

## Article

# Last Prophet and Last Day: Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā'ī Exegesis of the “Seal of the Prophets” (Q. 33:40) <sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Dedicated to the memory of Bahā'ī scholar and martyr, Mr. Kamālu'd-Dīn Bakhtāvar, who was executed by a firing squadron on 26 July 1981 in Kashmar, province of Khurasan, Iran (Vahman 2019, pp. 187, 189) for his faith. As a Bahā'ī scholar, Mr. Bakhtāvar was the author of *Risāla-yi Istimrār-i Zuhūrāt-i Ilāhiyya* [Treatise on the Continuity of the Manifestations of God], in which Bahā'u'llāh's *Lawḥ-i Ḥasan-i Shāhābadī* [Tablet to Ḥasan Shāhābadī]—which Stephen Lambden (2018, p. 80) calls the “*Lawḥ-i khātam al-Nabiyyīn*” [“Tablet of the Seal of the Prophets”]—was published for the first time (1974).

**Abstract:** The appearance of post-Islamic religions, the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faiths, is a theoretical impossibility from an orthodox Muslim perspective, since the Qur'ān designates the Prophet Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets” (Q. 33:40), widely understood as meaning the “Last of the Prophets”. To overcome this problem, the respective prophet-founders, the Bāb (1819–1850) and Bahā'u'llāh (1817–1892), each presented novel approaches which this article will explore. In short, the Bāb revealed a “new” Qur'ān, i.e., the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (1844), and Bahā'u'llāh wrote the *Kitāb-i Iqān* (Book of Certitude) in January 1861. While acknowledging Muḥammad as the last prophet in the “Prophetic Cycle”, the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh inaugurated the advent of the “Cycle of Fulfillment”. This new era was foretold in the Qur'ān by way of a symbolic code, understood metaphorically and spiritually. A key concept is that of the “divine presence” (*liqā' Allāh*), i.e., the encounter/“meeting” with God, whereby Q. 33:44, Q. 83:6, Q. 7:35 (and their respective parallels) effectively transcend Q. 33:40. Recognizing that the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh each manifests the “divine presence” thereby constitutes a “realized eschatology”. This paper represents the first time that a wide-ranging survey and analysis of the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī viewpoints on the subject of the “Seal of the Prophets” has been made and is the result of a collaboration between two scholars working in the United States and Russia.

**Keywords:** Seal of the Prophets; divine presence; Qur'an; Islam; Shaykhism; the Bab; Babism; Baha'u'llah; Baha'i Faith



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New religions, independent and dependent, typically advance new doctrines as well as novel truth-claims. This holds true for three religious movements that arose in the nineteenth-century Middle East, i.e., the Shi'a Islamic Shaykhī school, and the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions. All three were widely regarded as heterodox movements from the orthodox Muslim perspective. Shaykhism was the immediate ideological precursor of the Bābī religion (which broke away from Islam), while the Bahā'ī Faith evolved, in due course, from its Bābī predecessor and emerged as an independent world religion (Buck 2021; Ioannesyan 2009). How was this possible? In an Islamic context, post-Islamic prophets and post-Qur'ānic revelations were a theoretical impossibility, since Islam was presented as the last of the world's religions (all the more so for the Abrahamic faiths)—primarily because of one central pillar of Islamic belief, i.e., that Muḥammad was the “Seal of the Prophets” (Q. 33:40) (Momen 2021; Fazel and Fananapazir 1993).

As a missionary faith (in the sense of attracting converts), Bahā'ī outreach to religious minorities did not, as a general rule, include much discussion of the Prophet Muḥammad,

with the logical result that the “Seal of the Prophets” a non-issue. (For a well-known instance involving Cambridge Orientalist Edward Granville Browne ([Buck 2015a](#); [Buck and Ioannesyan 2018](#)) during his celebrated research travels throughout Persia in 1887–1888, see [Buck 2019a](#).) However, for outreach to Muslims, the “Seal of the Prophets” issue was paramount as a topic of interfaith discourse and dialogue.

So, in order to attract adherents to the post-Islamic religions of Bābism and the Bahā’ī Faith, the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh had to persuade their Muslim converts otherwise. How they did so was quite ingenious. Given this problem, the Bāb, expanding on the Shaykhī notion of the inception of a new prophetic cycle after Muḥammad (see “Shaykhī Exegesis of Q. 33:40”, below), revealed a “new” Qur’ān, i.e., the *Qayyūm al-Asmā’* ([Lawson 2011](#); [Buck 2015b](#)).

Since Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā’ī doctrines are quite wide-ranging, the present study focuses narrowly on the fundamental Islamic doctrine of Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets”, based squarely on Q. 33:40. This article will further show that the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh each added a new dimension to the interpretive discourse, i.e., the concept of the “divine presence” (*liqā’ Allāh*), i.e., the encounter/meeting with God. Basically, the Bābī and Bahā’ī perspectives treat the quest for attaining the Qur’ānic presence of God with what the present authors would best describe as “realized eschatology”.

This article will also contribute to academic discourse by including, within its scope, highlights of recent Russian academic studies on the Bahā’ī Faith—with some, or much, of the material being published in English for the first time. Russian scholarship in Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā’ī studies is important, among other reasons, by virtue of the fact that Bahā’īs in the Russian Empire were the first organized community outside Iran. Bahā’īs who moved to the Ashkhabad (‘Ishqābād) area from Persia, soon after that territory had been incorporated into the Russian Empire, formed a fully organized religious community there which was the first of its kind in the history of this religion ([Rafati 2011](#)). It reached a high level of development in a region which was then characterized by an almost absolute illiteracy of the local population. The community also went down in history as the site of the first Bahā’ī temple in the world ([Ioannesyan 2015](#)). The history of the Bahā’ī and Bābī Faiths has been closely related to Russia since their inception in Iran in the nineteenth century. This is also attested to by the attention these phenomena have received from Russian scholars and diplomats as well as from the general public ([Ioannesyan 2014](#)).

### 1. “Seal of the Prophets”: Prefatory Remarks

The “Seal of the Prophets” (Q. 33:40) is typically understood by Muslims as the “Last of the Prophets” (i.e., the final, and therefore “first and foremost” in the superlative sense). But this nearly universal contemporary Muslim understanding has not always been so; see the important studies by Yohanan [Friedmann \(1986, 1989\)](#). As the noted Arab linguist Hartmut [Bobzin \(2010, pp. 565–66\)](#) stated:

As is well known, Q 33:40 describes Muḥammad as “the messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets (*khātam an-nabiyyīn*)”, a statement which today is generally understood in the sense of finality—in other words, as claiming that there will be no prophet after Muḥammad. Yet the mere fact that “prophetic” movements within Islam have arisen again and again shows that the word “seal” (*khātam*) has also been understood differently, not just as indicating the finality of Muḥammad’s prophethood, but also in the sense of confirmation, i.e., as a form of continuity with earlier prophets.

This is confirmed by an examination of as-Suyūṭī’s (d. 1505) extensive commentary on the Qur’ān *ad-Durr al-manthūr fī t-tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*, which reveals a variety of interpretations of the term “seal”. ‘Ā’isha, for example, is reported to have said, “Say ‘Seal of the Prophets’ and not ‘there will be no prophet after him!’” while another *ḥadīth* quoted by as-Suyūṭī states:

A man once said in Mughīra (b. Shu'ba)'s presence: "God bless Muḥammad, the seal of the prophets, there will be no further prophet after him!" Mughīra replied: "Content yourself with saying 'seal of the prophets.' For we have been told that Jesus, blessings be upon him, will come again, and if he comes, he would be both before Muḥammad and after him (since he has already appeared earlier)!"

We now fast-forward to examine three heterodox Islamic movements in the 19th century CE that challenged, or at least nuanced, the notion of the finality of the Prophet Muḥammad: Shaykhism, Bābism, and Bahā'ism.

## 2. Shaykhī Exegesis of Q. 33:40

The doctrinal foundation for the Bābī Faith (Bābism) as an independent religious system was laid by Shaykhism, an esoteric Shi'ī school (Matthiesen 2014). Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (1753–1826) was the founder of the Shaykhī School, whose teaching prepared nineteenth-century Iran for the advent of the Bābī movement. Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (1793–1844), who was Shaykh Aḥmad's foremost disciple and designated successor, developed certain concepts that, apart from being revolutionary for Islam, paved the way for Bābism to some extent, while many of his disciples made up the ranks of the first disciples of the Bāb (the founder of Bābism), while others rejected the Bāb and stood in sharp opposition to him.

From that moment on, Shaykhism began to develop an acute controversy with Bābism and the Bahā'ī religions. At this stage, it is appropriate to call this subsequent, anti-Bābī/Bahā'ī movement "neo-Shaykhism". Western religious studies, represented by such an outstanding researcher as Henry Corbin, did not attach much importance to this turning-point in the history of Shaykhism and tried to consider it as an "isolated phenomenon", which is extremely controversial (Lawson 2005). In Russian religious and oriental studies, Shaykhism did not become an object of study until the appearance of Ioannesyan's 2011 translation and monograph, entirely devoted to this topic (Rashtī 2011).

On Shaykhism, a new monograph is now out (Ioannesyan 2021). This is the first major study on Shaykhism that systematically presents the teachings of this mystical school of Shi'ism (the second-largest sect of Islam, after Sunnī Islam) based on primary sources. Shaykhism, which originated in the Near and Middle East and developed rapidly at the end of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, was a unique and extremely interesting phenomenon. On the one hand, as a mystical and even esoteric trend in Shi'ism, Shaykhism was an alternative "Shi'ite response" to the well-known and widespread phenomenon of mystical thought and practice in Islam—Sufism (generally speaking, since Sufism is not a monolithic phenomenon). On the other hand, historically and, in a certain sense, as previously stated, Shaykhism established an ideological context—including heightened eschatological expectations—for Bābism, an independent religious system—i.e., a creed that emerged from the depths of Islam and initially declared itself as an independent religious revelation after Islam. Bābism, moreover, heralded the imminent advent of an even greater future revelation from God, thereby augmenting popular expectation and, to a certain extent, receptivity for the more fully independent Bahā'ī religion (which also drew intense opposition and persecution at the hands of clergy and state). The specific aspects of the early Shaykhī teachings that paved the way for Bābism were also not studied in depth by Western scholars, and if they were considered by them their studies left many gaps and questions—a lacuna in the research tradition that this monograph addresses.

Shaykhī exegesis of Q. 33:40 must be seen within the broader context of the Shaykhī theory of cycles in the religious history of humanity (Ioannesyan 2020b, 2020c, 2022). One of the major works of Sayyid Kāzīm, which we will consider here, is a voluminous and complex (both in its style and discourse and subject matter) treatise, entitled, "*Sharḥ qaṣīda lāmiyya 'Abd al-Bāqī Āfandī*" ("Commentary on '*Qaṣīda* with rhyme with the letter *lām*' by '*Abd al-Bāqī Āfandī*'". This treatise—also known as *Sharḥ Qaṣīda* and *Sharḥ-i Qaṣīda*—was written in the time period 1257–1258 AH, which falls within 1841–1842 CE, which means that it originated just a year and a half before Sayyid Kāzīm's death, so chronologically it practically coincides with his (*al-*)*Khujja al-baligha*. Although this work is

called “Commentary on *Qaṣīda*” and contains some references to the specified poetic work by ‘Abd al-Bāqī Afandī al-Musilī (1204/1789–1278/1861) from Mosul, dedicated to the ninth Imām, Muḥammad al-Javād, the work of Sayyid Kāzīm, as Armin Eschraghi (2013) rightly notes, has little to do with the analysis of the *qaṣīda*. Instead, it contains a detailed exposition of Shaykhī doctrines on a wide range of topics, including the theory of the “two cycles of divine revelation” and an indication of the eschatological figure who will initiate the second cycle.

The first in the West to pay due attention to the extremely significant passages of this work, shedding light not only on the Shaykhī “theory of cycles”, but also on important related issues—possibly predetermining the further history of not only Shaykhism, but also Bābism—was the outstanding French researcher of Bābism and Shaykhism, and translator of many of the Bāb’s writings, A. L. M. Nicolas (1910, vol. 2, pp. 42–55), whose great legacy, unfortunately, is often neglected by modern researchers. Nicolas was a pioneer of studies in the field and published high-quality translations of some major Bābī texts into French, which remain the first and unique complete translations of the Bāb’s writings into European languages up to the present day. The work of Nicolas has continued relevance today, since he articulates certain ideas and principles that are essential for every scholar specializing in Bābī studies (Ioannesyan 2016).

Let us now consider the doctrine of two cycles of divine revelations in the spiritual history of humankind, as set forth in the Commentary, according to which, upon the completion of the “prophetic cycle of Muḥammad” (the first cycle), a “new era” begins, if not already begun (i.e., another, second cycle of divine revelations after Muḥammad). The founder of Shaykhism and the mentor of Sayyid Kāzīm, Shaykh Aḥmad Ahsā’ī, claimed that the Prophet Muḥammad had two names: “Muḥammad”, by which he manifested himself and is known in the visible world, and “Aḥmad”. The latter is his mystical name, by which until now he was known only in the invisible, spiritual worlds. Based on this provision about two (i.e., exoteric and esoteric) names of Muḥammad, Sayyid Kāzīm, in the said Commentary, draws a conclusion about the completion/finiteness of the “cycle of Muḥammad”:

Since the external body has two positions—one position refers to changes, the appearance of innumerable states and a change in the order of things, the other position does not allow this, and since every stage actually reaches perfection in six ways, as we explained earlier—the commands relating to the external, which require the manifestation of the name “Muḥammad”, in reality end/come to an end in twelve hundred [years]. (*Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*, lithograph: 356, (manuscript: 202b). Translated from the original Arabic by Youli A. Ioannesyan.)

Thus, Sayyid Kāzīm defines a period of twelve centuries for the cycle of Muḥammad. Elaborating further on this novel doctrine, Sayyid Kāzīm goes on to say:

When twelve centuries have ended and the first cycle has been completed, which referred to the external manifestations of the Sun of prophecy and the twelve cycles of the Moon of chosenness in a position of subordination [i.e., subordination to the Sun of prophecy], then the cycle has ended, and everything it needs has been completed. [There began] the second round, the next cycle for the clarification of the commandments [and] the manifestation of deep truths and secret mysteries... that [have lain hidden] under the cover of veils and shrouds. (*Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*, Lithograph: 357, manuscript 202b. Translated from the original Arabic by Youli A. Ioannesyan.)

The first cycle, as is evident from the passage cited, was necessary for the cultivation of creatures in relation to the external aspects of their development and life, that is, it was mainly aimed at physical realities. The second cycle is addressed to everything inner and deep, that is, spiritual. Nicolas sees similarities with Sufi ideas in Sayyid Kāzīm’s reasoning. However, it is necessary to emphasize here the deep difference between the concepts of Sayyid Kāzīm and Sufi doctrines. For Sufis, “chosenness” should never end,

unless we consider that the Day of Judgment and everything connected with it should put an end to it. According to Sayyid Kāẓim, and in contrast to Sufi views, the “cycle of chosenness” is also coming to an end, or rather, has already ended after the twelve centuries allotted to the era of Muḥammad (cf. the quote above about the completion of twelve cycles, that is, centuries of the “Moon of chosenness”). But history does not end there. From this stage, another cycle begins. It is significant that Sayyid Kāẓim calls it “the second cycle of the Sun of prophecy” (*ad-dawra ath-thāniya li-shams an-nubuwwa*), i.e., in fact, the second prophetic cycle, which “comes or even came” (آتت) (*Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*, Lithograph: 357, manuscript 202b–203a. Translated from the original Arabic by Youli A. Ioannesyan). In other words, both the *nubuwwa* and the *walāya* have ended and will be followed by a new cycle of revelation. With this provision as to the inception of a new prophetic cycle after Muḥammad, Shaykhism fundamentally differs not only from Sufism (i.e., in its general features, notwithstanding its diversity), but also from any other Islamic school, including Shi’ite ones. Let us also point out that Shaykh Aḥmad’s viewpoint that Muḥammad was “the last prophet only within the Adamic cycle” is mentioned by Vahid Rafati (1990, p. 106).

In this respect, the Shaykhī exegesis of Q. 33:40 is seen within the broader discussion of the two revelatory cycles postulated by Sayyid Kāẓim in the *Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*.

### 3. Bābī Exegesis of Q. 33:40

The Bābī religion was an independent religious system (i.e., a distinct religious identity) founded in the first half of the 19th century by Sayyid ‘Alī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–1850), known as the Bāb (Gate). The *Qayyūm al-Asmā’*, an early Bābī writing, proves that the Bāb proclaimed his teaching as an independent divine revelation, while his Faith, right from its inception, emerged as an independent religious system with regard to Islam (Ioannesyan 2011). The academic study of the Bābī religion is too extensive to summarize here in full. A Russian monograph reviews prior scholarship in the Russian academic world and contributes some original insights (Ioannesyan 2003, 2020a).

Bābism is inextricably linked to the Bahā’ī religion, for which it laid the foundation. In other words, the Bāb was not only the founder of an independent religious system, the Bābī Faith, but was also the precursor of another prophet coming after him, whom he considered greater than himself, that would be made manifest by God at a certain time in the future. In his texts, known under the general name the “*Bayān*” (“Exposition”), the Bāb attached great importance to preparing the Bābī community for the recognition of the new prophet and repeatedly warned it against causing him any distress or suffering by refusing to recognize him, similar to what the Bāb had experienced at the hands of those who rejected him (Ioannesyan 2018).

The Bāb’s *Qayyūm al-Asmā’* exhibits a conscious effort to extend and amplify a Qur’ānic voice, a crucial warrant of revelation. In the first chapter of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā’*, the Bāb makes the stunning declaration that his religion is henceforth the “true Islam” to which all should turn: “Thus whoso seeketh Islam (submission to God), let him submit unto this Remembrance. . . . Whoso rejecteth this true Islam, God shall not accept, on the Day of Resurrection, any of his deeds” (trans. Saiedi 2008, p. 142). Arguably—and probably—the single most remarkable feature of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā’* (QA) is its claim to be the “new Qur’ān”. Nader Saiedi, moreover, justifiably makes this sweeping generalization: “The *Qayyūm al-Asmā’* is also frequently called the ‘Qur’ān’ or the ‘Inner Qur’ān’” (trans. Saiedi 2008, p. 140). Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini (2012, p. 8), confirming this same claim, explains that the Bāb, in QA 3, “mentions three times that the Qur’ān has been revealed to his heart”. Similar claims are made in QA 7 and 26 (Mohammadhosseini 2012). To illustrate this extraordinary, ambitious and audacious claim, two exemplars may be cited: “And verily, had these two Furqans not been from God, they (i.e., people) would, verily, have found in them more disparities” (the Bab, *Qayyūm al-Asmā’*, 99, trans. Ioannesyan 2011, p. 197), and “Verily, We have sent down this Book as the mystery of the Qur’ān. . . . And there is no one except for those who have renounced God, who would question even one of its letters as not being from God. And verily, God hath sent it (i.e., the Book) down by His

pre-existent might to His Remembrance (i.e., the Bāb) anew, with a new Truth, in a new way" (the Bāb, *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, 41, trans. Ioannesyan 2011, p. 202).

The Bāb's claim to have revealed a "new" and "true" Qur'ān is probably the most audacious claim to a new revelation imaginable within the context of Islam. The revelation of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* was a remarkable literary event—not to mention dangerous and ultimately fatal, since the Bāb was executed on 9 July 1850. It is of profound, eschatological moment, of grand and huge importance in its own right, as the extensive work of Todd Lawson on this remarkable text has shown. The sheer audacity of this signal, revelatory event is mind-boggling. It is nothing short of thaumaturgic as a self-proclaimed revelatory phenomenon, in the received and perceived Islamic sense of the Qur'ān as a "miracle" (or "sign") from God.

In Bābism, many conceptual provisions, including eschatological ones, inherent in other religions, are understood allegorically. The same approach extends to such ideas as the "Resurrection", the "Judgment Day" and the "end of the world", which are interpreted as a change of eras, i.e., milestones in the history of humankind and the abolition of the existing order of things associated with the sending of the next divine revelation (approximately once every thousand years), and as the affirmation of a new religion. Nader Saiedi further states:

The Bāb reinterprets the doctrine of resurrection not as the end of history but as the substance of history itself. Resurrection is described not as a single, final event but a recurring, cyclic, and progressive process linking all past, present, and future divine Revelations. Each resurrection is characterized by the abrogation of the former laws and ordinances and the inception of new ones, corresponding to the specific social needs of humanity in the emerging age.

The concept of progressive revelation transforms all the traditional categories and confers upon them new meanings. Not only is the doctrine of finality replaced by the doctrine of infinite sequential divine Revelations, but the very idea of the Day of Resurrection, traditionally a static notion, itself becomes an affirmation of the dynamic nature of spiritual reality. (Saiedi 2008, p. 254.)

According to the Bāb's teaching, the "Day of Judgment" came for Muslims (and for representatives of other religions) with the appearance of the revelation of the Bāb. Belief—or disbelief—in the Bāb and his religion marks the boundary that now runs between people and divides them into righteous and sinful. Saiedi notes:

More specifically, the Bāb explains that each spiritual Dispensation has its own life history, with a beginning and an end. The end of each Dispensation is its own Day of Resurrection. This end is a "resurrection" because it is also the inception of the next Dispensation, when the religion itself is recreated through the revelation dispensed by a new Manifestation of God. Thus the Day of Resurrection is the period when the new Manifestation of God is present on earth. (Saiedi 2008, p. 254.)

We find a detailed explanation of the "Resurrection" in the following lengthy passage from the Persian *Bayān*:

THE substance of this chapter is this, that what is intended by the Day of Resurrection is the Day of the appearance of the Tree of divine Reality, but it is not seen that any one of the followers of Shī'ih Islām hath understood the meaning of the Day of Resurrection; rather have they fancifully imagined a thing which with God hath no reality. In the estimation of God and according to the usage of such as are initiated into divine mysteries, what is meant by the Day of Resurrection is this, that from the time of the appearance of Him Who is the Tree of divine Reality, at whatever period and under whatever name, until the moment of His disappearance, is the Day of Resurrection.

For example, from the inception of the mission of Jesus—may peace be upon Him—till the day of His ascension was the Resurrection of Moses. For during that period the Revelation of God shone forth through the appearance of that divine Reality, Who rewarded by His Word everyone who believed in Moses, and punished by His Word everyone who did not believe; inasmuch as God’s Testimony for that Day was that which He had solemnly affirmed in the Gospel. And from the inception of the Revelation of the Apostle of God—may the blessings of God be upon Him—till the day of His ascension was the Resurrection of Jesus—peace be upon Him—wherein the Tree of divine Reality appeared in the person of Muḥammad, rewarding by His Word everyone who was a believer in Jesus, and punishing by His Word everyone who was not a believer in Him. And from the moment when the Tree of the Bayān appeared until it disappeareth is the Resurrection of the Apostle of God, as is divinely foretold in the Qur’ān; the beginning of which was when two hours and eleven minutes had passed on the eve of the fifth of Jamādiyu’l-Avval, 1260 A.H. (22 May 1844), which is the year 1270 of the Declaration of the Mission of Muḥammad. This was the beginning of the Day of Resurrection of the Qur’ān, and until the disappearance of the Tree of divine Reality is the Resurrection of the Qur’ān. The stage of perfection of everything is reached when its resurrection occurreth. The perfection of the religion of Islām was consummated at the beginning of this Revelation; and from the rise of this Revelation until its setting, the fruits of the Tree of Islām, whatever they are, will become apparent. The Resurrection of the Bayān will occur at the time of the appearance of Him Whom God shall make manifest. For today the Bayān is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of Him Whom God shall make manifest its ultimate perfection will become apparent. He is made manifest in order to gather the fruits of the trees He hath planted. (Bāb 1982, Persian *Bayān* 2:7, pp. 106–108.)

It is noteworthy that the Bāb understands “Resurrection” as the eschatological “Day” on which the “Tree”, planted during the previous Manifestation, reaches maturity (perfection), and its fruits are reaped. This metaphorical harvest occurs at the subsequent Manifestation (see above passage). The same applies to the period of the revelation of the Bāb himself, which should be replaced by the era of the next revelation.

To summarize: as is clear from the sources and, above all, from the key scripture of Bābism, the Persian *Bayān*, the terms “Resurrection”, “Judgment Day” and related eschatological concepts, which are important components of this doctrine, do not mean catastrophic events in the literal sense, or an actual “end of the world”, marking a final moment of history and human development. Instead of this gloomy perspective, Bābism puts forward the idea of “Resurrection” as a periodically repeating cyclical process of world history associated with the sending of the next bearer of divine revelation and giving rise to the maturation of a new civilization in each time circle under the influence of a new religious teaching. Thus, “Resurrection” and “Judgment Day”, from the point of view of Bābism, are not the end of human existence, but a change of eras or milestones in its progressive development and ascent from a lower stage of collective maturity to a higher one, which also signifies a change in the existing order of things. This understanding, which is fully consistent with the doctrine of “Progressive Revelation”, is based on the fact that, with each subsequent revelation, everything revives and resurrects, receiving a new impetus for development. According to Nader Saiedi (2008, p. 245): “The principle of progressive revelation is central to almost all the major later works of the Bāb”. And, further:

Yet another implication of the Bāb’s focus on the coming Dispensation is the central importance of the doctrine of progressive revelation. The Bāb’s later writings unfold a completely new sense of religious history, the relation of the religions to one another, and the dynamics of culture and society. This vision is further elucidated in the writings of Bahā’u’llāh, notably the Kitāb-i-Īqān (The

Book of Certitude). For that reason, it is not surprising that the *Kitāb-i-Īqān* has been considered as the completion of the Persian *Bayān*. (Saiedi 2008, p. 241.)

In the Persian *Bayān* 3:7, the Bāb wrote a chapter devoted to explaining what the Qurʾān means by “meeting God” on the Last Day. The title of this chapter is: “*On this, that any reference, revealed by God, to meeting God or attaining the presence of the Lord intendeth naught but Him Whom God shall make manifest. For verily God, by virtue of His Essence, can never be seen*” (Saiedi 2008, p. 354). In the following passage (provisionally translated and summarized by Edward Granville Browne), the Bāb goes on to explain:

The Eternal Essence cannot be comprehended or described, or qualified, or seen, though by It all things are comprehended, described, qualified, and seen; and therefore what is meant in the Heavenly Books by “Meeting with the Lord” is meeting with the Manifestation of the Point of Truth, which is the Primal Will. Thus in the Qurʾān by “Meeting with the Lord” is meant meeting the Apostle of God, even as it is said of the true believer, “To behold him is to behold the Prophet of God, and to behold the Prophet of God is to behold God”. . . . He is as the Sun, and all else than Him is as mirror in which reflections of the sun appear. Whoever attains to the Meeting with Him whom God shall manifest, attains to the Meeting with God. (The Bāb, Persian *Bayān* 3:7, translated/summarized by Edward Granville Browne 1988, pp. 340–41.)

The Bāb’s commentary on the purport and significance of the Qurʾān’s passages promising, for faithful and righteous believers, an encounter with God on the Last Day is an important prelude to Bahāʾuʾllāh’s expansion on this same theme in the Book of Certitude (*Kitāb-i-Īqān*), discussed in the next section. In a nutshell, to “meet God” on the Last Day is to attain the presence of God’s messenger, who is “God” by proxy—i.e., who represents God and conveys God’s will to humanity for that day and age. In other words, Qurʾānic promises of “meeting God” in the eschaton are impossible in terms of literal fulfillment. Therefore, the Qurʾānic Arabic expression *liqāʾ*, in all its derivative/cognate forms, in the eschatological context, is metaphorical and symbolic, not literal. Although the Qurʾān always means what it says, it does not always say what it means, if interpreted literally. A certain degree of metaphorical competence is required. In that respect, one of the “prophetic credentials”, as it were, of the Bāb and Bahāʾuʾllāh is to provide a true understanding of the Qurʾān—and, by extension, of the Bible and other holy books—according to Bahāʾī doctrine.

The “Seal of the Prophets” verse (Q. 33:40) refers to Muḥammad’s own time (i.e., the historical present, contemporary with the Prophet), whereas the “meeting God” passages of the Qurʾān (i.e., such verses as: Q. 2:46; Q. 2:249; Q. 9:77; 10:7; 10:11; Q. 13:2; Q. 18:110; Q. 29:23; Q. 33:44; and parallels) refer to the eschatological time of the future.

#### 4. Bahāʾī Exegesis of Q. 33:40

The Bahāʾī Faith was founded by Mīrzā Ḥusayn-ʿAlī Nūrī, known as Bahāʾuʾllāh (1817–1892). By virtue of its international audience, Bahāʾuʾllāh’s Book of Certitude (*Kitāb-i-Īqān*) may now be seen, among other things, as the world’s most influential Qurʾān commentary outside the Muslim world (Buck 2007, pp. 369, 378). The claim may be justified by the simple fact that the *Īqān* is coextensive with the spread of the Bahāʾī religion, which has spun out of its Islamic orbit and radiated globally, while maintaining its Islamic roots. As the preeminent Bahāʾī doctrinal text, the *Īqān*, given the solid doctrinal logic that it presented, went far in shaping and crystallizing Bahāʾī identity, greatly augmenting and energizing Bahāʾī missionary expansion in the process.

Post-Islamic by dint of its extraordinary eschatological claims, the *Īqān* vindicates the theophanic credentials of the Bāb who, as previously mentioned, broke decisively from Islam in 1844 by declaring himself to be the inaugurator of a new prophetic cycle. On the historical horizon in advance of Bahāʾuʾllāh’s imminent prophetic announcement (forthcoming on 22 April 1863), the *Īqān* subtly, yet unmistakably, pronounced itself to

be divinely inspired, i.e., a revelation from God (i.e., according to the Īqān's colophon, implying divine revelation):

Thus hath it been revealed aforetime, were ye to comprehend.

Revealed by the "Bā'" and the "Hā'".

Peace be upon him that inclineth his ear unto the melody of the Mystic Bird calling from the Sadratu'l-Muntahā!

Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!

(Bahā'u'llāh 1989, p. 257, [www.bahai.org/r/621971627](http://www.bahai.org/r/621971627) (accessed on 27 February 2023); Persian, 199; see also (Buck 2004), x, 4–7, 274, and 299, note 3.)

The date of the revelation of the *Kitāb-i Īqān* has been a topic of scholarly investigation. The late Ahang Rabbani (d. 2013) may be credited with having definitively and conclusively discovered the date of the revelation of the *Kitāb-i Īqān* in January 1861. (See Rabbani 1999, pp. 30–35.) The present writer (Buck), having been invited to read and comment on the prepublication manuscript, brought to Rabbani's attention that, by way of his translation, he had conclusively discovered the date of the revelation of the Īqān: in mid-January, 1861 (personal communication.) This was a significant finding. Dictated in the course of two days and two nights, the *Kitāb-i Īqān* set the stage for Bahā'u'llāh's imminent and impending claim to revelation in April 1863 in Baghdad.

The core claims advanced by the Īqān, in principle and in practice, have been adapted to other religious environments, including non-Abrahamic traditions, Zoroastrianism and the so-called Dharmic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism (but not as readily or successfully vis à vis Sikhism and Jainism), and Indigenous religious traditions as well, to a lesser extent.

From an orthodox Islamic point of view, the Īqān argued a doctrinally impossible scenario, i.e., a post-Islamic revelation. By advancing a heterodox Islamic argument to legitimate its post-Islamic claims, the Īqān's most original and dramatic act of Qur'ānic interpretation may well be its argument for how God could (and would) send another prophet after Muḥammad, notwithstanding the doctrinal impasse presented by the received understanding of the "Seal of the Prophets" verse (Q. 33:40), as discussed earlier in this paper. Bahā'u'llāh's exegetical strategy, therefore, is to employ an essentially Islamic argument to prove something ostensibly alien to orthodox Islam, both Sunnī and Shī'ī (Buck 2007). Bahā'u'llāh's discourse on realized eschatology became a self-fulfilling prophecy. More significant than its theological argument, however, is the Īqān's historical impact. The argument for a post-Islamic revelation was not academic in theory, but historical (and contemporary) in practice.

In what arguably and demonstrably is his most original and innovative exegetical argument, Bahā'u'llāh relativizes the claim that Muḥammad is the "Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40) in order to supersede it, by refocusing the reader's attention a mere four verses later (Q. 33:44) on the eschatological attainment to the presence of God (*liqā' Allāh*) on the apocalyptic "Last Day". Here, Muḥammad is the "last Prophet", as it were, in the "Cycle of Prophecy", whereas the Bāb is the first prophet to appear on the eschatological "Last Day"—or, more properly speaking, the first "Manifestation of God" to inaugurate, on the historical horizon, the "Cycle of Fulfillment":

Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book (Qur'ān), after (*ba'd az*) speaking of the "Seal" in His exalted utterance: "Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40), hath revealed unto all people the promise (*va'da*) of "attainment unto the divine Presence (*liqā'-yi khudā*)". To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned (*vide par.* 148, Q. 29:23; Q. 2:46; Q. 2:249; Q. 18:110; and Q. 13:2). The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than "attainment unto the divine Presence" hath been revealed in the Qur'ān. (*va khudā-yi vāḥid shāhid-i maqāl ast kih hīch amr-ī a'ẓam az*

*liqā' va asrah-i az ān dar furqān zikr nayāftih.*) Well is it with him that hath attained thereunto, in the day wherein most of the people, even as ye witness, have turned away therefrom.

And yet, through the mystery of the former (*avval*) verse, they have turned away from the grace promised by the latter (*thānī*), despite the fact that “attainment unto the divine Presence” in the “Day of Resurrection” (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*) is explicitly stated in the Book (Qur'ān). (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, pp. 169–70, pars. 181–182; parenthetical references added from the Persian text.)

In this remarkable and pivotal passage, Bahā'u'llāh harks back to “verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned”. Here, a quick search of the Īqān shows that, in Paragraph 148, Bahā'u'llāh cites: Q. 29:23 (*wa liqā'ihī*, “and (the) meeting (with) Him”); Q. 2:46 (*mulāqū*, “will meet”); Q. 2:249 (*mulāqū*, “(would) meet”); Q. 18:110 (*liqāa*, “(for the) meeting”); and Q. 13:2 (*bi liqāi*, “in the meeting”). Then, looking forward, Bahā'u'llāh also alludes to a Qur'ānic announcement of the “attainment unto the divine Presence” on the “Day of Resurrection” (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*) that comes “after” (*ba'd az*) the “Seal” verse. In other words, Bahā'u'llāh, after explicitly citing Q. 33:40, implicitly cites verse 33:44 (*yalqawnahu*, “they will meet Him”). This conclusion is justified under the following analysis:

In his dual role as authorized translator and interpreter of Bahā'ī scriptures within his overarching mandate as the designated “Guardian” of the Bahā'ī Faith from 1921 to 1957, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957) provides a word-for-word, literal translation in rendering the Persian/Arabic text of the Īqān, so: “And yet, through the mystery of the former”. Then, Shoghi Effendi—in the process of translating from the source language to the target language, while preserving the meaning of the former—inserts one word for amplification: “verse”. This word (Arabic: *āya*) is not found in the original Persian of the Īqān in this key passage. Shoghi Effendi's subtle, yet highly significant, one-word gloss disambiguates the text, narrowing the reading. The result is an episodic sequence of prophetic/eschatological events—i.e., the “Seal of the Prophets” followed by “Divine Presence”—to a textual, Qur'ānic sequence of verses in close proximity (Q. 33:40 and 33:44), descriptive of this same sequence of eschatological events. This makes perfect sense, since the preposition “after” (*ba'd az*) can also mean “next”.

Bahā'u'llāh evidently intended this pair of verses, Q. 33:40 and Q. 33:44, to be read together. This is an attractive hypothesis, with strong evidence, yet shy of conclusive proof. Indeed, the very next verse after the “Seal” verse that refers to the eschatological encounter with God is Q. 33:44, to wit: “Their greeting the Day they meet Him will be, ‘Peace.’ And He has prepared for them a noble reward” (tr. Ṣaḥīḥ International). A Shī'ī rendering is: “On the day when they will be brought into the presence of their Lord, their greeting to each other will be, ‘Peace be with you.’ God has prepared an honorable reward them” (tr. Muḥammad Sarwar). In Q. 33:44, cognates of the Arabic words *liqā'* (“encounter”, “meeting”, “attaining the presence of”) and *yawm* (“day”, i.e., the eschatological “Last Day”) are found. The Arabic word for “they will meet Him” is *yalqawnahu* (3rd person masculine plural imperfect verb, related to *liqā'*) and “Day” is *yawma* (accusative masculine noun). These verses are representative, not exhaustive. Other parallels may be cited, such as Q. 9:77 (*yalqawnahu*, “when they will meet Him”), 10:7 (*liqā'anā*, “the meeting with Us”), 10:11 (*liqā'anā*, “the meeting with Us”) and other parallels. These terms correspond—conceptually as well as linguistically—to Bahā'u'llāh's reference to “‘attainment unto the divine Presence’ in the ‘Day of Resurrection’” (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*).

Here, in the Īqān, Bahā'u'llāh places Q. 33:44 on a par with Q. 33:40. As signal an event and as paramount in prophetic history as the advent of Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets” surely is, of even greater moment is the eschatological encounter with God, according to Bahā'u'llāh's novel exegesis and supporting argument. An analysis of how Bahā'u'llāh interprets Q. 33:44 and parallels (adduced, as mentioned, in par. 48, as Q. 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:111 and 13:2) is needed. Arguing that direct beatific vision of God is impossible, Bahā'u'llāh reasons that Q. 33:44 anticipates a future theophany who, as *deus*

*revelatus* and divine vicegerent, is symbolically God by proxy. Similarly, Bahā'u'llāh, in an earlier Baghdad work, *Gems of Divine Mysteries (Jawāhir al-Asrār)*, explains:

Know then that the paradise (*hadhihi al-janna*, lit. “this Garden”) that appeareth in the day of God (*yawm Allāh*) surpasseth every other paradise and excelleth the realities of Heaven (*ḥaqā'iq al-riḍwān*). For when (*ba'd alladhī*, lit. “after”) God—blessed and glorified is He—sealed the station of prophethood (*maqām an-nubuwwa*) in the person of Him Who was His Friend (*ḥabībīhi*), His Chosen One (*ṣafīyyīhi*), and His Treasure (*khiyaratīhi*) amongst His creatures, as hath been revealed from the Kingdom of glory: “but He is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets” (Q. 33:40), He promised all men that they shall attain unto His own presence in the Day of Resurrection (*wa'ada al-'ibād bi-liqā'ihī yawm al-qiyāma*). In this He meant to emphasize the greatness of the Revelation to come, as it hath indeed been manifested through the power of truth. (Bahā'u'llāh 2002a, pp. 42–43, par. 58.)

Revelation is a concept familiar to all Muslims. After all, the Qur'ān, which is the very first book in Arabic, is considered, as a matter of Muslim faith, to be a series of revelations, communicated directly from God through the prophet Muḥammad. In the *Īqān*, Bahā'u'llāh argues that the Qur'ān, in turn, presages the advent of the Bāb as the “Promised One” in what is tantamount to a post-Islamic revelation, which is a theoretical impossibility in orthodox Islam, as previously mentioned.

Both of the present writers—who have previously collaborated on three articles (Buck and Ioannesyan 2010, 2017, 2018), making this their fourth collaboration—have each published a monograph on the *Kitāb-i Īqān* (Buck 2004; Ioannesyan 2001). Christopher Buck's *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahā'u'llāh's Kitāb-i Īqān* (Buck 2004)—which “represents the first book-length attempt in the English language to analyse one of the major works of Bahā'u'llāh” (Momen 1997, p. 290)—was first published in 1995 by Kalimāt Press. Youli Ioannesyan's monograph features an academic translation of the *Īqān* into Russian. The principal thesis and argumentative thrust of *Symbol and Secret*, taken as a whole, is that the primary eschatological symbol in the *Īqān* is the Bāb, while at the same time, a messianic “secret” pervades the *Īqān* as a subtext, charging the work with heightened eschatological tension, auguring Bahā'u'llāh's imminent declaration of his mission to the discerning whether before or after Bahā'u'llāh's prophetic mission commenced. Bahā'u'llāh's explicit argument is original, and his implicit claim is challenging to Muslims. By force of explicative logic, the *Īqān* served as an advance prophetic warrant for Bahā'u'llāh's proclaimed mission to unify the world (Buck 2004, 2016).

An academic translation into Russian was published in a monograph by Ioannesyan (2001), who writes, in part:

This commentary is on the following expressions/passages in the *Kitāb-i Īqān*:

“I am all the Prophets” (applied to Muḥammad),<sup>1</sup> “Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets”; “They (Prophets) are all manifestations of the beginning and the end”; “God will by no means raise a Messenger after Him”. (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, pp. 162, 169, 179, 212–13.)

The Bahā'ī creed in relation to the concept of “Seal of the Prophets” (prophecy), includes three aspects. One is global, as it is associated with the Divine, with the position and function of the Prophet in relation to God and with the relationship of the Prophets among themselves. Since God is the “First” and “Last”, the “Beginning” and “End”, and the “Alpha” and “Omega” of all things—and the great Prophets, the founders of religions, are manifestations of His qualities and names—then, in this aspect, they all equally manifest and reflect this Divine reality, “primacy” and “finitude” as an invariable attribute of the Divine.

Consequently, the assertion of one Prophet that He is “the last” does not contradict the similar assertion of another, for in both, the same reality is manifested

according to the principle of reflection, as in mirrors. This Reality is God's property and not their property as individuals. Thus, this aspect is inextricably linked with the doctrine of "the unity of the prophets" in the light of which "primacy" and "finitude" imply the beginning and end, but not in a temporal dimension.

The two other aspects of the "Seal of prophethood" notion are narrower. They are considered in the context of the first one and, therefore, can be regarded as secondary. A quote from Ishrāq-Khāvarī's dictionary of the Kitāb-i Īqān is relevant in this regard:

Prophethood and Messengerhood were terminated and consummated with His Holiness Muḥammad in the sense that during the millennial era which was [divinely] ordained for Muḥammad's Law there was no Prophet and Messenger, other than Muḥammad, who would be sent with a Book and the divinely ordained Law. When the millennial era of Muḥammad's Law was over, the Manifestation of the Divine Will [the Bāb] appeared, and new horizons were opened up by the Divine Will like a carpet being spread out. (Ishrāq-Khāvarī 1972, vol. 1, p. 304, translation by Ioannesyan.)

In other words, each Prophet who brings Revelation in the form of a new creed/teaching/law is limited by a certain time-frame, within which the world is under the shadow of this creed. During this period, He is the "last" Prophet, but only for the given time frame. This definition ("last Prophet") is no longer valid after the period expires. This is followed by the era of another Revelation and its Bearer (prophet-founder of a new religion), the next Prophet. Let us term this the "second" aspect.

The third aspect of the "Seal of prophethood" notion is related to the termination of Muḥammad's millennial prophetic era, which not only signifies the end of the era of his Revelation but also the consummation of the whole Cycle of the successive Revelations starting with Adam (Adamic Cycle). This Cycle could be more precisely defined as "the Cycle of prophecies" in the religious history of humankind where "prophecies" imply "predictions". The termination of the Adamic Cycle signifies the beginning of another Cycle, i.e., the Cycle of the fulfillment of the prophecies (predictions) of the past. This concept is also in conformance with the semantics and etymology of the Arabic word, *nabī* "prophet" (cf. its Hebrew equivalent with the same meaning) derived from the verb (*naba'a*) denoting "to proclaim, inform, foretell, predict, etc."

It would be relevant to quote a highly remarkable statement by Shoghi Effendi here: "A Revelation [i.e., Bahā'u'llāh's revelation], hailed as the promise and crowning glory of past ages and centuries, as the consummation of all the Dispensations within the Adamic Cycle, inaugurating an era of at least a thousand years' duration, and a cycle destined to last no less than five thousand centuries, signaling the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfillment..." (Ioannesyan 2001, pp. 203–205; quoting Shoghi 1979, p. 100.)

Prophecy foretells, as well as tells forth. In other words, prophecy is predicative, as well as predictive. In its predictive mode, prophecy, if true, foretells and then comes true in the future. When the future has come to pass, the past should not foreclose the present. In Bahā'ī belief, Bahā'u'llāh is symbolically foreshadowed in the Qur'ān as the "Great Announcement" (*an-nabā' al-'azīm*, Q. 78:2). Lest the "Seal of the Prophets" or any related doctrine prevent a truth-seeker from investigating a possible, if not actual, post-Islamic revelation, Bahā'u'llāh warns: "Take heed lest the word 'Prophet' (*an-nabī*) withhold you from this Most Great Announcement, or any reference to 'Vicegerency' (*al-walāya*) debar you from the sovereignty of Him Who is the Vicegerent of God, which overshadoweth all the worlds" (Bahā'u'llāh 1992, p. 80, par. 167).

In Bahā'ī doctrine, the “Cycle of Prophecy” (*kawr-i nubuvvat*) or “Adamic Cycle” (*kawr-i ādam*) prepared the world for the “Cycle of Fulfillment” (*kawr-i taḥaqquq va ikmāl*) or “Bahā'ī Cycle” (*kawr-i Bahā'ī*). This Cycle of Fulfillment was inaugurated by the Bāb, who prophesied the imminent advent of “Him who God shall manifest” (*Man Yuzhiru-hu Allāh*), whom the majority of Bābīs (followers of the Bāb) came to recognize as Bahā'u'llāh. In the “Cycle of Prophecy”, Muḥammad is indeed the last prophet for that time—but not for all time. That said, Bahā'īs believe in Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets and of the Messengers” and hold him to be the final Messenger for the “Cycle of Prophecy”—going beyond the Qur'ān's honorific of Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets” (*khātam an-nabiyyīn*) in Q. 33:40. Thus, the new term for the locus of spiritual and revelational authority in the Bahā'ī lexicon is “Manifestation of God” (*ẓuhūr-i ilāhī* or *mazhar-i ilāhī*). Therefore, Muḥammad was the last Prophet (*nabī*) and last Messenger (*rasūl*) of the “Cycle of Prophecy”, but not the last “Manifestation of God” according to this understanding.

As previously stated, Bahā'u'llāh revealed the *Kitāb-i Īqān* in Baghdad in January 1861, in the course of two days and two nights. This was prior to the formal declaration by Bahā'u'llāh of his prophetic mission, which occurred on 22 April 1863, known and celebrated by Bahā'īs today as the “First Day of Ridvān (“Paradise”)” and observed worldwide as a Bahā'ī twelve-day festival, the first, ninth and twelfth day of which are regarded as Bahā'ī Holy Days, in observance of which work is to be suspended (Buck 2004; Ioannesyan 2007). That same day, Bahā'u'llāh wrote what has come to be known as the “Sura of Patience” (*Sūriy-i-ṣabr*), alternatively known as the Tablet of Job, part of which is provisionally translated as follows:

Recite then unto them that which the celestial Dove of the Spirit hath warbled in the holy Ridvān of the Beloved, that perchance they may examine that which hath been elucidated concerning “sealing” by the tongue of him he who is well-grounded in knowledge in the prayer of visitation for the name of God, ‘Alī [Imām ‘Alī]. He hath said—and his word is the truth!—:

“[He (Muḥammad) is] the seal of what came before Him and the harbinger of what will appear after Him (*limā ya'tī minā'l-mursalīn min ba'du*)”.

In such wise hath the meaning of “sealing” been mentioned by the tongue of inaccessible holiness. Thus hath God designated His Friend [Muḥammad] to be a seal for the Prophets who preceded Him and a harbinger of the Messengers who will appear after Him”.

—Baha'u'llah, “Sura of Patience” (*Sūriy-i-ṣabr*). Provisional translation (and transliteration) by Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 3 April 2017, and posted on the Tarjuman listserve, 1 April 2017.

Here, Bahā'u'llāh cites a statement from a prayer for ‘Alī, who was Muḥammad's first male follower. ‘Alī later became the Prophet's son-in-law, after marrying Muḥammad's beloved daughter, Fatima. In Islamic history, ‘Alī was the fourth “rightly guided” Caliph. In Shia Islam, ‘Alī is considered to be the rightful successor to Muḥammad himself. Sunni Muslims, of course, disagree. But all Muslims agree that the Prophet Muḥammad dearly loved ‘Alī, and that ‘Alī was one of the greatest Muslims of all time.

In a monograph on Bahā'u'llāh's “Sura of Patience”, *Sayrī dar Būstān-i Madīnatu'ṣ-sabr* (in Persian), Dr. Foad Seddigh (2017) has located the exact reference for the statement in the prayer from which Bahā'u'llāh has quoted: “[He (Muḥammad) is] the seal of what came before Him and the harbinger of what will appear after Him”. Dr. Seddigh, in fact, has identified this prayer in several authoritative sources. One of its earliest publications is found in a book called *Kāmilu'z-Ziyārāt*. This is a well-known collection of prayers (of “visitation”, or prayers to be read at the graves of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Shī'ī Imams, and other Shī'ī figures). The *Kāmilu'z-Ziyārāt* is said to have been compiled by the Shī'ī scholar Ibn Qūlūya (d. 978 or 979 CE), and is available online: <http://ia800803.us.archive.org/14/items/736278932/kamil-zyarat.pdf> (accessed 1 Mar. 2023). The eleventh chapter of Ibn Qūlūya's book of prayers, entitled “Visiting the grave of the Commander of the Faithful

[Imam ‘Alī], how the grave should be visited, and what to pray at the grave”, begins on page 92. The statement that Bahā’u’llāh has quoted is found on p. 97, and is the second “*ḥadīth*” (tradition) cited. (Reference and translation from the Arabic courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami.)

This same statement— “[He (Muḥammad)] is the seal of what came before Him and the harbinger of what will appear after Him”—is also found in prayers of visitation for the shrine of Imam Ḥusayn and in a prayer to be said at the shrines of all of the Imams. These prayers are also found in the same book, mentioned above: the *Kāmilu’z-Ziyārāt*. The visitation prayer for Imam ‘Alī’s shrine has the exact words Bahā’u’llāh has revealed, verbatim. This prayer, universally recognized and used by Shia Muslims, is variously ascribed to the Sixth and Tenth Imams (references courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami and Dr. Foad Seddigh). It should be noted that Bahā’u’llāh’s understanding of this tradition differs from the traditional understanding by Shī’ī scholars. Dr. Seddigh points out this fact. On page 97 of the *Kāmilu’z-Ziyārāt*, one Shī’ī scholar (whom Dr. Seddigh quotes) glosses (paraphrases) the above tradition, as follows:

That is to say, [Muḥammad] is the seal of the Prophets who appeared before Him or their religious communities, or the knowledge and mysteries that preceded Him, and the harbinger of the Proofs (i.e., the Shī’ī Imams) who will follow Him or the knowledge, sciences, and wisdom that will appear after Him. (Reference and translation from the original Arabic, courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami.)

The difference is that Shī’ī commentators understand this *ḥadīth* to be a prediction of the advent of the Twelve Imams—and not a prophecy of the appearance of a future Prophet of God. But this much is certain: Shī’ī scholars and Baha’i scholars agree that Muḥammad is “the harbinger of what will appear after Him”.

This perspective finds confirmation in the following Tablet to Ḥasan Shāhābādī, revealed by Bahā’u’llāh (1995) in the late ‘Akkā period, first published by Kamāl ad-Dīn Bakhtāvar (Bahā’u’llāh 1974; Bakhtāvar 1974, pp. 104–105).<sup>2</sup> The Tablet of Bahā’u’llāh that Mr. Bakhtāvar published in 1974 was eventually republished (Bahā’u’llāh 1995, p. 3). According to Steven Phelps (2020, p. 109), the *Lawḥ-i Ḥasan-i Shāhābādī* (not named as such, however) is listed as Entry “BH03572” (reference courtesy of Adib Masumian, personal communication, 18 June 2022). Phelps notes that this Tablet is catalogued as British Library Oriental Manuscript 15715.035a, which is part of a series that Phelps describes as follows:

BLIB. Manuscripts in the British Library, London, listed by Or number. . . . Regarding manuscripts in the series Or16590 through Or15740, which together comprise half of all known works of Bahā’u’llāh, including some 4000 items which are uniquely accessible in this series: These were the bequest of a descendent of the family of Bahā’u’llāh; were mostly transcribed by Mīrzā Muḥammad-‘Alī, and are likely to have been derived in part from the two stolen satchels of Bahā’u’llāh’s papers mentioned in GPB [*God Passes By*, by Shoghi Effendi] p. 249 . . . . While included here owing to their importance, their degree of fidelity to the originals has not yet been ascertained. (Phelps 2020, p. 175)

In 2002, this Tablet was provisionally translated by Khazeh Fananapazir (Bahā’u’llāh 2002b) and is presented here, slightly edited by Buck, and also incorporating some information from Stephen Lambden’s translation of part of this same Tablet (Lambden 2018, p. 81), as follows:

*He shineth from the Horizon of the Heaven of true Knowledge with Wisdom and Utterance!*

O Ḥasan! Harken unto the Call of Ḥusayn [Bahā’u’llāh], Who hath been incarcerated in the Prison-Fortress of ‘Akkā, by reason of that which the hands of the heedless hath wrought. If one were to question them, “By what reason hath ye imprisoned Him?”, they would reply:

“Verily, He hath come with a new Sharī’a and this new Sharī’a doth not accord with the Law which we have been under. To this matter testifieth our Book, which is called the Qur’ān, a Book that is from God, the Lord of all mankind. See that which the All-Merciful hath revealed therein: ‘Verily, He [Muḥammad] is the Messenger of God, and the Seal of the Prophets’”. [Q. 33:40b.]

To this, We reply:

“Indeed thou speakest the truth. We do testify that through Him [Muḥammad], Messengership and Prophethood (*al-risāla wa’n-nubuwwa*) have both been sealed; and any one, after Him, claiming this most exalted station (*al-maqām al-‘alā*) is in manifest error”.

Nevertheless, O Questioner! Harken unto My voice which sayeth:

“Open thine eyes that thou mayest behold the Most Great Beauty, through Whom speaketh the Lord of divine decree. By God! Through Him the ‘Hour’ hath appeared, and the ‘Resurrection’ hath come to pass, and the ‘Moon’ hath been cleft asunder and thou wouldst behold all in an ongoing ‘Regeneration,’ if thou be of them that possess insight”.

“Verily, through His Advent hath come to be fulfilled the Advent about which glad-tidings hath been given by the Messengers of God, from all eternity, and there hath come to pass about which God hath revealed in the Qur’ān (*al-furqān*): ‘On that Day they shall all rise before the Lord of mankind.’ [Q. 83:6.] Truly the Cycle of Prophethood (lit., the “carpet of Prophethood”, *bisāt an-nubuwwa*) hath been rolled up, and He Who hath sent down the Prophets hath come, arrayed with a manifest and perspicuous sovereignty (*bi-sulṭān mubīn*; = Bahā’u’llāh)”.

“He, verily, is the One at Whose Advent all created things have given this utterance: ‘The Kingdom is God’s, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Praised.’ He is the One for Whom the necks of God’s chosen Saints have been outstretched in longing and ardent expectation, and every Prophet hath awaited His Presence in this wondrous Day. He is the One through Whom the ‘One Unseen and Hidden’ hath been made manifest, the One Whom no one hath known save He Himself, the one King over all mankind”.

“Peruse ye the Qur’ān—and all God’s Books revealed in the past—that haply ye may recognize this Day, illumined by the Countenance of thy Lord, the Manifest, the Perspicuous One”.

Thus have We illumined the horizon of the firmaments of this Tablet with the Luminary of Our Word, a Word through which God hath brought into being all creation, from all eternity to all eternity. Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds!

Here, Bahā’u’llāh explicitly acknowledges and affirms the fundamental doctrine that the Prophet Muḥammad was indeed the “Seal” (i.e., the last) Prophet (*nabī*) and last Messenger (*rasūl*) of the “Cycle of Prophecy”. However, then Bahā’u’llāh cites Q. 83:6 as an eschatological event that occurs after the Prophet Muḥammad’s tenure, or dispensation, as the “Seal of the Prophets”, as in this brief passage:

In truth I say: On this day the blessed words “But He is the Apostle of God, and the Seal of the Prophets” have found their consummation in the verse “The day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds”. Render thou thanksgiving unto God, for so great a bounty. (Bahā’u’llāh 1988, p. 114)

Here, the translator, Shoghi Effendi, follows Rodwell’s translation of Q. 83:6: “The day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds”. So Bahā’u’llāh declares that the Cycle of Prophecy has ended. This, however, does not mean that revelations from God would cease. It is simply that the nature of the revelations would be phenomenologically

similar, yet substantively distinct, in that these post-Islamic revelations are part and parcel of the new “Cycle of Fulfillment”. Mr. Bakhtāvar (1974, p. 101), after quoting Q. 33:40, states that right “after” (*b’ad az*) the “Seal of the Prophets” verse comes the promise (i.e., a further prophecy) of the future eschatological encounter with God:

On the day when they will be brought into the presence of their Lord, their greeting to each other will be, “Peace be with you”. (Q. 33:44a. Translated by Muḥammad Sarwar, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=33&verse=44>, accessed on 27 February 2023)

Mr. Bakhtāvar (1974, p. 101) does not, however, attribute the idea that Q. 33:40 and Q. 33:44 should be read together, as Bahā’u’llāh indicates that they should, in this remarkable argument, worth citing again for emphasis:

Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book (Qur’ān), after (*ba’d az*) speaking of the “Seal” in His exalted utterance: “Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets” (Q. 33:40), hath revealed unto all people the promise (*va’da*) of “attainment unto the divine Presence (*liqā’-yi khudā*)”. To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned (*vide par.* 148, Q. 29:23; Q. 2:46; Q. 2:249; Q. 18:110; and Q. 13:2). The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than “attainment unto the divine Presence” hath been revealed in the Qur’ān. (*va khudā-yi vāhid shāhid-i maqāl ast kih hīch amr-ī a’zam az liqā’ va asraḥ-ī az ān dar furqān zikr nayāftih.*) Well is it with him that hath attained thereunto, in the day wherein most of the people, even as ye witness, have turned away therefrom.

And yet, through the mystery of the former (*avval*) verse, they have turned away from the grace promised by the latter (*thānī*), despite the fact that “attainment unto the divine Presence” in the “Day of Resurrection” (*liqā’ dar yawm-i qiyām*) is explicitly stated in the Book (Qur’ān). (Bahā’u’llāh 1989, pp. 169–70, pars. 181–182; parenthetical references added from the Persian text.)

Stephen Lambden, in a section entitled “The *Lawḥ-i Ḥasan Shāhābadī/Lawḥ-i Khātām*” in his lengthy paper, “The Bābī-Bahā’ī transcendence of *khātām an-nabiyyīn* (Qur’ān 33:40) as the ‘finality of prophethood’” (Lambden 2018, pp. 80–82), writes:

The *Lawḥ-i Ḥasan Shāhābadī/Lawḥ-i Khātām al-Nabiyyīn*

At this point it will be appropriate to mention an important, probably late Acre period (1880s–early 1890s), Arabic scriptural Tablet of Baha’u’llah to a Persian Bahā’ī named Ḥasan who was born in or lived at Shāhābad, a village in western Azerbaijan, not far from Mākū where the Bāb was imprisoned in the late 1840s. Responding to Muslim judgements about his bringing a new *sharī’a* (religious law), Bahā’u’llāh affirms the truth of Q. 33:40b which he explicitly cites. In so doing he even goes on to affirm that both *risālat* implying the “sent Messengership” of the *rasūl* (the Messenger of God) and *nubuwwat*, the Prophethood of the *nabī* (Prophet) were “sealed” or consummated by Muḥammad ...

This untitled, brief but important scriptural Tablet of Baha’u’llah was addressed to a certain Ḥasan-i Shāhābadī; I have called [i.e., this Tablet] the *Lawḥ-i khātām al-Nabiyyīn* since Qur’an 33:40 is cited and commented upon within it. I am especially grateful to the learned UK based Bahā’ī scholar Khazeh Fananapazir for making a photocopy of a ms. of this text available to me...” (Lambden 2018, p. 80 and n. 95.)

The present writer (Buck) has asked both Lambden and Fananapazir for a copy of this photocopy of the original Arabic manuscript (or a copy of the original text) for further study. Lambden’s partial translation of what he calls the “*Lawḥ-i khātām al-Nabiyyīn*” follows (Lambden 2018, p. 81).

A very interesting and potentially significant statement by Shoghi Effendi—“Guardian” of the Bahā’ī Faith (1921–1957)—implicates a potential Bahā’ī “theology of pluralism”, to wit: “Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind” (Shoghi 1991, p. 58). This may be applied to individual religions—here, with special reference to Islam. To paraphrase, Islam, from this Bahā’ī perspective, is divine in origin, identical in its aims, complementary in its functions, continuous in its purpose, and indispensable in its value to humankind. In an ever increasingly multi-religious social framework within a progressively globalizing world—and in an era of emerging and overarching “transreligious” identity, as recently theorized and forecast by Roland Faber 2019 (see review by Buck 2019b)—this incipient Bahā’ī theology of pluralism also applies as to other religions.

Having arisen out of Islamic historical context and milieu, the Bahā’ī religion, as part of its spiritual ancestry and present heritage, possesses certain Islamicate elements, yet exhibits other features that are *supra*-Islamicate and distinct in character. For instance, Islamic doctrine adheres to a belief in successive revelations, beginning with Adam and culminating with the Prophet Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets”, as previously said throughout this article. In Bahā’ī teachings, therefore, the idea of successive revelations is invested with a teleology that transforms it into “progressive revelation” (*tajdīd va takāmul-i adyān*), where the succession of Messengers throughout the history of religions is not only sequential but cumulative, coefficient with the social evolution of humanity (Ioannesyan 2012). Here, “progressive” conveys the notion of “superior” in respect of being “fuller” and “more advanced”, without making a claim of intrinsic superiority.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper represents the first time that a wide-ranging survey and analysis of the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā’ī viewpoints on the subject of the “Seal of the Prophets” has been made, and is the result of a collaboration between two scholars working in the United States and Russia.

In sum, as demonstrated in the passages cited above, the eschatological “meeting God” verses of Q. 33:44 (and parallels)—as well as such other passages as Q. 83:6 (and parallels) and Q. 7:35—effectively transcend the “Seal of the Prophets” verse at Q. 33:40.

The foregoing analysis invites further investigation (for example, a thorough study of Shī’ī and especially Bābī exegesis of Q. 33:40–44, i.e., in Persian *Bayān* 3:7). In so saying, the present writers disclaim any pretense to authoritative pronouncements on these issues. The authors are simply “men at work”, so to speak, performing ongoing research, and contributing to the cumulative and acquisitive research tradition—especially by creating a synergy between Russian academic Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā’ī studies and the broader research tradition. By, respectively, connecting and interrelating Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā’ī exegesis of the “Seal of the Prophets”, a wider scope is obtained such that there is more of a sense of a developmental process in play. In other words, the present writers are looking at “the bigger picture”, as it were, in the birth and early genesis of the Bābī and Bahā’ī religions, thereby attracting further analysis and discussion. Recognizing that the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh each represent the “divine presence” constitutes, in the words of the present writers, a “realized eschatology”.

Realized eschatology transforms the idea that the “end of the world is near” (or “far off”, as the case may be) into the resolute belief that the “end of the world is here”. In other words, realized eschatology is a form of presentism, in which the present has caught up with the future, such that the future is here and now. For such sudden “faith” in the contemporaneous fulfillment of eschatological expectations to reasonably occur, without straining credulity too far, requires that popular notions—especially miraculous and therefore highly improbable events—must somehow give way to the firm conviction, or certitude, that prophetic narratives should be understood and appreciated primarily as figurative, metaphorical and symbolic discourses, hinting at a psychological or spiritual

reality that has been arcanelly expressed in otherwise wildly imaginative apocalyptic scenarios. In this sense, the Qur'an's promise of "meeting" God—which is physically impossible to do, since the finite cannot attain to the infinite—must be understood as "experiencing" the presence of God in some other way. For many who have come to embrace the Bahā'ī Faith, the *Kitāb-i Īqān* (The Book of Certitude) provides assurance that eschatological discourse is primarily metaphysical (i.e., all about psychological and social transformation), rather than physical (i.e., concrete reality). To interpret eschatological discourse literally is a form of spiritual illiteracy, in which the reader simply lacks the cognitive skills to decode prophetic code, as it were. In the end, this is a test of faith, as Bahā'u'llāh has put it:

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil. From time immemorial such hath been the way of God amidst His creatures, and to this testify the records of the sacred books. (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, p. 49, par. 53)

The *Kitāb-i Īqān* is a holy book about holy books. Not only that, but the *Īqān* claims to contain the essence of the wisdom enshrined in all of the holy books of the world's religions. "In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account", Bahā'u'llāh proclaimed. "So much so, that were a person to ponder it a while in his heart, he would discover from all that hath been said the mysteries of the Words of God, and would apprehend the meaning of whatever hath been manifested by that ideal King". (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, p. 237, par. 268). The *Kitāb-i Īqān* itself has been called, by Bahā'u'llāh himself, the "cynosure of all books", in this striking declaration revealed on 1 July 1882:

Regarding their statement that "our faith and religion is superior to every other", by this is meant such Prophets as have appeared before them. Viewed from one perspective these holy Souls are one: the first among them is the same as the last, and the last is the same as the first. All have proceeded from God, unto Him have they summoned all men, and unto Him have they returned. This theme hath been set forth in the Book of Certitude, which is indeed the cynosure of all books (*sayyid-i-kutub*), and which streamed from the Pen of Glory in the early years of this Most Great Revelation. Blessed is he that hath beheld it and pondered its contents for the love of God, the Lord of creation. (Bahā'u'llāh 2006, p. 45, par. 2.45.)

In this passage, the Persian phrase *sayyid-i-kutub*, translated as the "cynosure of all books", can also be expressed as the "prince of (all) books". The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "cynosure", in part, as: "figurative. a. Something that serves for guidance or direction; a 'guiding star'. b. Something that attracts attention by its brilliancy or beauty; a centre of attraction, interest, or admiration". By this definition, a cynosure serves as a source of illumination and a singular object of beauty. A cynosure, then, is something that not only attracts attention, elicits admiration, and commands respect, but also serves as a source of enlightenment, guiding the way forward. With regard to the *Īqān*, one could well ask "Why?" and "How so?" In other words, what makes the *Kitāb-i Īqān* so special, and from what perspective? On this question as to the significance and wider implications of the doctrines taught in the *Kitāb-i Īqān*, Shoghi Effendi elaborates:

A model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence, this Book, setting forth in outline the Grand Redemptive Scheme of God, occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahā'ī literature, except the *Kitāb-i Aqdas*, Bahā'u'llāh's Most Holy Book. Revealed on the eve of the declaration of His Mission, it proffered to mankind the "Choice Sealed Wine", whose seal is of "musk", and broke the "seals" of the "Book" referred to

by Daniel, and disclosed the meaning of the “words” destined to remain “closed up” till the “time of the end”.

Within a compass of two hundred pages it proclaims unequivocally the existence and oneness of a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty; asserts the relativity of religious truth and the continuity of Divine Revelation; affirms the unity of the Prophets, the universality of their Message, the identity of their fundamental teachings, the sanctity of their scriptures, and the twofold character of their stations; denounces the blindness and perversity of the divines and doctors of every age; cites and elucidates the allegorical passages of the New Testament, the abstruse verses of the Qur’ān, and the cryptic Muḥammadan traditions which have bred those age-long misunderstandings, doubts and animosities that have sundered and kept apart the followers of the world’s leading religious systems; enumerates the essential prerequisites for the attainment by every true seeker of the object of his quest; demonstrates the validity, the sublimity and significance of the Bāb’s Revelation; acclaims the heroism and detachment of His disciples; foreshadows, and prophesies the world-wide triumph of the Revelation promised to the people of the Bayān; upholds the purity and innocence of the Virgin Mary; glorifies the Imāms of the Faith of Muḥammad; celebrates the martyrdom, and lauds the spiritual sovereignty, of the Imām Husayn; unfolds the meaning of such symbolic terms as “Return”, “Resurrection”, “Seal of the Prophets” and “Day of Judgment”; adumbrates and distinguishes between the three stages of Divine Revelation; and expatiates, in glowing terms, upon the glories and wonders of the “City of God”, renewed, at fixed intervals, by the dispensation of Providence, for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind. Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahā’ī Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers. (Shoghi 1979, pp. 139–40.)

Although this statement “speaks for itself”, as it were, the primary social implications of the *Kitāb-i Iqān* are as far-reaching, progressive and profound as they are ideologically edifying, at least from the perspective of Shoghi Effendi, who translated the *Iqān* into English. Indeed, there is something of a grand vision—even a prophecy—here, in that Shoghi Effendi claims that the overarching impact of the *Iqān*, over time, will lead to the “complete and permanent reconciliation” of the followers of all world religions, all for the greater good, i.e., “for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind”. To be sure, this is a statement of faith. In and of itself, this does not render Shoghi Effendi’s foregoing pronouncement and prediction true or untrue. That said, Shoghi Effendi’s encomium of the *Iqān* invites serious reflection on the social implications of religious doctrines in general, as well as in particular with respect to the *Iqān* itself. By “sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world”, the *Iqān* “has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers” considering that Bahā’u’llāh’s mission was to “unify the world” (Bahā’u’llāh 1988, p. 46, second epistle to Napoleon III), promoting interfaith accord and concord—in what Bahā’ī philosopher Roland Faber (2019) calls “transreligious identity” as part and parcel of the potential, if not actual, religious and other social implications of the religiously unifying ideology of *Kitāb-i Iqān*, the Book of Certitude.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Bahā'u'llāh quotes this *ḥadīth*, in brief, so: *ammā an-nabiyyūna fa-anā*. (Arabic text, courtesy of Dergham Aqiqi, personal communication to Buck, 29 October 2021.) For the full version, see: al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* ("Sea of Lights"), vol. 25.
- <sup>2</sup> According to Fereyduṅ Vahman (2019), Mr. Kamālu'd-Din Bakhtāvar, who lived in Tehran, was "a scholarly author and an eloquent speaker". Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, "followers of the Hojjatieh and *Fada'iyan-e Islam* organizations, including Raja'i who later became president, created much trouble for him and disrupted meetings where he spoke about the Baha'i Faith". Eventually, Mr. Bakhtāvar was arrested in Mashhad, along with nine other Baha'is. Subsequently a trial was held which, at first, was public. "The Revolutionary Court in Mashhad", according to Vahman, "announced that Bakhtāvar's trial would be broadcast by loudspeaker in the city's main square". "Those who gathered to listen heard the prosecutor's accusations", Vahman notes, "but a few minutes after defense started, the judge ordered the loudspeakers turned off". On 26 July 1981, Mr. Bakhtāvar was executed by firing squad in Kashmar in Khurasan, Iran (Vahman 2019, pp. 187, 189). In a cable sent the very next day, 27 July 1981, addressed "To all National Spiritual Assemblies", the Universal House of Justice wrote, in part: Execution of Two Bahā'is in Kashmar. GRIEVED ANNOUNCE TWO MORE ACTIVE DEDICATED SUPPORTERS FAITH BAHĀ'U'LLĀH IRAN KAMALI'D-DIN BAKHTAVAR AND NI'MATU'LLAH KATIBPUR-SHAHIDI MARTYRED BY FIRING SQUAD IN KASHMAR, KHURASAN PROVINCE CHARGED WITH TOTALLY FALSE ACCUSATIONS INVOLVEMENT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. [https://bahai.works/MUHJ63-86/290/Execution\\_of\\_Two\\_Bah%C3%A1%E2%80%99%C3%ADs\\_in\\_Kashmir](https://bahai.works/MUHJ63-86/290/Execution_of_Two_Bah%C3%A1%E2%80%99%C3%ADs_in_Kashmir) (accessed on 27 February 2023).

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