

The Wronged One: Shí'í Narrative Structure in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Visitation
for Mullá Husayn
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To understand the significance of the martyrdom of Husayn for the Shí'í community and the religious literature it occasioned, one must look at the accounts of his pitiful death following his betrayal by his supporters in Kufah; his decision born of indomitable will to stand alone and unaided, save for a small band of followers, against an army of 5,000; the thirst which afflicted his family; their subsequent slaughter at the hands of his enemies; the pathetic scene of Husayn clutching his murdered son in his arms; and his final death and humiliation at the hands of Shamir, who placed his head on a pike and carried it to Yazíd, the Umayyad Caliph. It was a gruesome parade, the marching dirge of which was crafted from the wails of the few women left to mourn the dead.

Some historians might question the carefully constructed narrative of the events and cast suspicion upon the act of memory colored by more sectarian concerns. This, thankfully, is not the province of our inquiry. Rather, it is precisely the structure of this account that demands our attention, as it is the basis of later devotional activities. Indeed, the account itself may be seen as a devotional act, a sacralizing narrative played out again and again in commemorations of Husayn's martyrdom in the Shí'í world and in private visitations to his grave.

The central position of Husayn's martyrdom in the formation of Shí'í identity can find no greater parallel in religious writing than the Passion of Jesus of Nazareth. Both men, as portrayed in later accounts, were betrayed by their followers. Both were left to die alone and abandoned, pierced with wounds and mourned by a few pious women. Death, however, was merely a vehicle for victory in both narratives, granting lasting influence to the men who had offered up their lives for Truth and thereby demonstrated the falsity of their persecutors' acts. This core narrative of betrayal, abandonment, suffering, martyrdom, and victory forms the emotional center of both Christianity and Shí'í Islam.

These observations, of course, are not original and have been explicitly expounded by contemporary scholars of religion. What has not been heretofore discerned, however, is the important role that these *topoi* play in the narrative structure of the works of Bahá'u'lláh. One may even argue that they are the defining structure underlying most of His epistles and homilies. Proving such an assertion, however, is not possible in a single article. Therefore, I have chosen to begin the study of this narrative structure in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets by focusing on a single devotional text, a Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn, and its Shí'í antecedents. After a comparative analysis, I will offer some tentative observations about the importance of this narrative structure in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

To understand the kinship between Bahá'u'lláh's Writings and Shí'í narratives of the martyred Imám, we must first examine the structure of devotional texts used during visitations of Husayn's grave. As will be seen, these devotions parallel the structure of the narrative of his martyrdom. Although some elements of the narrative may be more pronounced in one text, or absent in another, all of these texts generally conform to the following outline (the elements of which will be indicated in the text, following, in <angle brackets>):

List of Elements:

1. Praise and greetings for previous Prophets, Muhammad and finally his primogeny, particularly the Imáms.
2. The virtues and station of Husayn or the other Imáms
3. The struggling (*mujáhadá*) of Husayn in the path of God
4. The patience of Husayn during his afflictions
5. Loneliness of Husayn
 - a. The abandonment of Husayn and the lack of supporters
 - b. Promise of God's aid and assistance, which will lead to ultimate victory
 - c. Promise of revenge on Husayn's enemies

- 6 The suffering of Husayn
- 7 The weeping of his followers, the heavens and the angels at his martyrdom
- 8 The recognition of Husayn’s spiritual authority or authority of the Imáms (*wiláya*)
9. The recognition of the purity of the Imám
10. The supplicant asks to be numbered among Husayn’s companions
11. The supplicant asks to be counted among those that were martyred with Husayn
12. The supplicant asks to be accounted among the faithful
13. The cursing (*la’án*) of Husayn’s enemies
14. A final prayer (*du‘á*) to Husayn which consists of:
 - a. Asking Husayn for intercession (*shifá‘a*)
 - b. Asking for blessings and forgiveness for supplicant and for the supplicant’s parents and family

Intermingled with the prayers of visitation are a series of genuflections that are composed of the recital of “Alláh-u-Akbar” (*takbír*), the raising of the hands in supplication (*qunút*), bending at the waist and placing the hands upon the knees (*rak‘a*), prostration (*sajda*), and, in some texts, the recitation of Qur’anic verses. These genuflections indicate that the recital of the prayers of visitation are not only an inner, spiritual act, but also a performance, or a series of movements that embody and reinforce the narrative of the text and highlight the renewal of the covenant between the supplicant and the martyred Imám.

In order to substantialize this adumbration of the various prayers of visitation for Husayn, I have further summarized two basic Shí‘í devotional texts below. I have chosen these texts because they are different enough to illustrate the provisional nature of the outline I have provided above, but they also contain the basic themes common to most devotional texts of the genre. Further, they are fairly far apart in time and differ in authorship so as to give an indication of the maintenance of these themes throughout Shí‘í history.

The first sample is from a fourth-century (AH) text recorded in the *Kámil az-Ziyárát* by Ja‘far b. Muhammad b. Qulawayya al-Qummí, a Shí‘í Muslim who died in 368 AH. The text, which is purported to be related from the sixth Imám, Ja‘far as-Sádiq, begins with a *salám* (greetings and blessings) upon Husayn, the angels, who are identified as “they who are drawing nigh unto God” (*al-muqarríbún*), and the Muslims. <Element 1, above> The supplicant then affirms that Husayn was righteous in his beliefs and is God’s blood-ransom among humanity (*thár alláh*). <Element 2> This ransom can only be redeemed through belief in the Imáms (*awliyá*). <8> The supplicant then asks to be endeared to the Imáms both in this world and the next.

At this point, the supplicant walks a little, says “Alláh-u-Akbar” seven times, and stands before the grave of Husayn. He then praises God and asks to be counted among Husayn’s party (*wafd*). <Element 10> After this, the supplicant beseeches God to curse (*la‘ana*) the enemies of Husayn. <13> The supplicant then asks to be counted among the faithful, <12> after which he says “Alláh-u-Akbar” five times and walks a little.

Again, the supplicant asks to be numbered among the faithful and to be counted among those who were with Husayn and martyred with him. <10,11,12> At this point, the supplicant says “Alláh-u-Akbar” three times and then puts both of his hands on the grave. The supplicant then calls to mind the purity of Husayn and his status as the ransom of God. <2> After this, he puts both cheeks on the Imám’s grave and then seats himself and mentions to God that which he desires. After this, the supplicant returns to his previous position and puts both hands on his legs, whereupon he praises the Imám and acknowledges that God will kill those who killed him. <5c>

The supplicant then turns to Husayn’s son, ‘Alí, and mentions whatsoever he desires. The supplicant then stands facing the graves of the martyrs and gives them greetings (*salám*) and recognizes them as the most exalted of all martyrs. <1,2> After this, the supplicant places the grave between his hands and prays for that which is seemly for him. The supplicant then says that he is approaching God through Husayn, after which he says “Alláh-u-Akbar” eleven times without pause, walks a short way and then stands facing the Qibla. <14a> The supplicant then praises God and calls to mind Husayn’s martyrdom and speaks directly to Husayn of God’s promise to assist him and testifies before Husayn that God has been faithful to His pledge and destroyed his enemies. <5b/c>

After this, the supplicant says “Alláh-u-Akbar” seven times, walks a little, and then faces the grave of Husayn. The supplicant then testifies that Husayn was obedient to God’s commands and struggled (*jáhada*) in

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His path (*sabíl*).<3> After this, he recounts God's cursing of those who forsook Husayn and those who killed him.<13> Finally, the supplicant testifies to God's *wiláya* as passed down through the Imáms and beseeches God to curse those who disobeyed Husayn and spilled the blood of the Imáms.<8,13>¹

The structure of the prayer of visitation closely resembles that of the narrative arrangement of the story of the Imám's martyrdom, and is, in fact, a symbolic reconstruction of those events so that the supplicant might identify himself with the suffering of the martyred Imám and reaffirm his ultimate redemption in the hearts of the faithful. Further, the text also demonstrates the centrality of the *wiláya* of the Imám and his liminal position as a gateway of divine forgiveness and pardon.

These elements are even more strikingly apparent in a prayer of visitation attributed to the twelfth Imám and recorded in Majlísi's voluminous *Bihár al-Anwár*. The text of the prayer begins with a *salám* upon the prophets mentioned in the Qur'án, both major and minor, and upon the Holy Family (i.e. Muhammad, 'Alí, Fátima, Husayn and Hasan).<1> Greetings and blessings are also given to the angels that weep for Husayn and circumambulate his grave and to the signs of physical grief expressed on Husayn's behalf.<1> In a particularly moving passage, the supplicant states in the cadence of beautiful rhymed prose (*saj'*):

Peace be upon thee [Husayn] from he who is aware of thy sanctity [hurmatika] and is faithful to thine authority [wiláyatika] and is drawing nigh unto God through thy love and is free of (the sins) of thine enemies.<1,8> Greetings from his heart, lacerated through thy wounds, and from his tears shed at mention of thee. It is the greeting of the distraught, afflicted one who, if he had been with thee in Karbila, would have shielded thee with his own self from the blades of the swords and expended his last life breath for you, and struggled by thy side [jáhada bayn yadayka] and assisted thee [nasaraka] against whomsoever oppressed thee.<3> He would have offered up his spirit and his body, his kin and his possessions, as a ransom for thee. Verily, his spirit is a sacrifice [fidá'] for thy spirit and his family is (offered up as) a shield for thy family.<10,11>

However, the passage of time hath hindered me and that which hath been destined hath prevented me from aiding thee and I was unable to fight [muhárib] against whomsoever fought against thee and displayed enmity towards thee. Therefore, I lament (thy passing) morning and eve and weep for thee, exchanging tears for blood in sorrow over thee and regret for that which hath befallen thee, grieving until I die through the anguish of the wounded one . . . <5a>²

The supplicant then recounts the virtues of Husayn, stating that he was an observant Muslim and struggled in God's path.<2,3> Further, his relationship to the Holy Family is detailed and the supplicant testifies that he faithfully carried out God's trust.<2> The patience of Husayn during his afflictions is then described and the supplicant bears witness that he assisted the religion of God and made it victorious through his efforts.<4, 5b> At this point the supplicant praises the station of the Imám and recounts his suffering at the hands of his enemies, reemphasizing his fortitude and solitude in the midst of adversity.<2,4,6> The wailing of the women in Husayn's party after his death is recounted, as his head is raised aloft upon the point of a spear.<6,7> The supplicant then states that the suffering of Islam and Muhammad are due to Husayn's murder, which brought about the weeping of the heavens and the angels.<7>

After testifying to Husayn's sufferings, the *du'á* portion of the prayer of visitation begins. The supplicant first asks for entrance to paradise through the intercession (*shifá'a*) of Muhammad and his family and implores them for favor and bounties, blessings and forgiveness.<14a> At this point in the prayer, there are a series of genuflections, consisting of two *rak'as* accompanied by a specified Qur'anic Súra. The first part of the *shaháda* (the Muslim creedal statement of belief) is then recited: "There is no god but God." The supplicant then affirms his belief in God and His prophets and asks Him to bless the Holy Family and the Twelve Imáms. After this, he asks for blessings through the Imám Husayn, beseeching God for aid and assistance.<14a> The supplicant then affirms his weakness and God's power and acknowledges his personal waywardness. This acknowledgement is followed by a supplication to God through Husayn to grant forgiveness to the supplicant, his parents and all the believers, both living and dead.<14a/b>

At the end of the prayer, there are further genuflections, after which God is asked for blessings. The supplicant then prostrates upon the tomb and gives a final *salám* to Husayn. Once he has done this, the supplicant may then say a private prayer for himself, his parents and for whatsoever else he may desire.<14b>³

Raised as a Twelver Shí‘í Muslim, Bahá’u’lláh would have had knowledge of the various prayers for visitation of the Imáms and been familiar with the general outlines of Husayn’s martyrdom as performed during ‘Áshúrá reenactments commemorating his death. Therefore, it is not surprising that this reverence for the Imám Husayn is present in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. What is surprising is the extent to which the narrative structure of Husayn’s death, as embodied in histories and devotional texts associated with it, permeates the Writings and the identity of Bahá’u’lláh. For Him, the narrative of Husayn’s suffering was made flesh and reenacted in His Person.

To illustrate this point, we will focus on a single text that neatly captures the narrative structure of the visitation prayers for the Imám Husayn and ties together a number of common elements found throughout Bahá’u’lláh’s writings. The text is a Tablet of Visitation written by Bahá’u’lláh for Mullá Husayn, the first person to believe in the mission of Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad, the Báb.

Throughout His prophetic career, the Báb wrote a number of Tablets of Visitation (*ziyaratnáma*) for the Imáms and his followers. In the early days of His ministry, He wrote a Tablet of Visitation for the Imám ‘Alí and later wrote one for all of the Imáms known as the “Ziyára jámi ‘a al-kabíra.” The Báb also wrote a number of *ziyaratnámas* for the martyrs of Tabarsí and one for Fátima.⁴ In the Persian Bayán, the Báb limited tomb visitation (*ziyára*) to Himself and the 18 Letters of the Living, whom He regarded as the return of Muhammad, Fátima, the twelve Imáms and the four gates (with Himself as the “Primal Point”).⁵ In Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn, we find a confluence of all of these trends: a *ziyaratnáma* for one of the martyrs of Tabarsí who was regarded as the return of Muhammad.

The recipient of the Tablet, Varaqatu’l-Firdaws (“The Leaf of Paradise”), was the sister of Mullá Husayn and distinguished in her own right as an early believer in the Báb and as a learned companion of Táhirih, as evinced in the following account by her husband, the scholar Skaykh Abú Turáb of Qazvín:

“I married her three years ago in Kerbelá. She was then but an indifferent scholar even in Persian, but now she can expound texts from the Kur’án and explain the most difficult questions and most subtle points of the doctrine of the Divine Unity in such wise that I have never seen a man who was her equal in this time, or in readiness of apprehension. These gifts she has obtained by the blessing of His Holiness the Supreme and through converse with Her Holiness the Pure [Táhirih] (upon whom be the splendour of God!). I have seen in her a patience and resignation rare even in the most self-denying men, for during these years, though I have no sent her a single diínár for her expenses, and she has supported herself only with the greatest difficulty, she has never uttered a word; and now that she has come to Teherán she refrains altogether from speaking of the past, and though, in accordance with the wishes of Jenáb-i-Bábu’l-Báb, she now desires to proceed to Khurásán, and has literally nothing to put on save the one well-worn dress which she wears, she never asks for clothes or traveling-money, but ever seeks reasonable excuses wherewith to set me at my ease and prevent me from feeling ashamed. Her purity, chastity, and virtue are boundless, and during all this while no unprivileged person hath so much as heard her voice.”⁶

Ishráq Khávarí adds a few more details to our scanty knowledge of Varaqatu’l-Firdaws’ life:

The young, respected sister [bíbí kúchak-i-hamshírih] of Jináb-i-Mullá Husayn, the Báb al-Báb, who was surnamed “The Leaf of Paradise” [varaqa al-firdaws]. She accompanied her brother and mother to Karbila, where she married the well-known Shaykh Abú Turáb. After the raising of the call [the declaration of the Báb], she became a believer in the blessed Cause and was among the companions of Táhirih. She accompanied Táhirih to Iran, and, after a brief stay in Qazvín and Tehran, she went to Khorásán and stayed in Mashhad. After hearing of the martyrdom of her brother at Fort Tabarsí, she left Mashhad with her mother for Bashrúiyih, where she provided service and resided in great difficulty. After a short period of time, she set out for ‘Ishqábád to offer (her) customary services until the time of her death.⁷

The key to understanding Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn is the multivalent persona of “Husayn” who is explicitly or obliquely referred to throughout the text. On one level, it is an allusion to Mullá Husayn, the first person to believe in the Báb. On another, it evokes the image of the Imám Husayn. On yet another, the persona refers to Bahá’u’lláh Himself, Mírzá Husayn ‘Alí. The two latter personae are particularly significant, as Bahá’u’lláh’s spiritual affinity for and identification with His namesake, which He often mentions in a number of Tablets, is beyond dispute.⁸ He may have also obliquely identified Himself with the Imám

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in many Tablets by referring to Himself as “the Wronged One” (*al-mathlúm*), an allusion to Husayn as the Wronged Martyr (*al-mathlúm ash-shahíd*). Bahá’u’lláh seems to allude to this equivalence in the opening passage of the Tablet:

This is a Book by the Wronged One, Who hath been named “the Glorious” [al-bahá’] in the kingdom of eternity [malakút al-baqá’], and “the Exalted, the Most High” [al-‘Alfí al-a‘lá] in the dominion of loftiness [jabarút al-‘Alá’]. In the Unseen World [láhút al-‘amá’] He is known by all of the beautiful Names of God and in the world below [ard al-anshá’] He is known as Husayn, yet most of the people are wrapped in veils and idle fancies [wahn ‘athím].⁹

As in the Shí’í prayers of visitation for the Imám Husayn, Bahá’u’lláh begins the Tablet by mentioning the prophets and holy ones of old. However, He breaks with tradition by not only identifying Himself with their suffering, but by identifying Himself as their return.

Tellingly, the blur of the shifting identities in the Tablet is mirrored grammatically with the shift from third person singular, to second person singular, to first person singular, and finally to first person plural, all within the space of five lines:

Again He was slain as one oppressed upon the plain of Karbila and with Him they martyred those whom God hath related unto His Own sanctified and radiant Self, until such time that they cut off His head and banished His family [ahlahu] and paraded them throughout the land [dárúhum fí al-balád]. Likewise the hosts of the evil ones condemned Him and once again suspended Him in the air and He was martyred in the path of God, the Help in Peril, the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent. Once again Thou wert imprisoned in the land of Tá for four months, as is well-known, and the Pen of the Worlds [qalam al-‘álamín] is unable to recount that which befell Thee. After that they removed Me from the prison and exiled Me, along with my family, from the lands (of my birth) [al-awtán] until We entered Iraq and abided therein.

The next portion of the Tablet even more strongly echoes the visitation texts for the Imám Husayn. Bahá’u’lláh begins by recounting His suffering at the hands of the oppressors, even though He was solely occupied with spreading the glad-tidings amongst the people. Only God protected Him from their machinations and granted Him victory over His enemies, even though He was alone and unaided. In response to His loneliness and suffering, the inmates of heaven weep and the maids of heaven mourn his plight.

Like the visitation texts for the Imám Husayn, Bahá’u’lláh also dwells upon the spiritual station of Mullá Husayn. Here, there are parallels in tone as well as structure, as Mullá Husayn is praised in terms that were reserved for the Imáms in Shí’í Islam. At this juncture, Bahá’u’lláh refers to the station of the first believer in the Báb by his name, Husayn:

[T]hrough which the standards of ascendancy hath been manifested and the Sun of grace hath shone forth and the moon of bounty hath shed its splendor and the Ancient Beauty hath been established upon the Throne of His Name, the Exalted, the Most Great. Through it the Kingdom of Names hath been raised up and the Embodiments [hayákil] of the Divine Attributes and the Temple [haykal] of holiness hath been adorned with the ornament of His Name, the Most Ancient. Through it the Lord of Command [sultán al-amr] hath encompassed all created things and the Sun of bounty hath shone forth upon all beings. By means of this Name the two great rivers have flowed through the Twin Exalted Names [al-ismayn al-‘áyayn]. [304]

Surprisingly, Bahá’u’lláh characterizes Mullá Husayn in terms that closely mirror his descriptions of Manifestations of God that are found in other Tablets:

Visit Him before (thou visiteth) Me inasmuch as He was sent down [nuzzila] at that time from the dominion of God [jabarút alláh], the Holy, the Most Exalted, the All-Wise, the Omniscient. [305]

Mullá Husayn is also referred to as “the Dayspring of Names and their Fountain-Head and the Dawning-place of the Divine Attributes and their Depository” (305), and his resting place is called the “Court of Paradise, the place where the First Name (*ism al-awwal*) is buried, which God hath made the tomb (*mashhad*) of His Temple, the Most Holy, the All-Powerful, the Luminous” (305). As witnessed in the Tablets of Visitation by the Báb for the Letters of the Living, we have here one of the few instances in the Writings of Baha’u’llah of the expansion of the theophany to include notable believers.

After praising Mullá Husayn’s station, Bahá’u’lláh informs Varáqatu’l-Firdaws of the various genuflections and repetitions of the names of God that are part of the visitation ritual. Like the visitation texts for the Imáms, these genuflections and repetitions are integral parts of the communion with the Imám and a means of obtaining divine grace, as evinced in the following passage:

Praise God, thy Lord [say “Alláh-u-Akbar”], nineteen times and at each instance of praise, God shall open one of the doors of Rizvan upon thy face and waft the sweet savors of the All-Glorified [as-subhán] unto thee from the direction of Paradise. (305)

Finally, Bahá’u’lláh ends the Tablet with a prayer (*du‘á’*) to be said by the supplicant. The prayer begins with a testament to the power and authority of the Báb, and then again enumerates the lofty station of Mullá Husayn. Since the Tablet has been translated in full, I will not quote the passages glorifying the station of the first believer in the Báb.

After testifying to the station of Mullá Husayn, the supplicant then bears witness to his suffering and his struggle (*mujáhada*) in the path of God. Paralleling both the visitation prayers for the Imám Husayn and Bahá’u’lláh’s own words about himself at the beginning of the Tablet, the supplicant asserts that through God’s aid, Mullá Husayn helped bring about the manifestation of “the testimony of God and His proof, the power of God and His omnipotence, the majesty of God and His grandeur, and His sovereignty over all created things. . . .” (307) In language identical to that of the visitation prayers for the Imám Husayn, the supplicant blesses those who have fought with (*muhárabá*) Mullá Husayn against the enemies of God (presumably at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí) and recognizes his authority (*wiláya*). Further, the companions of Mullá Husayn are called the Party of God (*hizbu’lláh*), just as the companions of Imám Husayn are called the *wafd’u’lláh* (party, or group of God). Similarly, the trials and tribulations of Mullá Husayn are recounted, which are accompanied by the weeping of the denizens of heaven. Finally, in a most stunning parallel with the Shí’í visitation texts, the curse (*la’na*) of God is invoked against Mullá Husayn’s enemies.

As in most of the Shí’í prayers found in the visitation texts, the supplicant ends by asking God for the forgiveness of sins through “Husayn,” but in this case it is Mullá Husayn. The believer also asks Mullá Husayn and the martyrs of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí for intercession [*istishfá’*] with God.

When we compare the elements of this Tablet of Visitation with the outline of the structure of Shí’í devotional texts detailed above, we find that it clearly shares a formal pattern with the Imámí Shí’í prayers of visitation for the Imám Husayn. Not only is the flow of the narrative structure the same, but also the precise language used to describe Husayn’s martyrdom and ultimate triumph is appropriated by Bahá’u’lláh.

Significantly, this Tablet was not composed in the early days of Bahá’u’lláh’s ministry, where we could expect to find many of these structural elements which would be familiar to his immediate Shí’í/Bábí audience. However, the Tablet was written during Bahá’u’lláh’s exile in ‘Akká. So why would Bahá’u’lláh employ such a clearly Shí’í form in this devotional text so late in his ministry?

I believe it is due to the central importance of the narrative of Husayn’s martyrdom in the self-conception of Bahá’u’lláh. The suffering and loneliness of Husayn is the narrative that Bahá’u’lláh most strongly identified with throughout His life, going so far as to claim to be the return of the Imám Husayn in physical retelling of the Shí’í narrative of the Imám’s martyrdom. Further, these topoi, as arranged in the narrative structure of Shí’í histories and prayers associated with Husayn’s death, form the underlying pattern of many of Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablets to believers. Frequently, Bahá’u’lláh recounts in a single Tablet His patience during His afflictions at the hands of His enemies, relying solely upon God. The heavens weep and the angels sigh at His suffering, which He bore alone for the redemption of the world. Finally, ultimate victory is promised through the aid of God and the believers. Bahá’u’lláh will then write a prayer to be recited by the believers, beseeching God through Him for forgiveness and pardon, and asking to be accounted among the faithful.

The assertion that the Shí’í narrative of the martyrdom of Husayn is the master structure through which Bahá’u’lláh views His own life and patterns His writings is a broad one and to fully demonstrate the validity of this argument would require an entire monograph. I hope, however, that this paper will serve as a catalyst for a more detailed examination of one of the principle structural elements in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and its antecedents in Shí’í Islam.

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Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn*

[p. 301] This Súra of Visitation [*súrat az-ziyára*] hath been sent down from the dominion of grace [*jabarút al-fadl*] on behalf of the First Name of God [*li-ism alláh al-awwal*] in order that the adoring one [*qánitat al-kubra*] and they who have believed in God and His verses may visit him by its means. They, verily, are of those who have attained.

He is the Powerful, the All-Mighty, the Exalted [*al-‘Alíy*], the All-Glorious [*al-abhá*]!

This is a Book by the Wronged One, Who hath been named “the Glorious” [*al-bahá*] in the kingdom of eternity [*malakút al-baqá*], and “the Exalted, the Most High” [*al-‘Alíy al-a‘á*] in the dominion of loftiness [*jabarút al-‘Alá*]. In the Unseen World [*láhút al-‘amá*] He is known by all of the beautiful Names of God and in the world below [*ard al-anshá*] He is known as Husayn, yet most of the people are wrapped in veils and idle fancies [*wahm ‘athím*]. None can recount that which hath befallen Him save God, the King, the Exalted, the Great. At one time He was brutally afflicted by Cain and was slain in the path of God and ascended unto Him as one oppressed. Such was the state of affairs in days gone by, as God hath known and born witness. At another time He was sorely tried at the hands of Nimrod and thrown into the fire. God made the fire as a light and mercy for Him and He, verily, doth protect His servants who have drawn nigh unto Him. Once again He was persecuted by Pharaoh and that which befell Him hath caused the hearts of the devoted ones to burn. Again, He was suspended upon the cross and ascended unto God, the Mighty, the Beautiful. Once more He was afflicted by Abu Jahl and by them who rose up against Him in dissension from among the people of hypocrisy. They inflicted upon Him that which He hath not mentioned in the Qur’án [*má lá yadhkuru bi-bayán*] and the Self of the Merciful was a witness thereunto and knew that which befell Him. Again He was slain as one oppressed upon the plain of Karbila and with Him they martyred those whom God hath related unto His Own sanctified and radiant Self, until such time that they cut off His head and [p. 302] banished His family [*ahlahu*] and paraded them throughout the land [*dárúhum fí al-balád*]. Likewise the hosts of the evil ones condemned Him and once again suspended Him in the air and He was martyred in the path of God, the Help in Peril, the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent. Once again Thou wert imprisoned in the land of Tá for four months, as is well-known, and the Pen of the Worlds [*qalam al-‘álamín*] is unable to recount that which befell Thee. After that they removed Me from the prison and exiled Me, along with my family, from the lands (of my birth) [*al-awtán*] until We entered Iraq and abided therein. None can recount that which befell us in that land at the hands of them who were created by My command. At every moment the shafts of the seditious were hurled [*ramy an-nifáq*], even though We concealed [*satarná*] the Cause and announced the glad-tidings [*mubashshir*] amidst the servants, calling them unto God, the All-Mighty, the Beautiful, until all of the religious communities [*kull al-milal*] rose up against Me with all of (their) might [*kull al-hayl*]. Truly, I was alone and betook myself to confront the enemies [*muqábilat al-a‘dá*] and My Lord caused Me to triumph inasmuch as I was obedient unto Him [*kuntu mustatí‘an ‘alayhi*] until He established [*haqqaqqa*] the Cause of God through His Words and thwarted the designs of those who join partners with God. Through that the fire of hatred was kindled in the breasts of those who profess faith in the Point of the Bayán. Likewise they allowed their souls to be seduced and Satan extolled their deeds [*zayyana lahum ash-shaytán ‘a‘málahum*] and they were among the heedless. I swear by God! There hath befallen me from those (people) that which hath befallen no one else. Wherefore the eyes of the helpless [*al-qásirát*] wept over me in the chambers (of heaven) and the hearts of the sincere ones cried out and behind them wept the eye of God, the Sovereign, the Omnipotent, the Exalted, the Wise. The ears of Him Whom God hath made victorious heareth the clamor of all created things and their lamentation in these days on account of that which befell Us at the hands of those who acknowledged God in His First Manifestation then disbelieved in Him after He came unto them in the Latter Beauty [*jamál ukhrá*], the Sovereign, the Most Manifest. Verily, We (dwelt) among them and among those who disbelieved among the religious communities of previous times, until [p. 303] the Sun of tribulation shone forth from the horizon of the Divine Decree and the judgment of exile came to pass according to that which hath been set down in the holy and preserved Tablets.

* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfán Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium.

By the one true God! I arose to confront [*muqábila*] the enemies during the days when the hearts of the mystic knowers were perturbed and the pillars of every soul quaked, and those who were among us and those who professed Thy oneness quivered in fright [*iqsha'arra julúd*], until the hosts of aid and assistance descended from the dominion of God [*jabarút alláh*], the Help in Peril, the Mighty, the Great. He protected Me through the Truth and assisted Me with the angels of heaven and earth and the invisible hosts of (all) the worlds. We left the city with the ornament of Him (by) whom the wisdom of the wise and the hearts of the mystic knowers become bewildered. In every city the Ancient Beauty passed, the necks of they who glorify God [*al-mutak - abbirín*] were bowed in submission in the presence of His Manifestation. In every spot He came to, the necks of those who profess the unity of God and they who join partners with Him were (both) bowed low, until we came to this prison. God is aware of that which we endured at the hands of them who cherished ill-will in their hearts against this Youth, as if they lay in ambush upon a place of malice [*marsad al-ghill li-min al-muntathirín*]. Not a moment hath passed save that the calumnies of the darts of discord were hurled by the hosts of the perfidious. I swear by God! At all times I am slain by the swords of hatred, as the tongue of God, the Exalted, the Most High, hath born witness. The people are wrapped [*kunnina*] in great heedlessness and dissension. If the people will sanctify their ears, they, verily, shall hear at this time that which their Lord, the All-Glorious [*al-abhá*] is crying out in the realms above and shall be of those who harken. However, they are veiled [*ihtajaba*] from that which the Tongue of the Ancient of Days is saying in the dominion of utmost sorrow [*jabarút al-aghmam*] and they are of those who are heedless. They rose up against us in such wise that they have condemned Me to death without clear proof [*bayyina*] from God and a great Book. Verily, the hosts of (divine) aid and assistance were sent down again and again and God protected Me through them and made Me to speak forth with His remembrance and made Me manifest through His sovereignty and made Me to shine forth with the lights [p. 304] of the holiness of His grandeur and speak with the praise of His Own Self, the Exalted, the Most Great. Such is that which hath been decreed for us and we have recounted it truthfully that perchance the people might be numbered amongst those that have apprehended the truth.

O leaf of Paradise [*waraqat al-firdaws*]! When this radiant and resplendent Tablet hath reached thee, rise from thy seat and take it with the hand of submission [*yad al-khudú*], then inhale from it the fragrance of God, thy Lord and the Lord of all the worlds. Call to mind, then, my misfortunes which have been revealed in it that thou mayest be (numbered) among those women in the Tablets who make mention of God, the Help in Peril, the All-Mighty, the Omnipotent. Teach, then, the Cause of thy Lord among those women who are in thy company and among those men who are guided by the guidance of the Spirit [*hidáyat ar-rúh*] and accounted among the well-assured.

Drink with healthy relish, O leaf of Paradise, inasmuch as the breezes of the Spirit have wafted unto thee and attracted thee unto the Egypt of the Divine Presence, the spot of the recognition [*'irfán*] of thy Lord, the Almighty, the Peerless. Thou hast drunk from the chalice of the mercy of thy Lord and attained unto that which none in all the worlds have attained. Therefore, render thanks unto thy Lord, then raise thy hands in supplication [*uqnutí*], and then bend down with thy hands resting on thy knees [*irka'í*], and take hold of the Book of God through His power. Verily, it is a mighty Book [*kitáb 'athím*].

Well is it with thee inasmuch as God hath related thee unto his [Mullá Husayn's] name through which the standards of ascendancy have been manifested and the Sun of grace hath shone forth and the moon of bounty hath shed its splendor and the Ancient Beauty hath been established upon the Throne of His Name, the Exalted, the Most Great. Through it the Kingdom of Names hath been raised up and the Embodiments [*hayákil*] of the Divine Attributes and the Temple [*haykal*] of holiness have been adorned with the ornament of His Name, the Most Ancient. Through it the Lord of Command [*sultán al-amr*] hath encompassed all created things and the Sun of bounty hath shone forth upon all beings. By means of this name the two great rivers have flowed through the Twin Exalted Names [*al-ismayn al-a'íyayn*]. None have drunk from them save those whom God hath singled out for His Cause, those whom He hath enraptured among His servants and they whom He hath purified among His creatures and made the dawning-places [p. 305] of His Beautiful Names and the manifestations of His exalted Attributes. He hath numbered them among those who have attained unto the Presence of Him Who is the Inaccessible, Incomparable, the Omnipotent.

O leaf of Paradise! Visit Him before (thou visiteth) Me, inasmuch as he was sent down [*nuzzila*] at that time from the dominion of God [*jabarút alláh*], the Holy, the Most Exalted, the All-Wise, the Omniscient. When

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thou dost desire to begin thy visit to the Dayspring of Names and their Fountain-Head and the Dawning-place of the Divine Attributes and their Depository, arise and turn thy face unto the Court of Paradise, the place where the First Name [*ism al-awwal*] is buried, which God hath made the tomb [*mashhad*] of His Temple, the Most Holy, the All-Powerful, the Luminous. When thou hast turned (thy face), stand still and praise God [*kab-birí alláh*, i.e. say “Alláh’u-Akbar”], thy Lord, nineteen times and at each instance of praise, God shall open one of the doors of Ridván upon thy face and waft the sweet savors of the All-Glorified [*as-subhán*] unto thee from the direction of Paradise. In such wise hath the Command been decreed from the presence of the Almighty, the All-Wise. Repeat “Alláh’u-Abhá” [*tubahhá*] nine times with certitude in His Cause and acknowledgement of His sovereignty while glorifying His Own Self and submitting to His manifestation and drawing nigh unto the face of Him who is the Most Holy, the Most Resplendent [*at-Táli’*], the Most Manifest, the Effulgent [*al-báhir*], the Luminous [*al-lámihi*], the Radiant, the Refulgent. Then say: “I bear witness by my very soul and my essence, my being and my tongue, and by my heart and the limbs of my body, that there is none other God but Him and that the Point of the Bayán is, verily, His manifestation and His revelation [*burúz*] and His glory [*‘izzuhu*] and His honor [*sharafuhu*] and His grandeur for all who are in the Concourse on High. Moreover, He is His majesty and His might and His power [*iqtidáruhu*] among all that are in the heavens and on earth. Verily, He who hath been manifested through Truth is His sovereign over all who are in the heavens and on earth and His glory [*bahá’uhu*] over all who are in the dominion of Command and the world of creation [*jabarút al-amr wa al-khalq*].”

Say, then: “Upon Thee, O secret of the Divine Decree, be the first Spirit, made manifest from the repository of grandeur [*makman al-kibriyá’*], and the first mercy, which descended from the heaven of holiness from the right side of the throne, the seat of our Lord, the Exalted, the Most High, and the Temple of the irrevocable Purpose [*haykal al-amdá’*] and the Word of the Most Perfect in the dominion of eternity [*jabarút al-baqá’*] and the Most Great Name in the Kingdom of created things!

I bear witness by my own essence, [p. 306] and by my soul and my tongue, that Thou art the one through whom the Beauty of the Most Praised was established upon the Throne of His Name, the Most Merciful, and through whom the Primal Will hath been made manifest unto the people of the earth [*ahl al-akwán*] and through whom the melody of Paradise hath been sent down from the heaven of grace from the presence of Thy Lord, the Almighty, the Beneficent, and through whom the Cause of God, the Help in Peril, the Omnipotent, the Powerful, the Ordainer, hath been made manifest. I bear witness that Thou art the first light manifested from the Beauty of Oneness [*jamál al-ahadiyya*] and the first sun which shone forth from the horizon of Divinity [*ufuq al-iláhiyya*]. But for thee, the Beauty of the Divine Identity [*al-huwwiya*] would not have been manifest and the secrets of eternity [*as-Samadiyya*] would not have been revealed. I bear witness that through thee the birds of the hearts of them that long for thee have soared unto the atmosphere of nearness and reunion and the hearts of the lovers have tasted the sweetness of intimate communion and the beauty of the radiance of the sun of the Face of Thy Lord, the Majestic [*al-jalál*], the Glorious [*al-ajlál*]. But for thee, none would have known the Self of God and His Beauty nor would any soul have attained unto the shores of His nearness and His Presence. Contingent being would not have quaffed the water of his bounty and loving-kindness, and all created things would not have slaked their thirst through the wine of His grace and generosity. Through thee the veils of all existent things have been rent asunder and the Kingdom of Names and Attributes hath been made manifest. Through thee every soul hath been guided unto the shores of holiness and grandeur and through thee the Mystic Dove hath warbled upon the twigs [*afnán*] of eternity and the Bird of the Throne hath sung upon the branches [*aghván*] of the Sadrah of Bahá. Through thee the Beauty of the invisible world [*al-ghayb*] hath been made manifest through His Name, the Exalted, the Most High and through thee all Good [*kull khayr*] hath been sent down from the dominion of the Divine Essence [*jabarút al-‘amá’*] unto the kingdom of creation [*malakút al-badá’*] and every grace which the finger of God hath traced upon the Tablet of the Divine Decree. Through thee all created things have been encompassed by the mercy of God, the Mighty, the All-Knowing, the Most Great. But for thee, heaven would not have been upraised nor the earth inhabited. The oceans would not have appeared, nor the trees born fruit and the leaves would have remained bereft of verdure [p. 307] and the sun of grace would not have shone forth from the horizon of holiness and radiance. Through thee the breezes of forgiveness have been wafted upon all who are in the heavens and on earth. Through thee the gates of Paradise were flung open unto all people, and the hearts of them that have believed in God, the Almighty, the Most Powerful, the Generous, have been enraptured. Thou art the Word through which God hath decided

between all created things and distinguished the joyous [*as-sa'íd*] from the miserable [*ash-shaqá*] and the light from the darkness and the believer from him who hath joined partners with God, from that day to this, in which heaven hath been rent asunder. God hath come upon clouds [*thulal*] from (the world of) Command and around Him are a company of His chosen angels. When the veils are torn asunder and the Face cometh from behind the coverings with the hosts of power and glory [*ribwát 'izz 'athím*] and they who render thanks unto God, (the people) shall flee on the right and on the left and drunkenness shall seize all who are in the heavens and on earth save a few letters [*'iddat ahruf*] (belonging to) the face of thy Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

I testify that thou hast born the trust of Thy Lord, the All-Merciful and hath known the Beauty of the All-Glorified [*jamál as-subhán*] before all existent things were created and that thou hast attained unto the presence of God in the day which none knew of save thee. This is due to a grace from God Who created thee through it before the creation of the heavens and the earth. I bear witness to thy remembrance through which the tongues of all created things were loosed in praise of their Lord, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, and to thy praise of He who is thy Maker. All things have arisen [*qáma 'alá*] in praise of Him and to this beareth witness all of existence [*kull al-wujúd*] in both the visible [*ash-shuhúd*] and invisible [*al-ghayb*] worlds and beyond them God Himself knoweth and testifieth to the truth of My words. I bear witness that thou hast assisted the religion of God and made manifest His Cause and struggled [*jáhadta*] in His path inasmuch as Thou wert obedient unto Him. Through thine aid the testimony of God and His proof, the power of God and His omnipotence, the majesty of God and His grandeur, and His sovereignty over all created things were made manifest. Blessed be they [p. 308] who struggled with thee and battled against [*hárabú ma'*] the enemies of God by thy command and circled round thee and entered the shelter of thine authority [*waláyatuka*] and drank from the living waters of thy love and suffered martyrdom before thy face and were laid to rest [*ruqidú*]¹⁰ within the precincts of Thy court. They, verily, are of those who rest peacefully [*ar-ráqidín*]. I testify that they are the helpers [*ansár*] of God upon His earth and His trustees in His lands and the people of God [*hizb alláh*] amongst His creatures and the hosts of God amongst His creation and the pure ones of God betwixt the heavens and the earth.

I bear witness to the great tests and overwhelming adversities which befell thee in the path of thy Lord and the tribulations which compassed thee on every side. Nothing prevented thee from the path of thy Creator and thou didst exert thyself [*jáhadta bi-nafsika*] until thou wert slain as a martyr in His way. Thou didst offer up thy spirit, soul, and body out of love for thy Master, the Ancient of Days. I testify that all things between heaven and earth and the eyes of those who have drawn nigh unto God behind the Tabernacle of manifest glory wept over thy suffering. The mystic maidens [*al-húriyyát*] bared their heads in the celestial chambers [*al-ghurfát*] and beat upon them with wondrous and holy fingers. They prostrated their faces upon the dust and sat upon the ashes and cried out at that time in the luminous, crimson¹¹ chambers. I testify that through Thy misfortune [*fi musibatúka*] all created things have been clothed with the robe of black and the faces of the sincere ones have paled. The pillars of those who profess the unity of God have been shaken and the eye of might and grandeur hath wept in the exalted and holy dominion [*jabarút*]. I bear witness at this time, O my master, in my present state that thou hast not fallen short in thy duty towards thy Lord nor hast thou carried out of love for thy Master. Thou hast proclaimed His Cause in both the East and the West until thou didst sacrifice thyself as a martyr in His path. [p. 309]

May God curse [*la 'an alláh*] those people who have oppressed thee and rebelled against thee and attacked thy soul and caviled at thy face and denied thy testimony and failed in their duty towards thee and turned away disdainfully from submission to thee [*al-khadú 'bayn yadayka*]. Verily, they were among those who join partners with God. Therefore, I beseech God by thee and by them who are in thy presence to grant me forgiveness and pardon my sins and sanctify me from the defilement of the earth and make me of those who are pure. Grant that I may attain His Presence during these days in which all are heedless of Him and are shut out as by a veil (from Him). Enable me to stand firm with Him and obedient to His cause and to have certitude in His Own Self and steadfastness in His verses and enter into His shade, and be established within the court of His mercy, martyred [*ash-shaháda*] in His path and repentant unto His Self, the Exalted, the Most Great. Though thee we beseech God to debar us not, in these days, from the splendors of the lights of His Face nor deprive us of the wonders of His grace nor shatter our hopes in His mercy which hath encompassed all the worlds. We ask God to make us firm in His love and steadfast in His Cause in such wise that our feet shall always remain upon His

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Path [*sirát*], which hath been made manifest through the power of Truth among the heavens and the earth.

Mercy, praise and glory [*al-bahá'*] be upon you, O pure ones [*asfiyá'*] of God amongst the servants, and his trusted ones [*umana'*] in the lands, and upon your bodies [*ajsád*] and your selves [*ajsám*] and your spirits, and your firstness [*awwalikum*] and your lastness, and your inner and outer beings, and upon them who have abided in your midst [*hallú jawáarakum*] and circumambulated you and attained unto the door of your mercy and stood before the manifestation of the lights of your forgiveness and entered the threshold of your nearness and drew nigh unto God though you and sought intercession [*istafsha'ú*] from God through your souls and visited your sanctuary and sought to be blessed by your grave [*turba*] and sought guidance by your guidance. They, verily, are of those who are turning unto your holy, sanctified, illumined, and radiant faces.

Therefore, O my God and my Master! I beseech Thee by him and by them who have been laid to rest [*ruqidú*] [p. 310] in his midst [*fí hawlíhi*] to number us among those who have soared in the atmosphere of Thy mercy and quaffed the wine of Thy favor and bounty and attained unto the pinnacle of graciousness through Thy generosity and Thy tender mercies and tasted the sweetness of Thy remembrance and scaled the loftiest heights and the highest stations through Thy grace and manifold favors and are detached from all things and travel swiftly unto the court of Thy gracious favors. The breezes of the glory of Thy tender mercies and the fragrances of Thine eternal holiness have seized them. Verily, Thou art the Omnipotent, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.

O our God and our Beloved! Forgive us and our parents and they who are close to us among those who believe in Thee and in Thy verses and in Him Who hath been manifested through Thy Sovereignty. Make us then, O my God, powerful in this world through Thy might and grant that we may attain unto Thy presence in the next world. Debar us not from that which Thou dost possess nor shatter our hopes in all of that which becometh Thee. Verily, Thou art the Bounteous, the Most Excellent, the Benevolent and, verily, Thou art our Lord, the All-Merciful and our God, Whose help is implored by all men and upon Whom we rely [*úlayka atuklán*]. None other God is there but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Generous, the All-Merciful.”

Thus have we set forth this Tablet for thee, O leaf of Paradise, and made mention of thee in order that thou mayest follow that which thou hast been enjoined to follow and be among those who adore (God) in the holy and luminous Tablets.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Athár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá*, vol. 4 (Tehran, 133 B.E.), p. 301-10

Notes

- 1) Ibn Qúlúyah, Ja'far ibn Muhammad, *Kámil al-ziyárat* (Bayrút: Dár al-Surúr, 1997): 358-62.
- 2) Majlisí, Muhammad Baqír. *Bihár al-Anwár*. Muhammad Baqír al-Mahmúdí, ed. Tehran: Wizárat al-Irshád al-Islamí, 1986-. p. 320.
- 3) Majlisí, 317-27.
- 4) Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bábí Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992): 99.
- 5) MacEoin. *Rituals in Bábism and Bahá'ism*. Pembroke Persian Papers, vol 2. London: British Academic Press, 1994: 26-7.
- 6) Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, *The Tárikh-i-Jadíd or New History of Mírzá 'Alí Muhammad the Báb*, trans. by Edward G. Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893): 94.
- 7) 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Da'irat al-Ma'arif-i-Bahá'í* [Bahá'í Encyclopedia]. Vol. 15. Digitally published, East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2001. Vol. 15: 111.
- 8) See, for example, *Gleanings IX*. In several untranslated Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh's identification with the Imám Husayn is much more explicit. In a Tablet to Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn-i-Tihraní, Bahá'u'lláh also remarks, "O Husayn! You visit (the grave of) Husayn while killing Husayn!" [*tazúru al-Husayn wa taqtulu al-Husayn!*]. *Ma'idih-ye Asamani*, vol. 4, p. 136.
- 9) This is one of the few places that Bahá'u'lláh refers to a quaternary structure of the universe, although the device was quite common in the Writings of the Báb. For an excellent discussion of quaternary structures in the Writings of the Báb, see Todd Lawson, "The Dangers of Reading: Inlibration, Communion, and Transference in the Qur'án Commentary of the Báb," *Scripture and Revelation*, ed. Moojan Momen (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997).
- 10) Although the published version of the Tablet contains *ruqidú* (to carry, support something), *ruqidú* seems to be the correct reading given the context and its repetition as an active participle at the end of the clause.
- 11) The text reads "Alá *ghurfát khamrin munírin*," but *khamr* (wine) is probably a scribal error and *humr* (red) was intended.

