

The Perfect Man and the Manifestation of God

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‘A bdū’l-Bahá mentions a Perfect Man several times. In his “Commentary on the 11th Chapter of the Revelation of St. John” He says, “In the beginning of the eleventh chapter of the Revelation of St. John it is said: ‘And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.’” Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to explain: “This reed is a Perfect Man Who is likened to a reed, and the manner of its likeness is this: when the interior of a reed is empty and free from all matter, it will produce beautiful melodies; and as the sound and melodies do not come from the reed, but from the flute player who blows upon it, so the sanctified heart of that blessed Being is free and emptied from all save God, pure and exempt from the attachments of all human conditions, and is the companion of the Divine Spirit. Whatever He utters is not from Himself, but from the real flute player, and it is a divine inspiration. That is why He is likened to a reed; and that reed is like a rod—that is to say, it is the helper of every impotent one, and the support of human beings. It is the rod of the Divine Shepherd by which He guards His flock and leads them about the pastures of the Kingdom” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 45].¹ “Therefore, it cannot be said there was a time when man was not. All that we can say is that this terrestrial globe at one time did not exist, and at its beginning man did not appear upon it. But from the beginning which has to beginning, to the end which has no end, a Perfect Manifestation always exists. This Man of Whom we speak is not every man; we mean the Perfect Man [ibid, 196]. In another instance ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ mentions the Perfect Man in *Paris Talks*: “To man is given the special gift of the intellect by which he is able to receive a larger share of the light Divine. The Perfect Man is as a polished mirror reflecting the Sun of Truth, manifesting the attributes of God” [*Paris Talks*, p.13].²

These, along with other occasions,³ have caused me to reflect upon the nature of the “Perfect Man” in Sufism where this concept originated in order to trace some of the analogies and essential differences between the concept of the “Perfect Man” (“Pole”) in Sufism and the Bahá’í notion of the Manifestation of God. What underlies both these notions is the idea that at all times the Divine Will manifests Itself to humanity through or in a certain Person, whose purpose is to be a shepherd, guardian and educator of humankind, directing it towards the good and keeping it from what is wrong. This idea can be traced to the Qur’án: “He directeth the ordinance from the heaven unto the earth; then it ascendeth unto Him in a Day, whereof the measure is a thousand years of that ye reckon” [32:4].⁴

That the Divine Command needs an expression in the form of a Divine Vicegerent and Educator for the education of humankind, is clearly stated by Sufi philosophers. Sufism, as we are aware, does not have a singular nor uniform teaching. Every individual writer may have a slightly different view on a particular issue. Here we may neglect these minor differences between Sufi thinkers and talk about Sufism as a whole. Let us now consider some quotations from Sufi works, paying close attention to the highlighted terms and expressions (highlighted by author):

“For God chooses Messengers from among the angels and people, so that these may direct humans towards what profits them in this world and the next, and remind them of the Days of the Lord, the Exalted, and of the things, which they have forgotten, in order to occupy them with [their] development... He teaches them the Book, wisdom and ..., in which (Book) the commands and prescriptions about administration, purity and worship are clearly stated.... There of necessity exists for humankind,

diminished by [its human] nature,...a Governor, confirmed by God, so that he may visibly or invisibly overpower souls, which resist the Truth and are subject to their passions. But for him order would never be established in their earthly existence.... If there were no one to restrain them through [his] overpowering might and force, both inwardly and outwardly or in one of these [two ways], their submission and resignation to His decrees and commandments would be impossible.... But for the restrictions imposed on the subjects, the world would never be in order.... Necessarily, at all times there is an Educator, as a vicegerent of the true Prophet, who turns the creation towards the Truth. The vicegerent of necessity possesses divine confirmation, so that he may subdue people [who seek] learning and profit those who can draw benefit [from it]" [Alá-al-Dawla Simnání.⁵ *إتحاف العربية* - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 488 (all translations are the author's unless otherwise stated)].

"Since this vicegerency is a necessity, established by God in the world... , consequently the appearance of a vicegerent at all times is needed for... attaining unto perfection, which is worthy of each human being" [Qaysarí. *إشرح فصوص الحكيم*, lithography, p. 34].⁶

"The Divine Command/Cause needs an expression, in order to administer Justice,... [and] guard the order in this world and the next. That this [expression] should rule in Its Lord, Who is the Lord of Hosts, in heaven also, executing Justice. So that each of them (images) may attain unto its perfection, both outward and inward. He is the Prophet, the True Pole, eternal and ever abiding, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. And He is the Muḥammadan Essence/Reality" [Qaysarí. *إشرح فصوص الحكيم* - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... Appendix), p. 490].

We come here to the important notion of the "Muḥammadan Essence" or "Muḥammadan Light" (analogous to the "Logos" of Neoplatonians and the "Word" of the Christians), the first emanation from God, also going by the name of the "Primal Intellect." This is the Image of God in its undifferentiated (undivided) unity. It is by and from this Essence, Which preexisted all things in creation (not in time, for time and space are peculiar properties of the physical realm, but as a cause, which preexists its effect), that all things were created. The "Muḥammadan Essence" is successively realized in Adam, the Prophets and the Poles each of whom is "The Perfect Man of the age."

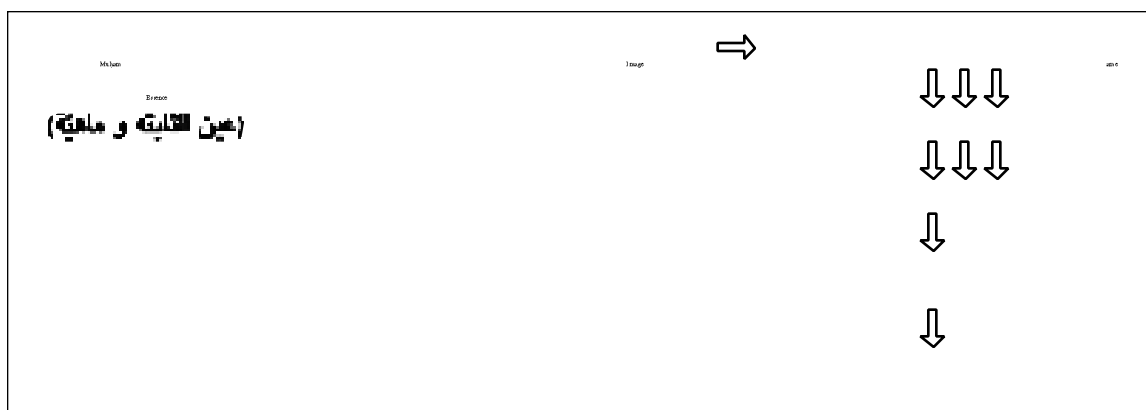
The philosophic development of this issue in the form of a doctrine is associated with the name of the great Sufi philosopher from Andalusia (Southern Spain) Ibn al-'Arabí (1165-1240), though clear allusions to the same idea can be traced in the work of an earlier Sufi writer - Al-Tirmizí (IX c.).

This is how the origin of the "Muḥammadan Essence" is explained by Ibn al-'Arabí and Dáud Qaysarí:

"There was God, and there was none other than Him (lit.: nothing with Him)... When He desired the existence of the world, He initiated its origin within the bounds of what He knew of it by His knowledge in Himself (*بدمه على حد ما علمه بطه بنفسه*). Out of this holy volition, by a flash of shining light there appeared a separation of the universal substance/reality (*العلوية الكلية*), called the "Primal Dust" (*البراه*). This is analogous to a sculptor molding the gypsum or plaster of Paris, so that patterns and forms, which he desires, may be revealed in it. This is the first of all existing things.... Then the All-Glorious shone forth with His light through the Dust. This is called by thinkers the "Primal/Universal Matter" (*البراهي الكلي*). The whole world (*العالم*) is [contained] in it in a potential and ideal form. And each thing in this Dust received from this [Light] to the extent of its power and capacity, like the corners of a house receive the light from the lamp to the extent of their proximity to this light, which (proximity) accordingly contributes to their share of illumination and receptivity. As He, the Exalted, has said: "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp" (Qur'án. 24: 35). Thus He has likened His Light to a lamp. And there is nothing in that Primal Dust nearer to this [Light] to receive it, than the Muḥammadan Essence/Reality, called the "Primal Intellect." It became the Lord of the world in its entirety and it is the first to appear in the [realm] of being. Thus, its origin is from this divine Light, the Primary Dust and the Universal Substance/Reality" [Ibn al-'Arabí. *توحفات المكنية* (the passage is quoted by Ámulí in his *أجمع الأسرار و منبع الأنوار*, p. 410)].⁷

“In explanation of the ‘Vicegerency’ of the Muḥammadan Essence, Which is the ‘Pole of Poles.’ According to what has been established, for each of the Divine Names there is an image (صورة) in God’s Knowledge, called the ‘true self (الحقيقية) or the ‘archetype/primal image’ (عين القابلية). All of them have outward forms, called the ‘expressions’ (مظهري) and ‘manifest beings’ (موجودات) (البيئية). These Names are the masters (أرباب) of these expressions, who are their subjects (موضوعها). You have learnt that the Muḥammadan Essence is the [ideal] image of God’s general Name (صورة الاسم الجامع الربى), which is implied by it. All other names emanate and proceed from this [Name] (الفيض والاستمداد على جميع الاسماء). Know that the [Muḥammadan] Essence governs all the other images of the world (universe) by the Lord, expressed in them, Who is the Lord of Hosts, for It is the manifestation (المظاهرة) in (through) those expressions, as has been stated. Thus, by Its outward image, [one of those], related to the images of the Universe, which (the image) is the expression of the divine Name ‘The Manifest’ It (the Muḥammadan Essence) governs (تربى) the [outward] forms of the Universe, and by Its inner [reality] It governs the inner [reality] of the Universe, for It is the possessor of the Greatest Name” (الحب الاسم الاعظم) [Qaysarí. تروح قصص من الحكم, lithography, p. 33].

The situation can be presented in the following table:



The above quotations may be summarized in the following manner:

1. God chooses people (and angels).
2. These Chosen Ones of God direct humans towards what is good for them.
3. They teach people spiritual principles, laws and whatever is related to the next world.
4. Humanity is never left without an Educator.
5. He has divine confirmation.
6. He brings order into existence.
7. His Purpose is to perfect the human race.
8. He is the Ruler, enjoying indisputable Authority.
9. He executes Justice.

How does, then, according to Sufi thinkers, the Muḥammadan Essence/Reality make itself manifest? Let us again turn to the texts:

“[Muḥammad/Muḥammadan Essence] is the manifestation of God’s general Name (Alláh). He is forever and ever God’s Vicegerent in the world. The other Poles and Perfect [Men] are His vicegerents in His community... Whoever of the dwellers of the ‘Jabarút’, ‘Malakút’ and the physical realm (‘Mulk’) exists in the world does not receive [anything] but from Him. Their perfection is from Him, as well as His Vicegerency is through them.... This Vicegerent does not govern the dwellers of the earth but in accordance with the requirements of the Divine Command (lit.: except that what the Divine Command requires) and the Essential Will (الشيئة الذاتية) .

And He bestows [His bounties] upon the archetypes to the extent of their readiness in eternity” [Qaysarí. *المصدر المتقدم* –Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 497].

“The Muḥammadan Spirit (الروح المحتدى) has a manifestation in the world. The most perfect of His manifestations is in the ‘Pole of the time’...” [Ibn al-‘Arabí. *إقرباط الحكمة*] (quoted by Ámulí in his *إجامع الاسرار و منبع النوار*], p. 418 (see endnote 7)).

“The one, who has inherited vicegerency from his Father, Adam, as legacy, is the the one, who truly receives the property. For He is God’s Vicegerent and He is also the Perfect [Man] of [His] time and the Pole of Poles” [Al-Tilimsani (quoted by Ámulí in his *إجامع الاسرار و منبع النوار*], p. 505)].⁸

“The manifestation (ظهور) of this Muḥammadan Essence is through special (separate) manifestations (lit.: is through the special manifestations of each of them) to the extent suitable to the people of a given epoch and time, depending on what the name of the given age (اسم الزمان) requires at that moment of the manifestation of perfection. These (manifestations) are in the forms of Prophets, may peace be upon them!

“Considered from the standpoint of their individualization and personification, and the principles of plurality and creation, governing this realm, which (principles) account for the difference and differentiation between them in things unrelated to the Muḥammadan Essence, which is common to all the names, the manifestation of each One of them occurs under a certain name and [is] characterized by certain qualities. If you consider them from the standpoint of their Reality and relation to the level of Unity (lit.: the presence of Unity), and the principle of oneness that governs it, you will grasp the mystery behind the union between them and the unity of things of God’s religion which they brought with them... Therefore, the Pole, who is the axis of the fundamental principles of the world and the Center around which existence revolves from the eternity past to the eternity future, is one, though considered from the angle of plurality, It is plural” [Qaysarí. *شرح نصير الحكيم*, lithography, p. 34].

From the above quotations we learn the following:

1. The Muḥammadan Essence, which incorporates in itself [the principles of] the Divine Command and the Divine Will, is God’s Vicegerent in the world;
2. It manifests Itself to the creatures;
3. It manifests Itself through separate manifestations;
4. Such manifestations are His (Its) vicegerents on earth (in the physical world);
5. These manifestations are in the form of God’s chosen Ones—a category, which includes also Prophets;
6. Though each of these manifestations personifies the same Reality, it occurs under a certain name and is characterized by certain qualities;
7. They all demonstrate the principle of the Essential Unity on one level, and the principle of plurality, which is inherent in the realm of creation, on the other (in things unrelated to the Muḥammadan Essence);
8. The most perfect of His manifestations is in the ‘Pole of the time’, who is also the Perfect [Man] of [His] time and “Pole of Poles”;
9. Each manifestation of the Muḥammadan Essence occurs to the extent, which is suitable to the people of a given epoch and time.

For all this there are analogies in the Bahá’í teaching about the Manifestation of God. In the Writings we find the following passages:

“God leaves not His children comfortless, but, when the darkness of winter overshadows them, then again He sends His Messengers, the Prophets, with a renewal of the blessed spring. The Sun of Truth appears again on the horizon of the world shining into the eyes of those who sleep, awaking them to behold the glory of a new dawn. Then again will the tree of humanity blossom and bring forth the fruit of righteousness for the healing of nations” [*Paris Talks*, p. 22]. (emphasis added)

The Perfect Man

“All the Manifestations of God came with the same purpose, and they have all sought to lead men into the paths of virtue” [ibid., p. 121]. (emphasis added)

“...the Source of infinite grace... hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence” [Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 99].⁹

“These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation” [ibid., p. 153]. (emphasis added)

“Through their appearance the Revelation of God is made manifest, and by their countenance the Beauty of God is revealed” [ibid., 177-178].

“Furthermore, it is evident to thee that the Bearers of the trust of God are made manifest unto the peoples of the earth as the Exponents of a new Cause and the Bearers of a new Message. Inasmuch as these Birds of the Celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person” [ibid., p. 152].

“These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth.... For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory.... Sayings such as this, which indicate the essential unity of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God's immortal utterances, and the Treasuries of the gems of divine knowledge, and have been recorded in the scriptures. These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number... Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same... It is clear and evident to thee that all Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, who have appeared clothed in diverse attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendor” [ibid., 152-154]. (emphasis added)

“Purge thy sight, therefore, from all earthly limitations, that thou mayest behold them all as the bearers of one Name, the exponents of one Cause, the manifestations of one Self, and the revealers of one Truth...” [ibid., 159]. (emphasis added)

“We have already in the foregoing pages assigned two stations unto each of the Luminaries arising from the Daysprings of eternal holiness. One of these stations, the station of essential unity, We have already explained.... The other is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfils a definite Mission and is entrusted with a particular Revelation. Even as He saith: ‘Some of the Apostles We have caused to excel the others.... It is because of this difference in their station and mission that the words and utterances flowing from these Wellsprings of divine knowledge appear to diverge and differ. Otherwise, in the eyes of them that are initiated into the mysteries of divine wisdom, all their utterances are in reality but the expressions of one Truth’ [ibid., 176-177]. (emphasis added)

“Thus, viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been and are applicable to those Essences of being.... Viewed in the light of their second station—the station of distinction, differentiation, temporal limitations, characteristics and standards—they manifest absolute servitude, utter destitution and complete self-effacement. Even as He saith: ‘I am the servant of God. I am but a man like you’” [ibid., 177-178]. (emphasis added)

This last quotation merits special notice. It has direct parallels in the Sufi description of the “Perfect Man”:

“Except for the [attribute of] ‘self-subsistence’ (الرجوب الذاتي) all the divine attributes of necessity should be applicable to the vicegerent, who truly exemplifies all His names.... We make this [distinction] except for ‘self-subsistence,’ because it is by this [attribute] that the [One Who is] Self-Subsisting is distinguished from him (vicegerent)... Because he (vicegerent) incorporates all the divine mysteries, manifesting God’s general Name (Alláh). Consequently, the vicegerent is a servant to God and is the Lord to the world owing to his ‘Lordship’” [Qaysarí. المصدر المتكلم - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 497].

“This Lordship is from the standpoint of his Reality and not from the standpoint of his humanity. For in the latter aspect [he is] a governed servant (عبد الربوب), who is in need of his Lord” [Qaysarí. شرح نصوص الحكم], lithography, p. 33].

The first sentence of the first paragraph also has a direct parallel in Bahá’í Writings:

“Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148].

Thus, if we compare the definition of the Manifestation of God in the Bahá’í literature with the Sufi description of the Perfect Man we can hardly escape noticing the similarities of the characteristics applied to the Manifestation of God and the Perfect Man, especially those which are related to their purpose, function and stations. To make this comparison easier we highlighted the most obvious phrasal analogies in the quoted texts. Let us now consider other terms, which bear the same meaning as or are used in the context of the Perfect Man:

“The Perfect Man is one, who leads by his essence (in his essence?)...to his Lord. None other than the Perfect Man is the crown of the physical world (ملك). He is the one who [is referred to] in His (God’s) saying: ‘God created Adam in His own image’ and ‘He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.’ He is the one, who combines nature and intelligence. As regards his nature, in him there is the crudest and the most refined composition. In him there is an abstraction from the materials and the power, which dominate the bodies. No other created being possesses this [quality]. It is for this reason that he is uniquely marked with the knowledge of all the names and the Word in its entirety. God does not reveal [to us] that He has bestowed this [quality] upon anyone but the Perfect Man.... It is by the Perfect Man that the Divine Decree (حكم) about the reward and punishment becomes manifest in the world (العالم), and by him order is established and destroyed, in him it is fulfilled, introduced and administered” [Ibn al-‘Arabí. اقترحات النكبة - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 275-276].

“Perfect’ is a man, who has attained unto the level of perfecting [others], who is perfect in the knowledge of the religious law (الشريعة), the mystical Path (الطريقة) and its true experience. Because the attainment unto [this] position is necessary that he may perfect others” [Ámulí. كتاب نصوص التصوف - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 505].

“A Prophet is a Perfect Man, who is sent down from God to His creation, for him to summon them (people) to Him, and for their salvation from darkness and ignorance” [ibid, 504].

The Perfect Man

“A Messenger is a Perfect Man, who combines these stations - [that of] a Prophet and [that of] a chosen One, and [accumulates] all the properties of these two, related to knowledge, gno-
sis, apostleship and the communication [of the message] **﴿تَلْمِيْحٌ﴾**” [ibid, 504].

“Therefore it is said: ‘The Absolute Man **﴿الإنسان المطلق﴾** is the Prophet of the time (lit.: of his time)’” [Ámulí. **﴿جامع الاسرار و منبع الانوار﴾**, p. 378].

From the former of the above quotations it is clear that a Prophet and a Messenger are included into the category of the Perfect Man. In the latter “the Prophet of the time” is identified with the “Absolute Man,” which suggests that the Absolute Man is but another term to designate the Perfect Man. That other terms, namely “the True Man” and “the Pole,” are also applied to the Perfect Man, follows from the passages below:

“Know that what is implied by the ‘True Man’ is the Primal light, which is the first Emanation (lit.: the light to be the first to emanate - **﴿النور الصادر الاول﴾**), the Intellect, the Holy Spirit” [ibid, 518, see endnote 5].

“For he (‘Alí) is like a point in relation to the first Individualization **﴿التعين الاول﴾**, which is the Essential Muḥammadan Light **﴿النور الحقيقي المسمى﴾**” [ibid, 563].

“The Pole is one. It is him, on whom God’s gaze is forever focused” [Ámulí. **﴿كتاب نحن التصوف﴾**]. - Al- Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 504].

“The Pole is the means, whereby the inhabitants of the world attain unto a true life. He is the one, on whom the gaze of Him, [Who is] the Exalted, is focused, when He contemplates creatures, manifest and hidden. ‘The Greatest Polarity’ **﴿التلبية الكبرى﴾** is the station of the ‘Pole of Poles’ **﴿قطب القطب﴾**, which is the inner reality **﴿باطن﴾** of Muḥammad’s Prophethood.... It is but by her-
itage **﴿وراثة﴾**, which is exclusively **﴿اختصاصه﴾** and altogether **﴿بالاكليّة﴾** his (Muḥammad’s), that this [station] is conferred upon” [ibid, 504].

It is evident from these statements that the relation of the ‘True Man’ and the ‘Pole (Pole of Poles)’ to the Muḥammadan Essence (or the Muḥammadan Essential Light), which is clearly defined as the first Emanation and Individualization, is the same as that of the Perfect Man. That the ‘Pole’ is but a Perfect Man becomes ever more obvious from the following passage:

“The Perfect Man of necessity is diffused in all creatures like the flow of the Truth in them.... As the Shaykh (Ibn al-‘Arabí)...stated in his ‘Futuhat’ in the chapter ‘about the position of the Pole’: ‘The Perfect Man is the one, whom God has desired to be the Pole of the world and God’s vicegerent therein.... It is necessary for him to watch all human beings, who until the Day of Judgment are goin (lit.: willing) to enter the [realm of] being’” [Qaysarí. **﴿شرح نصري الحكيم﴾**, lithography (section 8), p. 33].

It is clear from the considered quotations, that according to the Sufis, the “Perfect Man,” who is the expression of God’s Will, is not applied solely to Prophets. This conclusion is confirmed by another pas-
sage from Sufi works:

“The Prophethood and Sainthood **﴿الولاية﴾** have a twofold meaning—the absolute and restricted, in other words: general and particular, legislative **﴿التشريع﴾** and non-legislative.... As regards to ‘the absolute,’ it is the basic **﴿اصليّة﴾**, real **﴿حقيقي﴾** Prophethood, which is acquired in pre-eternity and is preserved forever.... The real, basic Prophethood consists in the knowledge of the Prophet, who is endowed with it (Prophethood), concerning the capacities of all the creatures from the standpoint of their essences **﴿بحسب ذواتها﴾**, their correspondence to their ideal models/archetypes **﴿حلاياتها﴾** and [in knowledge about] their [innermost] realities **﴿ماهياتها﴾**. [It also includes] administering justice to all who deserve it in a language, in which they (people) are capable [of receiving] a message about the essential [reality], and [capable of receiving] a teaching, [which is] true and eternal, **﴿التعليم الحقيقي الازلي﴾**, about what is known to be the ‘Highest Lordship’ and ‘Supreme Authority.’ The possessor of this station is named the ‘Greatest Vicegerent,’ ‘Pole of Poles,’ ‘Macrocosm,’ ‘True Adam (Man),’ defined as the ‘Supreme Pen,’ ‘Primal Intellect,’

‘Greatest Spirit’ etc.... This is referred to by the initiated (محققین) in their utterances about the likeness between God and the world: ‘The Perfect Man is like God, who (the Perfect Man) is the true Great Connecting Link (البرزخية الكبرى). For God, the Exalted, gazes upon the world by his gaze and graciously bestows existence upon it (the world)...’ [Ámulí. اجمع الاسرار و منبع الایثار, p. 380].

This passage is highly remarkable, for it highlights at one time a point of considerable difference from and a point of obvious similarity with the Bahá’í teaching. One Difference consists in the fact, that in the Bahá’í teaching the Manifestation of God or God’s Will is identified only with the Prophet-founders of religions. They are the sole channels for the Divine Will to manifest Itself to creation:

“The splendors of the perfections, bounties and attributes of God shine forth and radiate from the reality of the Perfect Man—that is to say, the Unique One, the supreme Manifestation of God. Other beings receive only one ray, but the supreme Manifestation is the mirror for this Sun, which appears and becomes manifest in it, with all its perfections, attributes, signs and wonders. The knowledge of the Reality of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendors and divine attributes are apparent in Them. Therefore, if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God...” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222].

“The Manifestation—that is, the Holy Lawgiver—unless He is aware of the realities of beings, will not comprehend the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things, and He will certainly not be able to establish a religion conformable to the facts and suited to the conditions. The Prophets of God, the supreme Manifestations, are like skilled physicians, and contingent world is like the body of man: the divine laws are the remedy and treatment” [ibid, 158].

“The Manifestations of universal Prophethood Who appeared independently are, for example, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. But the others who are followers and promoters are like Solomon, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. For the independent Prophets are founders; They establish a new religion and make new creatures of men...” [ibid, 164–165]. (emphasis added)

“From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination...” [ibid, 149].

That the Muḥammadan Essence—the Sufi analogue of the Divine Will can, according to the Sufi thinkers, be manifested through channels, other than the Prophets, namely classed under the category of the ‘Chosen’ or ‘Saints’, is explicitly stated by the Sufi authors (we will consider this in more detail later). As for the point of obvious similarity, it consists in the definition of the function of the Prophets, their purpose and mission. The idea, that the Prophet possesses knowledge of the essences of things and bases his relationship with humanity upon this essential knowledge (see above) is also part of the Baha’i teaching, which can be illustrated by the following quotations from ‘Abdu’l Bahá:

“Briefly, the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the reality of the mysteries of beings. Therefore, they establish laws which are suitable and adapted to the state of the world of man, for religion is the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things. The Manifestation—that is, the Holy Lawgiver—unless He is aware of the realities of beings, will not comprehend the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things, and He will certainly not be able to establish a religion conformable to the facts and suited to the conditions. The Prophets of God, the supreme Manifestations, are like skilled physicians, and the contingent world is like the body of man...” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 158]. (emphasis added)

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“Religion, then, is the necessary connection which emanates from the reality of things; and as the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the mysteries of beings, therefore, They understand this essential connection and by this knowledge establish the Law of God.” [ibid, 159].

One of the most striking analogies is between the Bahá'í teaching about the role of a Manifestation in bringing humans to the knowledge of God and the Sufi doctrine concerning the similar role of a Prophet:

“Know that reunion with God, the Exalted, is not possible except by following the Prophets and [God's] chosen Ones, peace be upon them.... There is no way for him (man) to [attain unto] the knowledge of the True [God] but that he would contemplate the creation (lit.: creations) and become assured by it of its Creator, who is the True [God], may He be glorified and His dominion be ever exalted ! And [man will become assured of] His uniqueness (وحدته) and self-subsistence, His knowledge and His might. [Man] will not learn beyond this measure from His attributes, [defined by] analogy (اصناف التشبيهية), while from the attributes related to His holiness he will know [only] that He is not corporeal, not temporal, not spatial. All this is nothing other than logical conclusions made from behind a veil. Guidance unto Him, however, is possible, but in no other way than by His informing [His creation] about His Essence, His attributes and names or through His revelation to His servants (بتجليه لعباده) and His testimony to them about Himself. Exalted is He, Who is the true Master, above [all, in] that the religious law should be revealed [not] to everybody, and that it should be communicated [not] except in succession (lit.: one after another) by them who are the Prophets and His chosen Ones.... These are the choicest of the inhabitants of [the realm of] being (اهل الوجود). It is incumbent upon the seeker of Truth to follow them and be guided by them. To the extent of his following the Prophets and His chosen Ones the rays of the divine light and God's mysteries will be revealed to him....”

“Prophethood is God's gift. There is no way to obtain it. A Prophet is sent from God, the Exalted, for the direction of the people (الارشاد الخلق) and their guidance (مدلتهم). He is one, who informs them of His (God's) Essence, His attributes, His deeds and the recent commands (احكام الآخرة).... The Prophethood has an inner reality, which is Saintship (الولاية). Thus, the Prophet draws by his Saintship the spiritual truths, corresponding to the degree of his perfection (التي بها كمال مرتبته) as God's chosen, from [God], the Exalted, or from an angel, while by his Prophethood he communicates to [God's] servants what he has received from God, the Exalted, through mediation or without mediation. He utters this to them. This is not possible except through a religious law.... As a book, which has the outer and the inner aspect, degrees and levels to it.... The outer is what can be understood from the words and be grasped by the mind. While the inner [consists in] the meaning behind the notions, which are necessary for the consideration of the former. This marks the boundary, where minds and brains become powerless.... The former, that is the outer, is for both – common people and special. While the meanings, which are necessary for its [understanding], is for the special. Common people have no access to it. This is the level of the perfect. This rank is for the choicest of all (الخلاصة اخص الخواص), like the greatest of [God's] chosen Ones (الكابر الاوليا) ” [Qaysarí. شرح مكنة القلبي الكبيرى – Al-Tirmizi, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 491-493].

“The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying: "His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all" hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His

image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the light that can never fade” [Bahá’u’lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 99-100]. (emphasis added)

“Know that the Reality of Divinity or the substance of the Essence of Oneness is pure sanctity and absolute holiness—that is to say, it is sanctified and exempt from all praise. The whole of the supreme attributes of the degrees of existence, in reference to this plane, are only imaginations. It is invisible, incomprehensible, inaccessible, a pure essence which cannot be described, for the Divine Essence surrounds all things... However far mind may progress, though it may reach to the final degree of comprehension, the limit of understanding, it beholds the divine signs and attributes in the world of creation and not in the world of God. For the essence and the attributes of the Lord of Unity are in the heights of sanctity, and for the minds and understandings there is no way to approach that position. ‘The way is closed, and seeking is forbidden’... Therefore, the Reality of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. It is absolutely impossible to ascend to that plane. We see that everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher... Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator? This plane is unapproachable by the understanding; ...Minds are powerless to comprehend God, and the souls become bewildered in explaining Him...” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146, 147]. (emphasis added)

“But for this Essence of the essences, the Truths of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God. All the perfections, the bounties, the splendors which come from God are visible and evident in the Reality of the Holy Manifestations like the sun which is resplendent in a clear polished mirror with all its perfections and bounties... Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations. There is no access to anything else...” [ibid, 147-148]. (emphasis added)

“...His Essence is above all comprehension” [ibid, 148].

“This is why it is said: ‘All that you have distinguished through the illusion of your imagination in your subtle mental images is but a creation like unto yourself, and returns to you’... It is clear that if we wish to imagine the Reality of Divinity, this imagination is the surrounded, and we are the surrounding one; and it is sure that that the one who surrounds is greater than the surrounded. From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition” [ibid, 149]. (emphasis added)

“God sent His Prophets into the world to teach and enlighten man, to explain to him the mystery of the Power of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to reflect the light, and so in his turn, to be the source of guidance to others. The Heavenly Books, the Bible, the Qur’án, and the other Holy Writings have been given by God as guides into the paths of Divine virtue, love, justice and peace” [Paris Talks, 57]. (emphasis added)

These passages speak for themselves, highlighting the similarities between the Bahá’í teaching on the role of a Manifestation in bringing to humankind knowledge about God, incomprehensible in His hidden Essence, and the Sufi view on the same role of a Prophet. His role in the spiritual education of man is also described in very similar terms:

“In like manner, the Holy Manifestations of God are the centers of the light of reality, of the source of mysteries, and of the bounties of love. They are resplendent in the world of hearts and thoughts, and shower eternal graces upon the world of spirits; They give spiritual life and are shining with the light of realities and meanings. The enlightenment of the world of thought comes from these centers of light and sources of mysteries. Without the bounty of the splendor and the instructions of these Holy Beings the world of souls and thoughts would be opaque darkness. Without the irrefutable teachings of those sources of mysteries the human world would become the pasture of animal appetites and qualities, the existence of everything would be unreal, and there would be no true life” [Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 162].

“But for the ordinances of the religious Law, which come down from the Divine Presence, encompassing the good of the both worlds, the actions of each one of them (people), when seized by lust, would [consist in] the desire to oppress his brother, and in claiming what is forbidden for the gratification of their basest instincts. Order would never prevail in this world and the next.... Therefore God, the Exalted, chooses in His wisdom angels, that these may be mediators (المستظنين الاخيار) between Him and the elect from among the most excellent [people] (المستظنين واسطة). They (angels) inspire these with the God breathed [word], so that they may be Messengers unto the high and low” [Alá-al-Dawla Simnání. *كتاب العروة*, - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 489].

The Bahá’í teaching about Divine Manifestations includes the notion of cycles:

“Each of the Divine Manifestations has likewise a cycle, and during the cycle His laws and commandments prevail and are performed. When His cycle is completed by the appearance of a new Manifestation, a new cycle begins. In this way cycles begin, end and are renewed, until a universal cycle is completed in the world, when important events and great occurrences will take place which entirely efface every trace and every record of the past; then a new universal cycle begins in the world, for this universe has no beginning...Briefly, we say a universal cycle in the world of existence signifies a long duration of time, and innumerable and incalculable periods and epochs. In such a cycle the Manifestations appear with splendor in the realm of the visible until a great and supreme Manifestation makes the world the center of His radiance. His appearance causes the world to attain to maturity, and the extension of His cycle is very great. Afterward, other Manifestations will arise under His shadow, Who according to the needs of the time will renew certain commandments relating to material questions and affairs, while remaining under His shadow” [Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 160-161].

A similar idea is expressed in the Sufi writings:

“For the Prophets...are the manifestations of God’s Essence from the standpoint of Its Lordship over the manifest beings and Its Justice among them (مظاهر الذات الالهية من حيث ربوبيتها المظاهر و عدالتها بينها). Consequently, the Prophethood refers exclusively to the outer. All of them (Prophets) participate in summoning, guiding and governing the people, and in the other things, which of necessity are related to Prophethood. Each one of them differs from another in degree: [Prophets] of an entire extent of powers (الحيطة التامة), like the independent Messengers..., and those with a limited extent, like the prophets of the people of Israel... Thus, the Prophethood of a full cycle consists of cycles, which are separate and different in magnitude (الكلية دايرة تامة، شتملة) (على ادوار غير متساوية و متقلبة في الحيطة (الولاية)”). You have already learnt that the outer does not obtain assistance, strength, might, the power to govern, knowledge and everything, which proceeds out of the Truth, Who is the Exalted, except by the inner. This is the station of a chosen One (الولاية)” [Qaysarí. *شرح فصوص الحكم*, - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 490-491].

That the Manifestations of God differ in degree is also part of the Bahá’í teaching:

“Know that the attributes of perfection, the splendor of the divine bounties, and the lights of inspiration are visible and evident in all the Holy Manifestations; but the glorious Word of God, Christ, and the Greatest Name, Bahá’u’lláh, are manifestations and evidences which are beyond

imagination, for They possess all the perfections of the former Manifestations; and more than that, They possess some perfections which make the other Manifestations dependent upon Them” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 149-150].

Until now we have been focusing mostly on the parallels between the Bahá’í religion and Sufism. Now it is time to consider the most essential differences between them. As has been already pointed out, unlike the Bahá’í teaching, according to which the Divine Will is manifested solely through the Prophets founders of religions, called the Manifestations of God, the Muḥammadan Essence—the Sufi analogue of the Divine Will can, according to the Sufi thinkers, be manifested through channels, other than the Prophets, namely classed under the category of the “Chosen” or “Saints.” Let us consider this aspect more closely. The Manifestations of God as they are described in Bahá’í Writings, are a special category of created Beings.

“Briefly, The Holy Manifestations have ever been, and ever will be, Luminous Realities; no change or variation takes place in Their essence. Before declaring Their manifestation, They are silent and quiet like a sleeper, and after Their manifestation, They speak and are illuminated, like one who is awake” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 85-86].

“The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God” [ibid, 147].

“Know that the Holy Manifestations, though They have the degrees of endless perfections, yet, speaking generally, have only three stations. The first station is the physical; the second station is the human, which is that of the rational soul; the third is that of the divine appearance and the heavenly splendor.... The second is the station of the rational soul, which is the human reality. This also is phenomenal, and the Holy Manifestations share it with all mankind.... Therefore, the reality of prophethood, which is the Word of God and the perfect state of manifestation, did not have any beginning and will not have any end; its rising is different from all others.... Then it is evident that the Manifestations possess three conditions: the physical condition, the condition of the rational soul, and the condition of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor” [ibid, 151-152]. (emphasis added)

“We said that the Manifestations have three planes. First, the physical reality, which depends upon the body; second, the individual reality, that is to say, the rational soul; third the divine appearance, which is the divine perfections, the cause of the life of existence, of the education of souls, of the guidance of people, and of the enlightenment of the contingent world.... But the individual reality of the Manifestations of God is a holy reality, and for that reason it is sanctified and, in that which concerns its nature and quality, is distinguished from all other things. It is like the sun.... So other human realities are those souls who, like the moon, take light from the sun; but that Holy Reality is luminous in Himself... We have mentioned, that the Holy Manifestations have three planes. The physical condition, the individual reality, and the center of the appearance of perfection.... Other individuals have the physical plane, the plane of the rational soul—the spirit and the mind....” [ibid, 154, 155]. (emphasis added)

“For these Holy Souls are pure from every sin and sanctified from faults.... These Holy Beings are lights, and light does not unite itself with darkness. They are life, and life and death are not confounded. They are for guidance, and guidance and error cannot be together. They are the essence of obedience, and obedience cannot exist with rebellion” [ibid, 170].

“Verily, from the beginning that Holy Reality...is conscious of the secret of existence, and from the age of childhood signs of greatness appear and visible in Him” [ibid, 155].

“Know that infallibility is of two kinds: essential infallibility and acquired infallibility. In such manner there is essential knowledge and acquired knowledge.... Essential infallibility is peculiar

to the supreme Manifestation.... To epitomize: essential infallibility belongs especially to the supreme Manifestations, and acquired infallibility is granted to every holy soul.... Briefly, it is said that the ‘Dayspring of Revelation’ is the manifestation of these words, ‘He doeth whatsoever He willeth; this condition is peculiar to that Holy Being, and others have no share of this essential perfection...for the Manifestation arises with perfect wisdom...’ [ibid, 171, 172, 173].¹⁰

Though the Sufis describe the “Prophethood” as a special gift from God, they do not attribute to the Prophets a special category among the created beings, a category, which is distinct from that of humans, and emphasize their human aspect:

“Do not think that this is peculiar to the Prophets (Messengers). For the quintessence of all humans (الكل من آدميات) in [their] innate nature (أدر أصل قطرت) is worthy of it (أينست شايسته).... A Prophet is also a human—‘Say: I am only a mortal like you’ [Qur’án 18:110]. Everyone, for whom this way has opened, were he to be shown what is to the advantage of humanity as a whole and were he to summon [the people] to what he has been shown, this would be called a religious law, and himself—a Prophet, while his condition [will be called] ‘mu’jiza’ (prophetic miracle). Were he not to apply himself to the exhortation of people, he would be called ‘a chosen One’, and his condition—‘karámát’ (miracles). It is not necessary, that to whomsoever this state has been revealed, should occupy himself with the admonition of the people. For it is within the power of God, the Exalted, not to occupy him with it, either because the religious law of the given time is still new and there is no need for new exhortations, or because the conditions are not suitable for an exhortation...” [Al-Ghazáli.¹¹ كيمياى سادات. Lithography, p. 14].¹²

“Therefore God, the Exalted, chooses in His wisdom angels, that these may be mediators (المستقلين الاخير) between Him and the elect from among the most excellent [people] (الايكوتوا واسطة). They (angels) inspire these with the God breathed [word], so that they may be Messengers unto the high and low.... And everyone, who receives confirmation from God, so that he may overpower the people outwardly and [overwhelm] the believers in Him inwardly and be independent in himself of a human like himself (استقيا بنفسه . . . عن بشر مثله) in receiving [a revelation] from His Lord, is a Prophet exclusively, which is not applicable except for the human (او لا يخلق الا على البشر). And every Prophet is an Apostle, and every Apostle is a Prophet” [‘Alá-al-Dawla Simnání. كتاب العروة - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 489].

“Perfect’ is a man, who has attained unto the level of perfecting [others] (و الكامل هو الانسان البالغ الى) (التكامل), who is perfect in the knowledge of the religious law (الشريعة) the mystical Path (الطريقة) and its true experience. Because the attainment unto [this] position is necessary that he may perfect others. As Junayd has stated: ‘The end is the return to the first principles/origin (الابدائيات): As regards ‘the return to the first principles,’ it has two meanings. The first [consists in] his (mystic’s) return to the basic starting point (المبدأ الاصلى) and the real abode (الوطن الصلي), [where] with the eye of insight he contemplates the beginning and the return (المعاد) and becomes perfect in Sainthood (as God’s chosen One) or Prophethood and Apostleship, or in all of these (و يصير كاملاً) (فى الرتبة او النبوة و الرسالة او السجوع), and in the contemplation of the True [God], the Exalted, in His manifestations. The second meaning [consists in] his return to whatever exists of the pillars of the religious Law and the mystical Path, to [promote] the growth of the people (lit.: creations), so that these may contemplate the Truth through the prism (lit.: eye) of the nura]itv. linherent in] the creation (فى عين الكثرة الخلقية), as has been pointed out” [Ámulí. كتاب نغم التصوص - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 505].

It is worth noting, that ‘becoming perfect in the Prophethood’ is explicitly stated in the passage. The latter demonstrates that for the illustrious Sufi thinkers (Ámulí here quotes the great Junayd Baghdádí)¹³ the Prophethood implied an act of attaining to a certain level of perfection, which suggests that this perfection is not innate.

According to the Bahá’í teaching, the Manifestations of God/founders of religions, have always been and will continue to be sent to humanity at a definite interval, which is about a thousand years:

“...the Manifestations of His Beauty no beginning hath beheld, and they will continue to the ‘End that knoweth no end’” [Bahá’u’lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 167].

“They that valiantly labour in quest of God’s will, when once they renounced all else but Him, will be so attached and wedded to that City that a moment’s separation from it would to them be unthinkable. They will hearken unto infallible proofs from the Hyacinth of that assembly, and receive the surest testimonies from the beauty of its Rose and the melody of its Nightingale. Once in about a thousand years shall this City be renewed and re-adorned...That city is non other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Our’án; in this day the Bayán; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book—the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme” [ibid, 198–200]. (emphasis added)

The Sufi view on this matter, which is no different from the traditional Moslem view, is based on the concept of the Prophet Muḥammad being the “Seal of the Prophets,” which is understood as Muḥammad being the last Prophet. This interpretation of the expression “Seal of the Prophets” originated in Islam quite early. To consider it here is not our point. The founder of the Bahá’í Faith, Bahá’u’lláh, treats this subject in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Suffice it to say that, according to the Sufi thinkers, after the Prophet Muḥammad and the discontinuation of the cycle of Prophets, the Divine Command is expressed solely through God’s chosen Ones (Saints). These, called the “men of the hidden” (**رجال القيب**), govern the universe through an uninterrupted invisible hierarchy with the Pole (Quèb) or *Ghauth* at the top. It is uninterrupted, because whenever one of the men in the hierarchy departs from his position, his place is taken by someone from the level below. This is believed to continue until the rise of the Mahdí, the coming of the Hour and the Day of Resurrection. The particular details related to that hierarchy vary from author to author, but the general idea is the same. Let us consider some extracts from the texts, which illustrate it.

“With the termination of the Prophethood, which is—bringing the religious Law, and the conclusion of its cycle and the appearance of the inner Saintship, the position of the Pole was altogether transferred to (الولي) God’s chosen Ones . Thus without interruption one of these is in this position (of the Pole) in order to guard this order and state of things.... The Saintship will be terminated with the manifestation of the ‘Seal of Saintship’, who is the One sealing the ‘absolute Saintship.’ Thus, when this cycle (Saintship) is also finished, the coming of the Hour will become necessary...” [Qaysarí. **شرح قصص الحكم**, p. 34].

“The Seal of the Prophets’ is the One by whom God, the Exalted, sealed the Prophethood. He is none other than the One, namely—our Prophet.... Likewise is the ‘Seal of the Saints.’ He is the One by whom the welfare of this world and the next reaches its top perfection, and the order of the universe will be destroyed by His death. He is the Mahdí, promised [to appear] at the end of time” [Ámulí. **اجمع الاسرار و منبع الاثرار**, p. 384].

“...God has saints (awliyá) whom He has specially distinguished by His friendship and whom He has chosen to be the governors of His kingdom and has marked out to manifest His actions and has peculiarly favoured with diverse kinds of miracles (karámát) and has purged of natural corruptions and has delivered from subjection to their lower soul and passions, so that all their thoughts are of Him and their intimacy is with Him alone. Such have been in past ages and are now, and shall be hereafter until the Day of Resurrection, because God has exalted this (Moslem) community above all others and has promised to preserve the religion of Muḥammad. Inasmuch as the traditional and intellectual proofs of this religion are to be found among the divines (ulamá), it follows that the visible proof is to be found among the saints and the elect of God.... God, then, has caused the prophetic evidence (burhán-i nabawí) to remain down to the present day, and has made the saints the means whereby it is manifested, in order that the signs of the

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Truth, and the proof of Muḥammad's veracity may continue to be closely seen. He has made the Saints the governors of the universe; they have... become entirely devoted to His business, and have ceased to follow their sensual affections. Through the blessing of their advent the rain falls from heaven, and through the purity of their lives plants spring up from the earth, and through the purity of their spiritual influence the Moslems gain victories over the unbelievers. Among them there are four thousand, who are concealed and do not know one another and are not aware of the excellence of their state, but in all circumstances are hidden from themselves and from mankind... But of those who have power to loose and to bind and are officers of the Divine court there are three hundred called Akhyár, and forty called Abdal, and seven called Abrár, and four, called Awtád, and three, called Nuqabá, and one, called Quèb or Ghauth. All these know one another and cannot act save by mutual consent" [Hujwírí. *Kashf al-Mahjúb*, p. 212-214].¹⁴

The idea of the invisible hierarchy of saints, governing the world, as well as that of this body of saints, acting as a collective manifestation of God's Command on earth, is not found in the Bahá'í Writings. On the other hand, though this is not part of the Bahá'í teaching, it would be too strong to assume that it goes altogether against the Bahá'í teachings either. For, this hierarchy, according to the Sufi authors, exists only till the appearance of the Mahdí, who is identified with the Pole (or Pole of Poles). Sufi writers also describe the Mahdí as the "Seal of the Saint" (see above), Who terminates by His manifestation the circle of Saintship. According to the Bahá'í teaching, the prophecies about the Mahdí were fulfilled in the Báb. I do not know of any authoritative Bahá'í interpretation of this subject, but in my own opinion, one way to interpret this from the Bahá'í standpoint, would be to assume that the Báb, Who is the Mahdí and, therefore, in Sufi terminology, is the "Seal of the Saints," sealed or ended by His manifestation the circle of Saintship.

In conclusion we will try to sum up the main similarities and differences between the concept of the "Perfect Man" ("Pole") in Sufism and the Bahá'í notion of the Manifestation of God. The basic analogies can be traced down to the following ideas:

God's Will/Command needs an expression. This Will/Command consists in the education and guidance of humankind and the governing of the world upon spiritual principles. This Will/Command is expressed through a person/persons, who act as representatives/vicegerents of God on earth. The world is never left without divine guidance. These divine representatives on earth are both servants in relation to God and Lords in relation to the world. Viewed from the standpoint of their essential unity they all manifest the same Reality, but from the standpoint of their individuality each of them appears under a certain name and is characterized by certain qualities. All the divine attributes are applicable to these Representatives of God and they play a major role in bringing humanity to the knowledge of God.

The differences between the teachings can be summarized as follows:

a) In the Bahá'í teaching these divine representatives, called the Manifestations of God (God's Will), are considered a special category of created beings, who are superior to humankind in the hierarchy of creation and are endowed with innate perfection. While the Sufis lay strong emphasis on the human aspect of the Prophets and God's chosen Ones (see below), who, in their view, attain to the spiritual level, which enables them to perfect others and promote their spiritual growth; b) in the Bahá'í teaching the Manifestations of God are limited to the Prophets—founders of religions, who are sent down to humanity at set intervals. In Sufism the Prophets are but a group within a broader class, called the Elect of God or God's chosen Ones (Saints), all of whom (and not just the Prophets) serve as channels for the manifestation of the Will of God (God's Command); c) in the Bahá'í teaching the Manifestations of God/the Prophets will forever continue to be sent down to humankind, while the Sufis hold the view that their can be no Prophet after Muḥammad, Who completed the cycle of Prophethood, to be succeeded by the cycle of Saintship. From that point onward until the end of time the role of the channels for the operation of the Divine Will passed from the Prophets to the Elect of God. These, acting within the Muḥammadan Law and His dispensation, govern the world through an invisible hierarchy.

Notes

- 1) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*. Collected and translated from the Persian by L. C. Barney. First pocket-size edition 1984/Reprinted 1994. Bahá’í Publishing Trust. Wilmette, Illinois.
- 2) *Paris Talks*. Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1911. London (Printed by The Cromwell Press, Broughton Gifford, Melksham, Wiltshire), 1995.
- 3) A reference to the Perfect Man can be seen in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, in which Bahá’u’lláh says: **کتاب ایقان را اینست ملام انا هو . در هر لفظ که در حدیث مذکور است** . — *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude). Reprinted from the original edition, Egypt, 1934. Printed with the permission of the Universal House of Justice (19 June 1997) p. 75], which is in English translation as follows: “This is the significance of the tradition: I am He, Himself, and He is I, myself” [Bahá’u’lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán. The Book of Certitude*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi. First pocket-size edition 1983. Bahá’í Publishing Trust. Wilmette, Illinois, p. 100].
A.E. Khavari in the ‘*Qamus-i-Iqan*’ explaining this issue points out that what is implied here is the Perfect Man: **این چه در حدیث قدسی وارد شده که حق تعالی فرموده است انسان سیر و لقا سوره لقا هو و هو انا . . . و مقصود از انسان در این حکم انسان کامل است که مظهر لطف است** [A.E. Khavari. *Qamus-i-Iqan*, Vol. I, p. 166; A. E. Khavari. *Concordance to the Book of Certitude*. Abridged by H. Vaezi. Published by Century Press Pty. Ltd. Bundoora, Australia p. 85].
- 4) *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’án*. Text and explanatory translation by M. Pickthall. Vol. II. Hyderabad-Deccan (India), 1938.
- 5) ‘Alá-al-Dawla Simnání (659/1261–736/1336)—a famous mystic of the Il-khanid period. He turned more and more toward mainstream Sufism and a moderate kind of Sufism.
This and some other quotations are translated from the original sources (Arabic texts), published in the appendix to the *Kitáb Khatm al-Awliyá* by al-Tirmizí—Al-Tirmidí. *Kitáb Khatm al-Awliyá*. Édité par Othman I. Yahya. Recherches publiées sous la direction de L’Institut De Lettres Orientales De Beyrouth. Tome XIX. Imprimerie Catholique, Beyrouth.
- 6) Da’ud al-Qaysarí, a follower of Ibn al-‘Arabí and a brilliant expounder of his teaching, was a prolific writer. Very little is known about his life, except that he lived in Asia Minor. From the fact that he is often quoted by S.H. Ámulí (see endnote 7) it can be inferred that he lived between the time of the great Sufi from Andalusia and the time of Ámulí.
The reference here is made to the Lithographic edition from the collection of the Oriental Institute of St. Petersburg (Russia)—**شرح لیسوی حکم الشیخ سنی الدین ابن عبدالمعتمد ابن علی السمرقندی یابن عربی الطائی الطائی لأخیر السلفین بالمدینه المنوره القیصری**. Publisher: Mirza Mohamed Shirazi. Bombay, 1300 H. (the library call number: Hd III 22.)
- 7) Sayyed Haydar Amolí (VIII/XIV siècle). *La Philosophie Shi’ite*. 1. Somme des doctrine ésotériques (Jâmi’ al-asrâr) 2. Traité de la connaissance de l’être (Fi ma’rifat al-wजूd). Textes publiés avec une double introduction et index par H. Corbin et O. Yahia. Teheran-Paris, 1969.
S. H. Ámulí, early representative of Imamite theosophy (born in 720/1320), a prolific writer. He was an early proponent of the thesis that Imamite Shi’ism is identical with Sufism. Ámulí was an early example of a long line of Imamite thinkers who incorporated the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabí and his follows into their writings.
- 8) ‘Afif al-Dín Sulaimán b. ‘Alí b. ‘Abd Alláh b. ‘Alí b. Yásín Tilimsání, born at T(i)limsán in 616/1219, a Sufi author of a number of works who lived in Syria and Asia Minor.
- 9) See endnote 3 for the full reference.
- 10) For a more detailed explanation of the Bahá’í teaching on the inherent distinction between ordinary human beings and the Manifestation, see John S. Hatcher, “The Doctrine of the ‘Most Great Infallibility’ in Relation to the ‘Station of Distinction,’” *The Law of Love Enshrined*. Selected Essays by John Hatcher & William Hatcher. George Ronald. Oxford, 1996, p. 59-100.
- 11) Abú Hámid Muḥammad b. Muhammad al-Vúsí al-Ghazálí (450/1058–505/1111), outstanding theologian, jurist, original thinker, mystic and religious reformer.
- 12) The reference here is made to the Lithographic edition from the collection of the Oriental Institute of St. Petersburg (Russia)—**کتابیات**. Second edition [Lakchnau]. Publisher: Naval Kishor (the library call number: P 35). For information about the given lithography, refer to O.P. Shcheglova. Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia. AN SSSR, c. II, Moskva, 1975, p. 453. See also a big portion of this passage in M. Takeshita’s translation. Masataka Takeshita. Ibn ‘Arabí’s *Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa*. Studia Culturae Islamica 32. Tokyo, 1987, p. 152-153.
- 13) Abú-l-Qásim al-Junayd al-Khazzáz al-Baghdádí (died in 298/910), the leading figure of the Baghdad school of Sufism in IX-X centuries, the highest authority in mysticism, who left behind a great number of prominent disciples; author of many treatises on Sufism.
- 14) ‘Alí B. ‘Uthmán al-Jullábí al-Hujwírí, an eminent Sufi, born at Ghazní (died in 465/1072 A.D.), author of many books of which the *Kashf Al-Maujúb*—a work treating the lives, teachings and observances of the Sufis—is the most widely known and read.
The passage is quoted in R.A. Nicholson’s translation (highlighted by us)—*The Kashf Al-Maujúb*. The oldest Persian Treatise on Lúfiism by ‘Alí B. ‘Uthmán al-Jullábí al-Hujwírí. Translated by R.A. Nicholson. “E. J. W. Gibb Memorial.” Vol. XVII. Leyden: E. J. Brill, Imprimerie Orientale. London: Luzac & Co, 1911.