unlimited Time”), which was an attempt to overcome a basically dualistic metaphysic.⁸² In the case of the imamology expressed in this sermon, it is not by reason of a “zervanic” cosmic doubt, nor by reason of any duality inherent in the person of the Imam, which gives rise to the antithesis; rather, the antithesis comes about as a result of the choice which is put before men in the very appearance of the Imam himself. This choice was decided by humanity in the period of preexistence, referred to in the Qur’an as the Day of the Covenant (Qur’an 7:172). It is also from this “point” i.e., the Imam, that the various acts of being acquire their reality, to be determined in their final form by this or that quiddity. Such is the meaning of the Imam’s statement: “I am the Essence of essences.”⁸³

Here, the two gulfs are the highest degree of the process of divine manifestation detailed by Rashti, in the course of which he cites another statement

from the *khuṭba*. “I saw the Earth as a garment enfolded in a fissure (*khazaf*) in the right hand gulf, and the two gulfs appear as if they were to the left of two other gulfs.” These two other gulfs are the Orient and the esoteric dimension of the first two, which being at the level of the manifestation of divine mercy, become through the acceptance or rejection of men, the place of the manifestation of the antithetical divine names. The divine names are really in one state. The two gulfs both flow from the principle of diety (*ulūhiyya*). They are called “the gulf of Life” (cf. *al-ḥayy*) and the “gulf of Permanence” (cf. *al-qayyūm*). The “pole” (*quṭb*) is the esoteric dimension of the Imam, and the theophany (*tajallī*) of the Greatest Name (*ism a’zam*). Still deeper, “and [paradoxically] still higher as well,” Rashti perceives an esoteric dimension of these two gulfs. He refers to them respectively as the gulf of the Exclusive Unity (*taṭanj al-aḥadiyya*), and the gulf of the Inclusive Unity (*taṭanj al-wāḥidiyya*, “golfe de l’Un-multiple”) where the Imam is the source of the divine names and attributes. The pole, in this case, is the impenetrable mystery (*ghayb*) of the Imam. Still “further East,” two other gulfs are found which flow from the “Ocean of pre-eternity” (*baḥr al-azal*). They are the gulf of deity and the gulf of the divine ipseity (*huwiyya*).

There are, according to Rashti, still other ways of looking at these two gulfs, namely as the typifications of Matter and Form respectively, but in the sense of the hylemorphism peculiar to the Shaykhi school.⁸⁴ Here, Matter is the paternal aspect, or “being as light.” Form is the maternal aspect—that is the “quiddity” which determines being in its act; it is also referred to as the dimension of “divine mercy.” According to a tradition from al-Sadiq, each faithful believer has as “father” this divine light, and has as “mother” divine mercy. The Prophet and the Imam represent this Matter and Form respectively.⁸⁵ Therefore, man is only fully man insofar as he accomplishes the triple *shahāda* distinctive of Shi‘i Islam: (1) affirmation of divine unity (*tawḥīd*); (2) affirmation of the mission of the prophets (*risāla*); (3) affirmation of the guardianship (*walāya*) of the Imams. The first affirmation renders the believer “fully human” only on the level of potentiality, “evanescent before a God who does not regard the believer.”⁸⁶ The second element produces the formless Matter of the heretofore only potential believer. The third element completes, or actualizes the believer, by providing him with Form or quiddity.

Corbin closes his brief examination of Rashti’s commentary on the *Khuṭbat al-taṭanjīyya* by observing the implications such a metaphysics has for anthropology, which he sees as nourished by the determining mythic event of the Day of the Covenant, the day of “Am I not [your Lord].” Basically this fosters a purely theosophical perspective that then dominates the great cosmogonic and cosmological scale inherited by Rashti and others from Avicennan neoplatonism.

Between the *Absconditum* who is the first Cause and the structure of our world with the Intelligences and the Souls which move the celestial spheres, is interposed the space of the divine Names and their energies;

the initial pre-eternal support of their theophanies is thus the mystery of the Imam, of whom the manifestation at the level of our world entails a dramaturgical cosmology never suspected by the [purely Aristotelian] philosophers. Here Shi'ite thought reveals its highest horizon envisaged, and it is completely different than some discussion about the "legitimacy" of the three first caliphs recognized by Sunni Islam.⁸⁷

This discussion of Rashti's commentary on the *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya* will have established the correspondences between the Báb's vocabulary and style, and the theosophical or metaphysical themes that Rashti read in the *khuṭba*. The all-important spiritual implications of the duty of choice (*ikhtiyār*) has been amply demonstrated. Indeed, this emphasis may be seen as one of the formative or defining themes of pristine or "Kufan" Shi'i Islam. Rashti's identification of the "two gulfs" as Exclusive Unity and Inclusive Unity will also be seen to relate to the Báb's terminology, beginning with the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara*, particularly in those passages where the Báb refers to the *walāya* of the Exclusive Unity and its counterpart. These references may also be seen in the various other images the Báb uses repeatedly throughout the earlier work, namely *hujja* (gulf, watery deep), *ṭamṭām* (midst of the sea), and *yamm* (open sea), all of which mean some kind of body of water and are used ubiquitously by the Báb in *Baqara* to indicate some kind of polar or oppositional relationship, in the realms of mysticism, ontology, religion, or morality.⁸⁸ The apparent lack of clarity in some of those usages, which revolves around the question of the exact nature of the "Inclusive Unity" (sometimes used to refer to false *walāya*, sometimes used to refer to levels of the true *walāya*), may be derived in part from Rashti's hierarchization.⁸⁹ In this scheme, the values "good" and "evil" are ever relative and ever subject to a progressive refinement, which appears to risk meaning itself, but somehow ultimately preserves it. Simply put: on one level the Inclusive Unity, as less complete than the Exclusive Unity, may refer to false *walāya*, just as it might, for the same reason, refer to *nubuwwa*, or *imāma* as less "complete" than pure divinity (*ulūhiyya*).

Most importantly, as the following reproductions of the two Arabic texts will show, the relationship between the Báb's *Sūrat al-'Abd* (number 109 of the *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf*) and the *Khuṭbat al-tuṭunjiyya* itself, is unmistakable. The message is quite clear: the Báb is claiming for himself the specific type of *imāma* that this *khuṭba* was perceived to describe by authors like Rashti. Needless to say, the Báb's "invocation" (and therefore appropriation) of the spiritual and charismatic authority that the *khuṭba* expresses is far from the kind of detailed, discursive analysis offered by Rashti. But Rashti in his commentary was not claiming *imāma*, he was only explaining it. The difference in the approach of the two authors to the same text (the one explanation, the other imitation and thus appropriation through performance) shows most convincingly that the Báb, at the time of writing his commentary, had gone far beyond any claims either put forward by or for Sayyid Kazim.

- 151 *Qaṣīda*, p. 239.
 152 *Qaṣīda*, p. 242. See also *Qaṣīda*, pp. 265, 320.
 153 *Qaṣīda*, pp. 323, 358. The identification of “face of God” (*wajh Allāh*) mentioned several times in the Qur’an (e.g., 2:115; 2:272; and 30:37), with the Imam is a very old and traditional Shi’i interpretation. See the appropriate article in *Mir’āt*, pp. 333–335 and *Divine Guide*, q.v. index: *wajh*.
 154 *Qaṣīda*, p. 95.
 155 *Qaṣīda*, pp. 137, 138, 156.
 156 *Qaṣīda*, p. 156.

3 Renewal of covenant: *concordia oppositorum* and the primal point

- 1 “Certes, l’Imām comme *mazhar* est bien la limit à partir de laquelle prennent naissance les couples de termes antithétiques.” *Enseignement*, p. 117.
- 2 *Enseignement*, pp. 104–107, 111–118. Other mentions of the *Sharḥ Khuṭbat al-Taṭanjīyya* may be found in *Corbin*, vol. 1, p. 96n.; vol. 3, p. 184n.; vol. 4, p. 195n., 236n. The unusual word is also vowelless *Tuṭanjīyya*. See also Rafati, p. 133. On the *Khuṭbat al-Tuṭanjīyya*, see now Todd Lawson, “The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful by Rajab Bursi,” in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn, foreword by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, introduction by S. H. Nasr, vol. 2 of *The Heritage of Sufism*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, pp. 261–276 (reprint of 1991 publication) and Mohammed ‘Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Aspects de l’imāmologie duodécimaine I: *Remarques* sur la divinité de l’Imām,” *Studia Iranica*, vol. 25 no. 2 (1996): 193–216. On Bursi himself, see now, Henry Corbin. *Les Oriens des Lumières*: édition établie et introduite par Pierre Lory. Paris: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran & Verdier, 1996.
- 3 The *alif* is the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, represented by a single vertical line. The words ascribed to the Prophet are also ascribed to ‘Ali in the literature. The text does not state explicitly one or the other, but sense the topic is prophethood, it seems logical to ascribe it to the Prophet here. *Mashāriq*, pp. 37–38; cf., Corbin, *Oriens*, pp. 101–103.
- 4 *Mashāriq*, p. 23.
- 5 On this see the excellent discussion of the thought of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i: Cole, “Text”.
- 6 For further information on the *abjad* system, especially as it pertains to the Babi and Baha’i contexts, see the excellent article by Franklin Lewis, “Overview.”
- 7 Bausani, *Persia*, p. 460 and Bausani, *Religion*, p. 381.
- 8 My thanks to Roberto Tottoli for suggestions here and also to Maria Anna Calamia.
- 9 *QA*, p. 3, v. 20. (The numbering of the verses is provisional.)
- 10 *QA*, p. 23, v. 29.
- 11 *QA*, p. 51, v. 10. This is slightly adapted from the translation in *Selections*, p. 54.
- 12 *QA*, p. 86, v. 36.
- 13 *QA*, p. 91, v. 23.
- 14 *QA*, p. 114, v. 9.
- 15 *QA*, p. 164, v. 41.
- 16 *QA*, p. 167, v. 24; cf. Qur’an 11:100.
- 17 *QA*, pp. 229–230, v. 17.
- 18 *SEI*, pp. 55, 582.
- 19 *Nahj al-Balāgha*, (‘Abduh edition, Beirut, n.d.) vol. 1, pp. 30–31. This *Khuṭba* is frequently referred to by the Báb in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara*.
- 20 *Corbin*, vol. 3, pp. 9–10.
- 21 *Corbin*, vol. 1, p. 21.

- 22 Corbin, vol. 1, p. 298; on this “double trap” see also *idem*, *Trilogie ismaélienne*, p. 11. See also Peter Smith, “Motif Research: Peter Berger and the Bahá’í faith,” *Religion* 8 (1978) 210–234 and his later *The Bahá’í Faith*.
- 23 Corbin, vol. 2, p. 205, cf. *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 261, which discusses further the polar dimension conferred upon the believer by his Imam.
- 24 Corbin, vol. 2, p. 69.
- 25 Corbin, vol. 2, pp. 71–72.
- 26 From the French translation of a passage from Ibn Abi Jumhur, *Kitāb al-Mujlī*, p. 488, in Corbin, vol. 4, pp. 406–7. On this scholar, See now Sabine Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfterschiitischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abi Ġumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī (um 838/1434–35-nach 906/1501)*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000.
- 27 Corbin, vol. 4, p. 282.
- 28 Corbin, vol. 4, pp. 282–283: “[A]jucun d’eux [i.e., the Shaykhis] n’a jamais prétendu que c’était lui-même, ni prétendu à être reconnu comme tel. Loin de là. Ils ont affirmé son *existence*, parce qu’il est impossible que le monde humain, l’humanité terrestre, en soit privé, mais ils ont corollairement affirmé l’impossibilité qu’il soit *manifesté*, c’est-à-dire l’impossibilité que les hommes soient en mesure de le reconnaître, de le déterminer ou proclamer nommément, en personne. Sa personne et son nom restent le *secret* de l’Imam . . . Quiconque se proclame publiquement le Báb de l’Imam, se met *eo ipso en dehors* du shi’isme, car il en profane le secret fondamental, viole la *ghaybat*, rompt l’attente eschatologique. Aucune école n’a insisté avec plus de force démonstrative que le shaykhisme sur ce point. C’est pourquoi le *Babisme* et le *baha’isme*, quel que soit l’intérêt de ces phénomènes religieux considérés en eux-mêmes, ne peuvent apparaître que comme la négation même du shaykhisme.”
- 29 Lawson, “Orthodoxy.”
- 30 Cf. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, pp. 159–179.
- 31 *QA*, p. 4, v. 39.
- 32 *QA*, p. 115, v. 21.
- 33 *QA*, p. 150, v. 42.
- 34 *QA*, p. 159, v. 34.
- 35 *QA*, p. 163, v. 28.
- 36 *QA*, p. 202, v. 39.
- 37 *QA*, p. 40, v. 6.
- 38 *QA*, p. 227, v. 20.
- 39 Cf. Northrop Frye, “The Double Mirror.”
- 40 *QA*, p. 154, v. 19. (2) Cf. also *Mizāj al-Tasnīm*, p. 72, quoted above, which continues: “When the Lord of the Age will have become absolutely established [in the earth], he will become the centre of all its forms (*ṣāra markazan li-ṣuwariha ajma’*.)” Cf. also Corbin, “L’idée du Paraclet.”
- 41 M. Eliade, “La Coincidentia oppositorum et le mystère de la totalité,” *Eranos*, 1958, vol. 27, pp. 195–236.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 234–235, my translation.
- 43 Rafati, p. 195.
- 44 Lawson, “Akhbari.” Cf., e.g., *Mir’āt*, under such headings as “*al-ākhira*” (p. 72), where in one hadith it is defined as the return of the Hidden Imam (*al-raj’a wa-l-karra*); “*al-janna*,” (p. 118) where Paradise is described as the “reign of God with the Qa’im” (*dawlat al-ḥaqq ma’a al-Qā’im*); “*al-nār*,” (p. 314) where ‘Ali is described as the “master of heaven and hell” (*ṣāhib al-janna wa-l-nār*).
- 45 A commentary on one verse of Rashti’s commentary is ascribed to the Báb (*Sources*, p. 73). Three manuscripts are known to exist, none of which have been available to me.
- 46 See above, note 2.

- 47 *Enseignement*, pp. 111–118.
- 48 Rosen, *Collections scientifiques*, vol. 1, p. 186.
- 49 From *Mashāriq*, pp. 166–170. Bursi wrote a *Tafsīr sūrat al-tawhīd* which is apparently still in manuscript (*Fihrist-i Kitābhānah-yi Madrasah-yi ‘Alī-i Sipāhsālār*, vol. 1, pp. 127–128). His *nisba* refers to the small town in Iraq, situated on the Euphrates between Hilla and Kufa.
- 50 *Enseignement*, p. 113.
- 51 Muhammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Sharashub Sarawī Mazandarāni (b. ca. 490/1096), *Manāqib Al Abī Tālib*. He also wrote a work entitled *Ma‘ālim al-‘Ulamā’*. Majlisi identifies it with the *Khuṭbat al-Aqālīm*, as does the author of *al-Dharī‘a*. (*Enseignement*, pp. 113–114).
- 52 *Mashāriq*, p. 166. Lest it be thought that the last phrase is a misprint, it is found quoted in this way at *Baqara*, p. 9, C, f. 3a, and I, p. 157: *wa-l-firdaws ra’y al-‘ayn*. The editor’s note in the text reads simply: *fī al-aṣl* “*afradaws*.”
- 53 *Mashāriq*, p. 167
- 54 *ṭūfān* (floods) occurs twice in the Qur’an: 7:133 and 29:14.
- 55 *Mashāriq*, pp. 167–168.
- 56 *Enseignement*, p. 114.
- 57 *Enseignement*, pp. 112–113. The text of this *khuṭba* is also found in *Mashāriq*, p. 31 and is said by Corbin to have been also commented on by Rashti.
- 58 Hermann Landolt, *Correspondance spirituelle échangée entre Nūrod-dīn Esfarāyēnī* (ob. 717/1317) et son disciple ‘Alāoddawleh Semnānī (ob. 736/1336), Paris and Tehran: Maisonneuve, 1972, p. 21 (intro.); see the following quotation, which describes the source of this voice as “the subtle substance of the self” (la substance subtile du Moi/laṭifah-ye kāmīlah-ye anāniya). Cf. also *idem*, “Deux opuscules de Semnani sur le moi théophanique.”
- 59 Landolt, *Correspondance*, p. 6 (intro.).
- 60 *Corbin*, vol. 1, p. 96n. On manuscripts of the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*, see *al-Dharī‘a*, vol. 7:200–202; for a listing of commentaries, see *al-Dharī‘a*, vol. 13:210–211, 218–289; 20:89; 21:198. Two versions of the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān* are reproduced in ‘Alī al-Yazdī al-Ha’iri (d. 1333/1914–1915), *Ilzām al-Nāṣib fī Ithbāt al-Hujja al-Ghā’ib*, Beirut: Mu’assasat al-‘Alamī lil-Maṭbū‘āt, 1422/2002, vol. 2:148–198. The Sufi scholar Muhammad Dihdar Shirāzi’s (d. 1016/1607) Persian commentary on the *khuṭba* is one of the few that has been published. Muhammad b. Mahmud Dihdar Shirāzi, *Sharḥ Khuṭbat al-Bayān*, ed. Muhammad Husayn Akbari Savi, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Šā’ib, 1379AS/2000–2001). A more recent Persian commentary is Muhammad ‘Alī Bahma’i Ramhurmuzi’s *Asrār-i Vilāyat-i Muṭlaqah*, Qum: M.‘A. Bahma’i Ramhurmuzi, 1372AS/1993). See also discussion and French translation of one segment of the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān* in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Aspects de l’Imamologie Duodécimaine I: Remarques sur la divinité de l’Imam.” *Studia Iranica* 25, 2 (1996): 193–216, see esp. pp. 197, 207–216 (reprinted in *idem*, *La Religion Discrète: Croyances et Pratiques Spirituelles dans l’Islam Shi’ite* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 89–108). Lebanese cleric Ja’far Murtada al-‘Amili has sharply criticized the *khuṭba* in his *Dirāsa fī ‘Alāmāt al-Zuhūr wa-al-Jazīra al-Khadrā’*, Beirut: Dār al-Balāgha, 1412/1992, part 2, pp. 65–167. A condensed version of this work was later published as, *Bayān al-‘Imma wa-Khuṭbat al-Bayān fī al-Mīzān*, Beirut: al-Markaz al-Islāmī lil-Dirāsāt, 2003. A Persian translation of al-‘Amili’s work is now in its sixth printing: Ja’far Murtada ‘Amili, *Jazīrah-yi Khadrā’ dar Tarāzū-yi Naqd: Pazhūhishī darbārah-yi Nishānih-hā-yi Zuhūr va Nīz Naqd va Barrāsī-i Kitāb-hā-yi Bayān al-‘Imma, Khuṭbat al-Bayān va Jazīrah-yi Khadrā’*, trans. Muhammad Sipihri, Qum: Mu’assasah-yi Būstān-i Kitāb, 1387AS/2008–2009. See also Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 57, 152, 174, 179–180; *Corbin*, s.v. index vol. 4, “Khotbat al-Bayān”; *idem*, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 49; Elizabeth Alexandrin,

“Al-Mu’ayyad fi al-Din al-Shirazi’s Concept of the Qa’im: A Commentary on the ‘Khutbat al-Bayan,’” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, November 18, 2003. My thanks to Omid Ghaemmaghami for this information.

- 61 Ja’far ibn Mansur al-Yaman, al-Da’i (ascribed), *Kitāb al-Kashf*, p. 8. See above, the Báb’s appropriation of the title *kalimat Allāh al-akbar*. It is also the basis of a substantial commentary by the later Muslim alchemist, ‘Aydamiir Jildakī (d. 1342), part of which is translated in Henry Corbin, *Alchimie*.
- 62 Rajab Bursi is frequently disqualified from religious discourse by those who esteem themselves representatives of what must be considered in this context “orthodox Twelver Shi’i Islam” by recourse to the term “extremist.” (Cf. the comments in the *Fihrist-i Kitābhānah-yi Madrasah-yi ‘Alī-i Sipāhsālār*, loc. cit.). In a recent polemical work directed against Babism, the author makes the following statement about Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i: “It is quite obvious from his teachings that in a number of matters, Ehsai [sic] had followed the deviationist schools of Hurufi, Nuqtaviyan, Adadiya, Ghulat sects and some of the mystical sects who went on to elevate the Imam or the Prophet to superhuman levels and deify them. Most of these extreme views that led to his excommunication, were borrowed directly from the writings of Hafiz Rajab Bursa Hilli . . . and Qazi Saiduddin Qummi . . . Hafiz Rajab was, in turn, influenced by the views of Sayyid Shah Fazlullah . . . Fazl-i Hurufi . . . founder of the Hurufi sect . . .” Y. Noori, *Finality of Prophethood and a Critical Analysis of Babism, Bahatism, Qadiyanism*, Tehran: Majma’-i Ma’arif-i Islami, 1365sh/1986, p. 20 (English text). The statement is of course impossibly general, but it does indicate a common attitude.
- 63 Corbin, vol. 1, p. 96n.
- 64 “certaines résonances avec l’Imamologie ismaélienne,” Corbin, vol. 3, p. 184n.
- 65 The commentary is apparently on the whole *Mashāriq*; cf. Corbin, vol. 4, p. 212.
- 66 *Enseignement*, p. 236: très dense, allant, suivant son habitude, jusqu’au fond des difficultés spéculatives et en dégageant la portée spirituelle pratique. The edition of the commentary used by Corbin was lithographed in Tabriz in 1270 [1853]. Despite its 353 pages, in –8°, of tightly written script, 35 lines per page, it was left unfinished, covering only one of several levels of meaning which the author of the commentary perceived the sermon as encompassing. “As such, it has, therefore, the virtues of a Summa.”
- 67 *Baqara*, p. 24.
- 68 āna al-āmil wa’l-ma’mūl, *Mashāriq*, p. 166.
- 69 This has implications for the term *al-‘amā’* “the cloud,” which although strictly not a void, may be seen as devoid of “meaning” (cf. *al-ma’ānī*) prior, (in an ontological sense) to the articulation within it of the divine hypostases known collectively as the “Family of God.”
- 70 Cf., e.g., *Baqara*, p. 10: *wa-dāma al-mulk fī al-mulk* . . .
- 71 *Enseignement*, p. 115.
- 72 *Ibid.*
- 73 See the preliminary discussion of this commentary by the Báb by Stephen Lambden: <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/03-THE%20BÁB/03A-The%20Báb/Sharh%20Khutba%20al-Tutunjiyya.htm>.
- 74 In this connection, it would be interesting to study the work of the Báb’s disciple, Mulla Muhammad ‘Alī Barfurushi, known as Quddus, on the interpretation of the *ṣād* of *ṣamad* (from Qur’an 112) which is reported to be “thrice as voluminous as the Qur’an itself.” (*Nabīl*, p. 357) No manuscripts of it have been found.
- 75 Variations of this amulet may be found in *Risālat al-Isim al-A’zam*, *Masā’il Majmū’a*, ed. Strothmann in *Gnosis-Texte*, pp. 171–177; MacEoin, “Some Baha’i and Shaykhi Interpretations of ‘The Mystery of Reversal,’” p. 11; MacEoin, “Talismans”, pp. 92–93. See also Anawati, “Le nom suprême,” pp. 23–30; Cnaan,

- “The Decipherment,” pp. 142–144. Both authors cite al-Būnī (622/1225), *Shams al-Ma‘ārif* (see Bibliography). See Anawati, p. 22, for a discussion of the various editions of this work he describes as “le vade-mecum de tous les ‘professionnels’ en talismans en Islam.” This device is also found in the Báb’s *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Qadr/Qadar* where he says that whoever inscribes it on a ring of red cornelian (*‘aqīq*) will have all good and be protected from evil. Moreover, this device “speaks of” the three grades of the Torah, the four [grades] of the Gospel, and the five [grades] of the Qur’an (*Majmū‘a*, p. 18).
- 76 Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, “*Risāla fī al-Sharḥ wa-Tafsīr Ism al-A‘zam*,” *Ras‘il li-l-Rashī*, S.O.A.S. Arabic ms. 92308O, ff. 271a–274a.
- 77 *Risāla fī al-Sharḥ*, f. 272a.
- 78 *Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 10: “When God created the Intellect, he tested it by saying ‘Draw near!’ Then it drew near. Then he ordered it to step back, and it stepped back. God exclaimed, ‘By My might and glory! I have created nothing which is dearer to Me than you.’” On *‘aql* in hadith attributed to Sadiq, see D. Crow, “The Teaching of the Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq, With Reference to His Place in Early Shī‘ism.” M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1980, *passim*. See now the Ph.D. thesis by D. Crow, “The Role of *‘aql* in Early Islamic Wisdom with Reference to Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq,” 2 vols., McGill University, 1996.
- 79 This topic of *nuzūl* and *šū‘ūd* is of course a standard one in Muslim spiritual philosophy. Cf. Rafati, pp. 111–113, for Shaykh Ahmad’s twenty-eight-tier “alphabet” hierarchy, which is possibly the precedent for Rashtī’s, described by Corbin in *Enseignement*. However there is no mention in Rafati of a corresponding negative hierarchy.
- 80 L’Imam veut dire qu’il est le Pôle (quṭb) qui domine les deux golfes et détermine la courbe de leur cercle respectif. Il est celui par qui se manifeste la Miséricorde et par qui se manifeste son antithèse. *Enseignement*, p. 118.
- 81 *Enseignement*, p. 118. Material in quotation marks is from Corbin’s translation of Rashtī: “C’est en lui que se produit la différenciation des choses; c’est de lui que procèdent l’origine de la béatitude et l’origine de la damnation; c’est par lui que prend réalité la différence de l’une et de l’autre.”
- 82 *Corbin*, vol. 2, pp. 54–56; see *ibid.*, pp. 88–90, 96; *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 208n.
- 83 Also quoted by the Báb, *Baqara*, p. 165. Cf. also the “mystery of reversal” (*sirr al-tankās*) discussed above.
- 84 Idris S. Hamid. “The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh Aḥmad Al-Aḥsā‘ī: Critical Edition, Translation, and Analysis of ‘Observations in Wisdom’.” Phd. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1998.
- 85 Cf. *Baqara*, p. 224. Cf. also the similar view put forth by Isma‘ili author, Husayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Muhammad, ibn al-Walid (seventh/thirteenth century) translated in Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne*, p. 184. Earlier (fifth/eleventh century), Nasir-i Khusraw had taught a similar doctrine (mentioned in *Corbin*, vol. 4, p. 296).
- 86 The three levels of *rubūbiyya* are alluded to in *Baqara*, specifically in such expressions, *passim*, as: “The Lordship which exists when no vassal (*marbūb*) is seen.”
- 87 *Enseignement*, p. 118.
- 88 Lawson, “Interpretation.”
- 89 Lawson, “Perfect Man.”

4 The metaleptic Joseph: the shirt, the Bees, and gnostic apocalypse

- 1 John Donne, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”
- 2 #93, *QA*, pp. 189–191.
- 3 Fritz Meier, “Some Aspects of Inspiration,” in *The Dream and Human Society*, edited by G. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966 (pp. 421–429), p. 421.