

From Adam to Bahá'u'lláh:
The Idea of a Chain of Prophecy*

by Zaid Lundberg

Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestations of Adam with that of the Báb . . . —Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings XXXI

The purpose of this paper is to briefly present a preliminary¹ contextualization of the Bahá'í *idea of a chain of prophecy*, which is an intimate and important feature of the Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation.²

Although the term “prophecy” commonly is understood as *fore-telling*, in academia it is better known as *forth-telling*,³ i.e., it has to do with “prophetology” rather than with “futurology” (although prophecy, admittedly, sometimes includes this dimension as well). The technical term “chain of prophecy” can be found in various religious contexts other than in the Bahá'í Faith, and is not specifically a Bahá'í term. Generally speaking, a chain of prophecy refers to a sequence (linear and/or cyclical) of mediators (prophets, messengers, *avatars*, etc). It can be defined as “a sequence of religious mediators who operate between divine (supramundane) and earthly (mundane) realms.”

This paper argues that variations, or family-resemblances,⁴ of such an idea of a chain of prophecy can be located in the following religious contexts, including some major and well-known religions of the world (Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism), as well as a few less well-known religions (Bábism, Manichaeism, and Jainism), and branches, or sects, of religions (Shaykhism, Pseudo-Clementines, Elkesaites, and Ebionism).

The Bahá'í Faith

The opening passage from the Kitáb-i-*qán* above may serve as an example where Bahá'u'lláh explicitly states the idea of an unending *succession* of revelation, ranging from *Adam to the Báb*.⁵ Two main themes that are relevant for this paper are therefore the closely related ideas of:

- the *chain of successive* revelations
- the *linkage* of Adam and the Báb (and ultimately Bahá'u'lláh)

It is also significant that it is within this immediate context of the quoted passage of Bahá'u'lláh where Shoghi Effendi first employs the technical term *progressive revelation*.⁶

A similar statement “from Adam” is also found elsewhere in the Kitáb-i-*qán* where Bahá'u'lláh refers to “all the Prophets, from Adam even unto the ‘Seal,’ [Muhammad].”⁷ The idea of a chain of prophecy can also be found in statements by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, e.g., “From time immemorial the divine teachings have been *successively revealed*, and the bounties of the Holy Spirit have ever been emanating.”⁸ More specifically, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of “From the days of Adam” while implying the idea of a chain of prophecy:

From the days of Adam until today, the religions of God have been made manifest, one following the other, and each one of them fulfilled its due function, revived mankind, and provided education and enlightenment.⁹

In another passage ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explicitly identifies various religious figures while expressing the idea of a chain of prophecy:

For the position of Adam, with regard to the appearance and manifestation of the divine perfections, was in the embryonic condition; the position of Christ was the condition of maturity and the age of reason; and the rising of the Greatest Luminary [Bahá'u'lláh] was the condition of the perfection of the essence and of

the qualities. This is why in the supreme Paradise the tree of life is the expression for the center of absolutely pure sanctity—that is to say, of the divine supreme Manifestation. From the days of Adam until the days of Christ, They spoke little of eternal life and the heavenly universal perfections. This tree of life was the position of the reality of Christ; through His manifestation it was planted and adorned with everlasting fruits.¹⁰

In the last passage it is clear that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses various organic metaphors (embryo, tree, fruits) to convey the accumulative growth of religion/revelation. He writes more elaborately on the idea of a chain of prophecy in the following passage:

All these holy, divine Manifestations are one. They have served one God, promulgated the same truth, founded the same institutions and reflected the same light. Their appearances have been successive and correlated; each One had announced and extolled the One Who was to follow, and laid the foundation of reality . . . the divine religions They established have one foundation; Their teachings, proofs and evidences are one; in name and form They differ, but in reality They agree and are the same.¹¹

In connection with describing the Bahá’í Faith, Shoghi Effendi states that “The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh should indeed be regarded . . . as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of *successive*, of preliminary and progressive *revelations*.”¹² Shoghi Effendi is even more specific than both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá since he uses the chain metaphor in conjunction with a description of the Bahá’í Faith and progressive revelation in at least two occasions:

It [the Bahá’í Faith] should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet.¹³

[The Bahá’í Faith] readily and gratefully recognizes their [previous Dispensations] respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment of one Divine Revelation, unhesitatingly acknowledges itself to be but one link in the chain of continually progressive Revelations . . .¹⁴ [emphases added]

More explicitly, Shoghi Effendi clearly connects the idea of a chain of prophecy with the doctrine of progressive revelation:

It [the Bahá’í Revelation] regards them [the religions that have preceded it] . . . as different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it itself forms but an integral part. . . . the fundamental principle which constitutes the Bedrock of Bahá’í belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final.¹⁵

With regard to Adam, Shoghi Effendi states that “There are no Prophets, so far, in the same category as Bahá’u’lláh, as He culminates *a great cycle begun by Adam*.” [emphasis added]¹⁶ In the following passage it is possible to see how Shoghi Effendi refers to progressive revelation and the chain of prophecy while simultaneously employing an organic metaphor:

. . . the series of progressive Revelations starting with Adam and concluded by the Revelation of the Seal of the Prophets, marked by the successive appearance of the branches, leaves, buds, blossoms . . .¹⁷

In addition, Shoghi Effendi also refers to Islam as “the succeeding link in the chain of Divine Revelation.”¹⁸

The terms “Prophet” and “Messenger”¹⁹ are frequently utilized by especially Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but the term “Manifestation of God”²⁰ appears to be the most commonly used epithet. The Manifestation of God²¹ is also, according to Cole, at the center of the teachings of Bahá’í.²² Similarly, Saeidi states that:

The doctrine of manifestation, the concept of manifestation, is a fundamental, central, theological, philosophical, and sociological concept of the Bahá’í Faith. . . . Everything should be understood, can be understood in terms of this fundamental category, in terms of this fundamental concept. [It is] not just one concept among other concepts, but the central conceptual category of the Bahá’í Faith.²³

Although it may be correct to infer that the concept of the Manifestation of God plays a very central role in Bahá’í, it is argued that this concept is integral of a much larger and more central doctrine—that of progres-

sive revelation.²⁴

The terminology, which is connected with the Manifestations of God, is rather exhaustive. The following citation by Bahá'u'lláh may illustrate the abundant and complex variety of titles and metaphors that are associated with this concept:

It hath, therefore, become manifest and evident that within the tabernacles of these Prophets and chosen Ones of God the light of His infinite names and exalted attributes hath been reflected, even though the light of some of these attributes may or may not be outwardly revealed from these luminous Temples to the eyes of men. That a certain attribute of God hath not been outwardly manifested by these Essences of Detachment doth in no wise imply that they who are the Day Springs of God's attributes and the Treasuries of His holy names did not actually possess it. Therefore, these illuminated Souls, these beautiful Countenances have, each and every one of them, been endowed with all the attributes of God. [emphasis added]²⁵

In addition to the above stated designations, Bahá'u'lláh entitles the Manifestation of God as: "Tabernacles of holiness," "Primal Mirrors," "Essences of Being," "Day Stars of His divine guidance," "symbols of His divine unity," "sanctified Beings," "Manifestations of His wondrous Essence," "the Luminaries of truth," "Manifestations of the Sun of Truth," "Manifestations of Holiness," "Birds of the celestial Throne" etc. Further, the concept of "manifestation" occurs also in connection with other epithets. In the next passage Bahá'u'lláh enumerates various titles of the Manifestations of God and states that they are all essentially identical:

By virtue of this station they have claimed for themselves the Voice of Divinity and the like, whilst by virtue of their station of Messengership, they have declared themselves the Messengers of God. In every instance they have voiced an utterance that would conform to the requirements of the occasion, and have ascribed all these declarations to Themselves, declarations ranging from the realm of Divine Revelation to the realm of creation, and from the domain of Divinity even unto the domain of earthly existence. Thus it is that whatsoever be their utterance, whether it pertain to the realm of Divinity, Lordship, Prophethood, Messengership, Guardianship, Apostleship, or Servitude, all is true, beyond the shadow of a doubt.²⁶

Although Bahá'u'lláh above seems to include a variety of titles under the epithet of Manifestation of God, in His Kitáb-i-*qán* He elevates the "Prophet endowed with constancy" who has revealed a "Book" and which suggests the advent of a new revelation and the establishment of a new religion.²⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá is more explicit on this point since He clearly distinguishes between two kinds of prophets:

Universally, the prophets are of two kinds. One are the independent Prophets Who are followed; the other kind are not independent and are themselves followers. The independent Prophets are the lawgivers and the founders of a new cycle . . . The Manifestations of universal Prophethood Who appeared independently are, for example, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, 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; They change the general morals, promote new customs and rules, renew the cycle and the Law. Their appearance is like the season of spring, which arrays all earthly beings in a new garment, and give them a new life. With regard to the second sort of Prophets who are followers, these also promote the Law of God, make known the Religion of God, and proclaim His word. Of themselves they have no power and might, except what they receive from the independent Prophets.²⁸

Here one can see an important difference in that the independent Prophets,²⁹ i.e., Abraham to Bahá'u'lláh, are "founders" of "a new religion."³⁰ These kinds of Prophets are also referred to as "universal Prophets."³¹ The "second sort of Prophets" is *dependent*³² upon the former for whom they are "followers and promoters."³³ In other words, the latter kind of prophets (Salomon to Ezekiel),³⁴ does not establish a new religion since they do not reveal a "Book." They do, however, "promote the Law of God" and "make known the Religion of God." Consequently, only Prophets "endowed with constancy," or the "universal" and "independent Prophets," are upheld as Manifestations of God.

In the example above 'Abdu'l-Bahá enumerates six universal Prophets, or Manifestations of God, but other sources mention additional religious figures, and therefore the following names can be added to the sequence:

Adam, Noah, Krishna, Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Húd, Sálìh, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.³⁵

If one were to include both kind of prophets (independent and dependent) that Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi mention in their writings, one could enumerate thirty-two religious figures (in alphabetical order):

1) Adam 2) Abraham 3) The Báb 4) Bahá’u’lláh 5) Buddha 6) Confucius 7) Daniel 8) David 9) Elijah 10) Ezekiel 11) Hud 12) Isaac 13) Isiah 14) Ishmael 15) Jacob 16) Jeremiah 17) Jesus Christ 18) Jethro 19) Job 20) Joel 21) John the Baptist 22) Joseph 23) Joshua 24) Krishna 25) Lot 26) Moses 27) Muhammad 28) Noah 29) Sálìh 30) Solomon 31) Zachariah 32) Zoroaster

Yet, neither Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, nor Shoghi Effendi specify a limited number of Manifestations of God. On the contrary, the number of Manifestations of God appears to be unknown or unlimited. On this theme Bahá’u’lláh states:

[T]he Manifestations of His Divine Glory . . . have been sent down from time immemorial, and been commissioned to summon mankind to the one true God. That the names of some of them are forgotten and the records of their lives lost is to be attributed to the disturbances and changes that have overtaken the world.³⁶

[T]he manifold bounties of the Lord of all beings have, at all times, through the Manifestations of His divine Essence, encompassed the earth and all that dwell therein. Not for a moment hath His grace been withheld, nor have the showers of His loving-kindness ceased to rain upon mankind. [emphasis added]³⁷

Similarly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that

there have been many holy Manifestations of God. One thousand years ago, two hundred thousand years ago, one million years ago, the bounty of God was flowing, the radiance of God was shining, the dominion of God was existing.³⁸

From these examples it should be clear that the forgoing mentioned number of *six* Manifestations of God is not an exclusive number, since Bahá’u’lláh states that they “have been sent down from time immemorial,” “in every age,” and even that “the names of some of them are forgotten.” Similarly, the quote by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá above supports this conclusion since He states that the Manifestations of God existed even as far back as “a million years ago.” The appearance of a Manifestation of God, according to this view of prophecy, may be a rare event, but it is not a unique phenomenon in the history of mankind. Although the list of religious figures above seems to be limited to the Near and Far East regions, Bahá’u’lláh also says that “Unto the cities of *all* nations He hath sent His Messengers.”³⁹ Together with the above sentence “encompassed the earth” it is possible to interpret such passages as an allusion to a *global* scheme of revelation. Consequently, the revelatory process does not seem to be restricted to any specific time period or geographic locality.

Although the examples above are predominantly oriented toward the *past* it is relevant to turn the attention to the *future* perspective of the Manifestations of God. Thus, for example, in His Súriy-i-Sabr, Bahá’u’lláh addresses this issue and states that “God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed to Moses and Jesus, and He will *continue* to do so till ‘the end that hath no end’; so that His grace may, from the heaven of Divine bounty, be *continually* vouchsafed to mankind.”⁴⁰ Thus, Bahá’u’lláh only claims to be the *latest*, not the last, in a sequence of Manifestations of God.

The Middle Eastern and Iranian Contexts

Babism

Bahá’u’lláh was an early and distinguished adherent of the Báb (1819-1850), the Prophet-founder of the Bábí religion,⁴¹ though the two never physically met. That the Báb was a promulgator of the idea of continuous revelation is foremost seen in His claim of being the Qá’im/Mahdí of Islam.⁴² The following passage the Báb conveys clearly the idea of a chain of prophecy, not only in the past but in the future as well:

In the time of the First Manifestation the Primal Will appeared in Adam; in the day of Noah It became known in Noah; in the day of Abraham in Him; and so in the day of Moses; the day of Jesus; the day of Muhammad, the Apostle of God; the day of the ‘Point of Bayán’ [the Báb]; the day of Him Whom God shall make manifest; and the day of the One Who will appear after Him Whom God shall make manifest.

Hence the inner meaning of the words uttered by the Apostle of God, 'I am all the Prophets,' inasmuch as what shineth resplendent in each one of Them hath been and will ever remain the one and the same sun.⁴³

Here the Báb explicitly asserts a chain of prophecy. However, this chain does not end with him, but He prophesies a subsequent *man yuzhiruhu'lláh* (Him Whom God shall make manifest):

For everything shall be set aside except His Writings, which will endure until the following Revelation. And should anyone inscribe with true faith but one letter of that Revelation, his recompense would be greater than for inscribing all the heavenly Writings of the past and all that has been written during previous Dispensations. Likewise continue thou to ascend through one Revelation after another, knowing that thy progress in the Knowledge of God shall never come to an end, even as it can have no beginning. [emphasis added]⁴⁴

Another, and more elaborate passage, can be found in Báb's Persian Bayán:

It is clear and evident that the object of all preceding Dispensations hath been to pave the way for the advent of Muhammad, the Apostle of God. These, including the Muhammadan Dispensation, have had, in their turn, as their objective the Revelation proclaimed by the Qá'im. The purpose underlying this Revelation, as well as those that preceded it, has, in like manner, been to announce the advent of the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest. And this Faith—the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest—in its turn, together with all the Revelations gone before it, have as their object the Manifestation destined to succeed it. And the latter, no less than all the Revelations preceding it, prepare the way for the Revelation which is yet to follow. The process of the rise and setting of the Sun of Truth will thus indefinitely continue—a process that hath had no beginning and will have no end⁴⁵

The probably clearest example of a chain of prophecy is found in the Báb's Kitáb-i-Panj Sha'n (Book of the Five Grades)⁴⁶ where He explicitly writes of nine *man yuzhiruhu'lláh* (Him Whom God shall make manifest):

His [God's] exteriority in [the Qur'án] is Muhammad, the Messenger of God; in the Bayán it is [the Báb]; in the Gospel it is Jesus, the Spirit of God; in the Psalms it is David, the upright of God; in the Torah it is Moses, the One Who conversed with God. And after the Bayán it is [1] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [2] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [3] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [4] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [5] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [6] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [7] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [8] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*; and after *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, [9] *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*.⁴⁷

Although the Báb here explicitly mentions nine *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*, this number should not be taken at face-value but rather as a symbolic figure. Thus, Lambden writes that the Báb "did not simply speak of one future appearance of Manifestations of God but nine or more such theophanies. In fact, He did not limit the number of their successive and progressive Divine Manifestations in the world."⁴⁸ The following passage of the Báb implies that the number of future Prophets indeed is indefinite:

God hath raised up Prophets and revealed Books as numerous as the creatures of the world, and will continue to do so to everlasting.⁴⁹

Shaykhism

The Báb had been a student of Siyyid Kázim Rashtí (d. 1843) who in turn had been the foremost disciple of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í (d. 1825), the founder of Shaykhism.⁵⁰ The Báb was thus well versed in the Shaykhí school of prophetology. Thus, for example, Rafati writes the following about the Shaykhí view of continuous and successive revelation:

According to the Shaykhí theory, a prophetic cycle began with Adam and continued to the Prophet Muhammad. During this Adamic cycle, six major prophets appeared: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. While most Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last prophet, Shaykh Ahmad maintains that Muhammad was the last prophet only within this cycle. . . . Shaykh Ahmad's view of Muhammad as the final prophet only within the Adamic cycle implies a continuing divine revelation through a succession of prophets in a series of cycles; while each cycle has a beginning and an end, the cyclical process itself is progressive and continuous.⁵¹

Rafati explains that Shaykh Ahmad uses the analogy of the development of an embryo with humanity's spiritual progress and were various prophets play central roles:

According to the Shaykhí view, the six stages of embryonic development corresponds to the six prophets who appeared in the Adamic cycle: the stage of the life-germ corresponds to Adam; the stage of the clot, to Noah; the stage of the morsel of flesh, to Abraham; the stage of the bones, to Moses; the stage of the flesh, to Jesus, and the stage of another creation, to Muhammad. Following the analogy further, as the first five stages of embryonic development are prerequisite to the entrance of the spirit into the body, the first five religions are perceived as performing a preparatory function for the religion of the Prophet Muhammad. The last stage of the development of an embryo is final only in respect to its life in the womb, for the now completely developed embryo will be born into another world. Likewise, although the sixth stage of the Adamic cycle, i.e., the Prophet Muhammad, is the last stage of its cycle, it is, at the same time, the beginning of a new phase in the spiritual development of humankind and marks the inception of a new cycle.⁵²

Here we can clearly see that although Muhammed is regarded as the "last Prophet" He is this only within a cycle, i.e., the "Adamic cycle." Thus, in Shaykhism we can enumerate the following six Prophets:

- 1) Adam, 2) Noah, 3) Abraham, 4), Moses, 5), Jesus, 6) Muhammad

Islam

Shaykhism emerged within the Shí'í branch of Islam that historically has emphasized the continuity of revelation *after* Muhammed. Yet, this succession was mainly restricted through the succession of Imáms. However, what is of importance in this context is once again the idea of a chain of prophecy. An example is the Isma'ílís who believe that

Prophets come in cycles which comprise a "great week" of seven thousand years. Each cycle is presided over by one of the Prophets . . . (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad), as well as by an "intermediary" (wási), (Seth, Shem, Ishmael (Ismá'íl), Aaron, Peter, 'Alí), and a "permanent Imám" (Imám-Qá'im). . . .⁵³

Similarly, the Ahl-i-Haqq "believe in seven successive manifestations of God, coming to dwell 'in a garment.'"⁵⁴ It is also possible to locate passages of an esoteric identification with previous prophets. For example, in the *hadíth al-Sahába*, 'Alí⁵⁵ is supposed to have made the following claim:

I am Adam, I am Noah, I am Abraham, I am Moses, I am Jesus, I am Muhammad; I move through the forms as I wish—whoso has seen me has seen them, and whoso has seen them has seen me."⁵⁶

According to Nicholson, Rúmí (1207-1273) believed that "in every era there is a new manifestation of God," and in his *Díwán*, Rúmí states that "every instant the Loved One assumes a new garment, now of age, now of youth."⁵⁷ According to this view, the Spirit has appeared in various forms as: Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Jesus. Nicholson further writes that "In every generation he [the Spirit] was coming and going, until at last he appeared in Muhammad and ruled the world and he became 'Alí with his sword."⁵⁸

The Iranian al-Mukanna' (fl. 755-85) went one step further and identified himself not only with various prophets but with *God*:

I am your God and the God of the whole world. I call myself by whatever name I wish. I am he who manifested himself in the creation in the guise of Adam, and later in the guise of Noah, later in the guise of Abraham, later in the guise of Moses, later in the guise of Jesus, later in the guise of Muhammed, and later in the guise of Abu Muslim, and finally in the appearance you now behold.⁵⁹

Although the Shí'í branch's interpretations of an idea of a chain of prophecy is not accepted in the Sunni and majority branch of Islam, both the term and the idea of a "chain of prophets"⁶⁰ can clearly located. Waldman, writing on the topic of *Nubúwah* (prophethood) in Islam, states for example that it

has been God's primary means of communicating with humankind, involving a long and continuous chain of revelation-bearers who were related both functionally and genetically . . . The chain stretched from the first human, Adam, to the deliverer of the Qur'án, Muhammad. . . .⁶¹

The idea of a chain of prophecy is further and lucidly depicted in several *súrah*s of the *Qur'án*.⁶² For exam-

ple:

Say ye: "We believe in God, and the revelations given to us, and to Abraham, Ismá'íl, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all Prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them . . ." (2:136)

We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: We sent inspiration to Abraham, Ismá'íl, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms. Of some Apostles We have already told thee the story; of others We have not—and to Moses God spoke direct—apostles who gave good news as well as warning . . . (4:1 63-65)

The two most common terms for "prophet" in the *Qur'án* are *rasúl* (messenger) and *nabí* (prophet). According to *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, the former is a Prophet "who brings a new religion or a major new revelation" and the latter is a prophet "whose mission lies within the framework of an existing religion."⁶³ Some of the prophets are also referred to as *úlu-l-'azm* (prophets endowed with constancy; *Qur'án* 46:35).

The following twenty-six prophets (in alphabetical order) can be found in the *Qur'án*:

1) Adam 2) Alaysa' (Elisha) 3) Ayyúb (Job) 4) Dá'úd (David) 5) Dhú-l-Kifl (Ezekiel) 6) Húd 7) Ibrahím (Abraham) 8) Idrís (Enoch) 9) Ilyás (Elijah, Elias) 10) 'Isá (Jesus) 11) Isaiáh 12) Isháq (Isaac) 13) Ismá'íl (Ishmael) 14) Luqmán 15) Lút (Lot) 16) Muhammad 17) Músá (Moses) 18) Núh (Noah) 19) Sálíh 20) Shu'ayb (Jethro) 21) Sulaymán (Solomon) 22) Yúnus (Jonah) 23) 'Uzair (Ezra) 24) Yahyá (John the Baptist) 25) Ya'qúb (Jacob) 26) Yúsuf (Joseph)⁶⁴

Yet, the number of prophets does not seem to be exhausted by the ones listed above, since some traditions give the symbolic number of 124,000 prophets,⁶⁵ and, more importantly, because the *Qur'án* (10:48; 16:36) also states that prophets/messengers have been sent to *every* nation/community. It is also significant that some authors even use the term "progressive revelation"⁶⁶ and "progressive disclosure"⁶⁷ in the context of Islamic revelation.

However, although Islam clearly recognizes a chain of prophecy, a progressive disclosure of revelation, and that a prophet has been sent to every nation, one of the basic doctrines of Islam is that Muhammad is *khátim al-anbiyá'* (the Seal of Prophets, *Qur'án* 33:40), and that Islam is the perfected religion (*Qur'án* 5:3-5). This is often interpreted as if there will be no other prophet after Muhammad and, consequently, that there will be no future religion other than Islam. On this point, for example, Zaki writes that "the *Qur'án* abrogates all previously revealed scriptures just as Muhammad's prophethood supersedes the missions of all previous prophets, which are now rendered otiose of his universality" and that Muhammad therefore "retrospectively annuls . . . all the prophets who had preceded Him and at the same time invalidates the claim of any future claimant to the title."⁶⁸ Similarly, Nadwi writes that "It was perfectly logical as well as inevitable, too, that after the complete and final guidance had been vouchsafed to the Prophet of Islam, *the chain of prophecy* should come to an end with him."⁶⁹

This idea that Muhammad is completing a chain of revelation can further be seen in the following *hadíth* recorded by al-Bukhárí (810-870):

Narrated Abu Huraira: Alláh's Apostle said, "My similitude in comparison with the other prophets before me, is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except for a place of one brick in a corner. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: 'Would that this brick be put in its place!' So I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets."⁷⁰

By using this brick/house analogy, Muhammad is depicted as "the last brick" and thereby completing the "house of revelation." He is thus seen as "the last of the Prophets." In other words, although it is clearly possible to find a chain of prophecy in Islam, this chain is seen as *ending* with the Prophet Muhammad.

Manichaeism

Having briefly reviewed the Bábí-Bahá'í and Islamic views of prophecy, it is significant to note that Andrae asserts that "Mohammed's conception of revelation . . . betrays a relationship to the Ebionitic-Manichaeic doctrine which cannot be accidental."⁷¹ What is especially significant with the religion of Mání (216-276) is that here it is possible to locate a prophet-founder's first and explicit claim of being a part of a chain of prophecy.

An example of this claim can be found in the writings of al-Bírúní (973-1048), who cites the following from Mání's *Shábúhragán*:

Wisdom and deeds have always from time to time been brought to mankind by the apostles of God. So in one age they have been brought by the apostle called Buddha to India, in another by Zarathustra to Iran, in another by Jesus to the West. Thereupon this revelation has come down, this prophecy in this last age through me, Mání, the apostle of the God of truth to Babylonia.⁷²

In this passage it is clear that Mání sees himself as one of the apostles who have been sent "from time to time" and to different countries. Thus, he recognizes the following series of prior prophets:

1) Buddha 2) Zoroaster 3) Jesus

However, al-Sháhrastání⁷³ lists another sequence of prophets:

1) Adam 2) Seth 3) Noah 4) Abraham 5) Buddha 6) Zoroaster 7) Jesus Christ 8) Paul

Other sources also list Shem, Sem, Enosh, and Nikotheos⁷⁴ as prophets. For example, Lieu writes that:

We learn from the first discourse in the Kephalaia that Mani regarded Seth (or Sethel), the son of Adam, as the first of a line of special prophets from the Father. He was followed by Enosh, Enoch and Shem. After them came Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus and Paul. After Paul, mankind was gradually led astray into sin until the time when there appeared again a just man who belonged to the 'kingdom'. Together with another righteous person they gave strength to the church. . . . After they had descended to the Land of Light, the church again degenerated and became like a tree which was deprived of its fruits. It was then that Mani's apostleship began, as he was the Paraclete of Truth who was promised by Christ to this last generation.⁷⁵

Thus, a more complete list of the successive prophets of Manichaeism would include the following twelve prophets:

1) Adam 2) Seth 3) Enosh 4) Enoch 5) Noah 6) Shem 7) Abraham 8) Buddha 9) Zoroaster 10) Jesus Christ 11) Paul 12) Mání

What makes Manichaeism especially interesting in the context of the Bahá'í Faith is that Mání "believed he was promulgating a new universal religion that would supersede all others."⁷⁶ Mání, however, did not only uphold that his religion was a continuation or succession of previous religions, but that it was superior and *final*. Consequently, Lieu states that Mání saw himself "as part of a *chain of revealers* which finally terminated with him."⁷⁷ Thus, it is small wonder that Mání, centuries before Muhammad, used the epithet *khátimu'n-nabíyín* (the seal of the prophets).⁷⁸ Although Manichaeism seem to have influenced Islam, it is also important to note that Mání grew up in an Elkesaite environment.

Pseudo-Clementines, Ebionites, and Elkesaites

Another context in which the chain of prophecy occurs is the Judeo-Christian sects that flourished around the first four centuries C.E. The Pseudo-Clementines refers to a collection of early Christian writings⁷⁹ (325-380) that were clearly influenced by Ebionism. The Ebionites were Christians who maintained the Jewish law and claimed Ebion as its founder, but this term is more likely derived from *ebyóním* (the poor).⁸⁰ Earlier it was seen that Andrae referred to "the Ebionitic-Manichaean doctrine." Both the Ebionites (c. 200 C.E.) and the Elkesaites (c. 100 C.E.) identify Adam and Christ as prophets. They also believed in a series of successive incarnations.⁸¹ The Pseudo-Clementines and Ebionites also speak of a reincarnated *verus propheta* (true prophet).⁸² This "True Prophet" is viewed in a recurring fashion as "the seven pillars of the world" and which can be enumerated as:

1) Adam 2) Enoch 3) Noah 4) Abraham 5) Isaac 6) Jacob 7) Moses

The eighth and final pillar is that of Christ.⁸³ However, the idea of seven pillars that the world rests upon is, according to Schoeps, derived from the old Jewish *Haggadah*. He further states that:

All the seven are alike in that each is a saddiq (righteous man), i.e., a true prophet. Also, the picture of the wandering Shekinah (the glory of God) was widely known and frequently associated with the seven righteous men. The names change, but the patriarchs and Moses are constant members of the group; in them the glory of God returns to the earth after the sins of the earliest period had driven it away. The later cabala developed these views into a doctrine of the reincarnation of the original man Adam Kadmon.⁸⁴

Schoeps refers to this chain of prophecy as “cyclical succession of the Spirit of revelation.” In discussing its range of influence he states that it “extends from Elkesai, the Mandaeans, Mani, and Mohammed, to the Shi'ite Imám-doctrine of the Hadíth” and that it subsequently was “translated back into Judaism.”⁸⁵ Above it was seen that this idea of a chain of prophecy could be extended forward to Shaykhism, Bábism, and the Bahá'í Faith. The rest of this paper will show that this idea can be extended even further backwards to encompass not only Christianity and Zoroastrianism, but also Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism.

Christianity

Although Schoeps does not mention Christianity, it is clear that at its center is the belief that Jesus is the eschatological and soteriological *Masih* (Christos) of Judaism. Thus, from a Christian perspective, He is promised and prophesied in the Jewish scriptures (TNK)—the “Old Testament” —and the “New Testament” is the testimony and the fulfillment of this promise. For example, in John 5:46 Jesus is supposed to have said: “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for He wrote about Me” which probably is an allusion to Dt. 18:15-19 “Yahweh your God will raise up for you a *Prophet like Me* from among your own brothers.”⁸⁶ Jesus is indeed also referred to as a “prophet” many times in the New Testament⁸⁷ and John (7:40) even makes a reference of Jesus as “*the prophet*.” More importantly, Jesus refers to Himself twice as a “prophet.”⁸⁸

At the time of Jesus it was also thought that some of the ancient prophets Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah would appear as a prophet *revidus* before the coming of the Messiah.⁸⁹ This is apparent in the dialogue of the “Transfiguration” passages in e.g., Matt. 17:1-13:⁹⁰

After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus . . . The disciples asked Him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize Him, but have done to Him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist.⁹¹

Although this passage suggests a more esoteric view of the chain of prophecy, it may allude to Jesus' prophetic stature being on par with the theophanies of Moses,⁹² Elijah,⁹³ and John the Baptist.⁹⁴ A perhaps more explicit example of a chain of prophecy is “The Parable of the Tenants”:⁹⁵

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one [1], killed another [2], and stoned a third [3]. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son [4] to them.⁹⁶ “They will respect my son,” he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, “This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.” So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.⁹⁷

Commenting on this passage Aune writes that “The series of messengers represents the prophets who were prosecuted and killed by a rebellious Israel, while the beloved son is *Jesus, the last in a long series of prophetic messengers* who have experienced rejection by the people.”⁹⁸ Aune also writes of Jesus as “the final messenger of God.”⁹⁹ Another passage, which is often employed by Christian adherents of a continuous and progressive revelation between the OT and the NT is Heb. 1:1:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.

Judaism

Although Schoeps refers to that the idea of a “cyclical succession of the Spirit of revelation” this idea was eventually “translated back into Judaism.” Yet, the idea of a chain of prophecy can clearly be found even in the ancient Hebrew religion (from which Rabbinical Judaism is the only surviving offspring). Thus, for example, the *Encyclopedia Judaica* boldly asserts:

There is . . . no analogy to the Israelite chain of prophecy . . . which produced a successive line of prophets spanning several centuries who guided and taught the people, reproved and censured them for their sins, and threatened impending destruction or promised future restoration.¹⁰⁰

This, however, could be questioned since both Christianity and Islam make claims of being heirs to this “successive line of prophets.” Still, Judaism is different from both Christianity and Islam since it has no *single* founder or unique soteriological mediator, although Abraham and, especially Moses— “the paragon of prophets”¹⁰¹ and “the master of the prophets”¹⁰²—play extraordinary roles. Thus, the *Encyclopedia Judaica* states that “The classical prophets . . . considered themselves successive links in *the chain of divine messengers* extending back to Moses.”¹⁰³

Judaism has a variety of terms for “prophet” e.g., *návi* (prophet), *‘ish ha-‘Elóhím* (man of God), *ró’eh* and *hózeh* (seer).¹⁰⁴ That the prophets have played an important role in Judaism can be seen in the very name of the *TaNak*¹⁰⁵ where N stands for *Nevi'im* (Prophets). However, the prophets can be further subdivided into *nevi'im rishonim* (“former” or “earlier” prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings), and *nevi'im aharonim* (“latter” or “major” prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; and the twelve “minor” prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micha, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephania, Haggai, Zehariah, and Malachi).¹⁰⁶

The following list of fifty-five prophets is based on the *Talmud* and *Rashi*: 1) Abraham, 2) Isaac, 3) Jacob, 4) Moses, 5) Aaron, 6) Joshua, 7) Pinchas, 8) Elkanah, 9) Eli, 10) Samuel, 11) Gad, 12) Nathan, 13) David, 14) Solomon 15) Iddo, 16) Michaiiah son of Imlah, 17) Obadiah, 18) Ahiyah the Shilonite, 19) Jehu son of Hanani, 20) Azariah son of Oded, 21) Jahaziel the Levite, 22) Eliezer son of Dodavahu, 23) Hosea, 24) Amos, 25) Micah the Morashtite, 26) Amoz, 27) Elijah, 28) Elisha, 29) Jonah ben Amittai, 30) Isaiah, 31) Joel, 32) Nahum, 33) Habakkuk, 34) Zephaniah, 35) Uriah, 36) Jeremiah, 37) Ezekiel, 38) Shemaiah, 39) Barukh, 40) Neriah, 41) Seraiah, 42) Mehseiah, 43) Haggai, 44) Zehariah, 45) Malachi, 46) Mordecai Bilshan, 47) Oded, 48) Hanani, 49) Sarah, 50) Miriam, 51) Deborah, 52) Hannah, 53) Abigail, 54) Huldah, 55) Esther

Although both Adam and Noah have been considered as prophets in the above reviewed religions it is noteworthy that neither one is regarded as a prophet in Judaism. Yet, even though fifty-five prophets can be listed, the *Talmud* also states that the number of prophets was *innumerable*, or more precisely, twice the number of Jews who left Egypt, estimated as being 600,000. Thus, the number of prophets would amount to 1,200,000.¹⁰⁷

Zoroastrianism

In the above contexts it was seen that Zoroaster was only mentioned in the Bahá'í and Manichean contexts. The life-time of Zoroaster, or more precisely, Zarathustra (Spitaman), has never been satisfactorily resolved since scholars are divided into two groups: (1) Boyce who estimates 1700-1200 B.C.E, and (2) Zaehner and others who claim 628-551 B.C.E. Moreover, later Parsi tradition dates Zarathustra to have lived 6000 B.C.E., but this date is not accepted by Western scholars. Thus, there is a great variance from 6000-600 B.C.E. However, most scholars agree that Zarathustra was an *historical* figure and some even suggest that He may have been the very first prophet or apoclypt in history,¹⁰⁸ or the “oldest known millenarian prophet.”¹⁰⁹ From the extant Zoroastrian writings it is clear that He was *zaotar* or *áthravan* (priest)¹¹⁰ and that He also saw himself as *saoshyant* (saviour),¹¹¹ and *mathran* (prophet).¹¹² Nyberg states that Zoroastrianism’s greatest innovation was its prophetology and that “Zarathustra was the first who thought good, spoke good, acted good. He was the first *áthravan*, the first *rathaésr* (chariot-fighter), the first *vástryó.fsuyant* (shepherd),” and “mankind’s first lawgiver and teacher of the heavenly command.”¹¹³

In the context of the idea of a chain of prophecy it is interesting that a scheme of ten incarnations exists in the *Avesta*.¹¹⁴ It states that *Véréthraghna* (glorious power) appeared as follows:

- 1) Váta (wind), 2) Golden-horned bull, 3) White horse, 4) Male camel, 5) Boar, 6) Young man, 7) Váregan-bird, 8) Ram (?), 9) Goat, 10) Warrior¹¹⁵

What is especially significant in this context is that Nyberg writes that *Véréthraghna* “has wandered through time and makes the unifying bond in the history of Iran.”¹¹⁶ Further, there is the notion of *kavis* (priest-kings) who are seen as forerunners of Zoroastrianism, and Nyberg states that “even very old Avesta-texts may have had a fixed series of such pre-zoroastrian rulers and heroes.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, both Nyberg and Widengren describe Zarathustra as “primordial man reincarnated,”¹¹⁸ which suggests the notion of pre-existence. Indeed, this idea

can be seen in the division of the development of the cosmos and its three protagonists:

- 1) Gayó-maretan (primordial man),¹¹⁹ 2) Zarathustra, and 3) Saoshyant.

This idea was also seen above in that Zarathustra was seen as the first priest, chariot-fighter and shepherd. Thus, these examples illustrate the notion of a series of succession, although it is unclear if they have had any soteriological function.

The idea of the *Saoshyant* (savior) can be found at several places in the oldest Zoroastrian texts—the *Gáthás*.¹²⁰ Gnoli states that “the concept of the future saviour is one of the fundamental notions of Zoroastrianism” and that “the doctrine . . . had already taken shape in the Achaemenid period (sixth to fourth centuries B.C.E.).”¹²¹ For example, in *Yasht* 19:89 the *Saoshyant* is labeled as a “messenger of Ahura Mazda.”¹²² Yet, the identification of *Saoshyant* with a *future* savior is quite misleading since Zarathustra, as was seen above, also refers to himself as *Saoshyant*.¹²³ However, as was also stated earlier, Zoroastrianism recognizes three successive soteriological mediators *after* Zarathustra, although it is believed that the number of three *Saoshyants* was a later development.¹²⁴ It is possible to enumerate the three future and successive soteriological mediators of Zoroastrianism as:

- 1) Ushedar (Uchshyatereta), 2) Ushedarmah (Uchshyat-nemah) 3) Saoshyant (Astvatereta).

The three *Saoshyants* are depicted as “sons” of Zarathustra although it is clear that they are born during the last two millennia (i.e., the years 10,000-12,000 in the Zoroastrian calendar). The eleventh millennium is inaugurated with the arrival of Ushedar, who will “renew the prophet’s [Zarathustra’s] revelation and defeat the forces of evil.”¹²⁵ Here Boyce implies that it is the original revelation that is renewed. The twelfth millennium is inaugurated with Ushedarmah, and the final *Saoshyant* (Astvatereta) arrives at the end of the final millennium—in the year 11943.¹²⁶ Thus, it is important to note that the time-span between the three saviors is approximately 1,000 years, i.e., a millennium. Yet, it is possible to note, as Nyberg states, that “Zarathustra makes a continuous series with his mythical sons, the apocalyptic saviours” and that “the appearance of Zarathustra is the prelude to the eschatological event.”¹²⁷

Further, the last *Saoshyant* is, in the *Pahlavi*-literature, always identified simply as “Soshyant,” but the *Avesta* refers to him as Astvatereta (he who embodies righteousness).¹²⁸ Nyberg writes that Astvatereta is “the pinnacle and completion of humanity.” As was stated above, Nyberg sees “Zarathustra as primordial man reincarnated” and likewise are “the apocalyptic saviours Zarathustra reincarnated.”¹²⁹ The evidence for this, according to Nyberg, is *Yasna* 46:3 where Zarathustra identifies himself with the *Saoshyants*.¹³⁰ Similarly, Widengren sees the three *Saoshyants* as “incarnations of Zarathustra as the divine Primordial Man” and that it is therefore possible to discern “a clear series of four saviour-figures: Zarathustra, Hushetar, Hushetarmah and Soshyans.”¹³¹ Although *Gayó-maretan* may not have functioned as a soteriological figure in the mythical past, he may, since he is regarded as the incarnation of Zarathustra, still be included in the series of soteriological mediators. It is therefore possible to summarize and enumerate the following series of five successive soteriological mediators of Zoroastrianism as follows:

- 1) *Gayó-maretan* (primordial man), 2) Zarathustra, 3) Ushedar 4) Ushedarmah 5) Saoshyant (Astvatereta)

The Indian context

Having briefly reviewed and discussed the idea of a chain of prophecy in the Middle Eastern and Iranian contexts, we will now turn to three religions of Indian context: Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism.

Buddhism

The central figure of Buddhism is Siddharta Guatama (566-486/560-480 B.C.E.)¹³² or “the Buddha.” Yet, on this point Parrinder writes that “We commonly speak of Gotama as *the* Buddha, but every Buddhist, Theraváda, as well as Maháyána, believes that there are numerous Buddhas, past and to come.”¹³³ Thus, the theme in Buddhism which is most relevant in this context of the idea of a chain of prophecy is the idea of successive Buddhas, or *Buddhavamsa* (Lineage of Buddhas). This idea seems to be specifically Indian and ultimately influenced by the Hindu *avatara*-scheme, and most probably, indirectly influenced by Jainism,¹³⁴ although Gautama “Quite early . . . is perceived as one of several Buddhas in a series that began in the distant past.”¹³⁵ Related to this is the idea from the *Játaka* tales which states that the Buddha has gone through five-hundred

previous births¹³⁶ and that, in a sense, there are Buddhas in preparation.¹³⁷

The idea that a Buddha is born in various epochs can, for example, be found in the *Digha Nikaya*:

Know, Vasettha, that (from time to time) a Tathagata is born into the world, a fully Enlightened One, blessed and worthy, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the world, unsurpassed as a guide to erring mortals, a teacher of gods and men, a Blessed Buddha.¹³⁸

Moreover, in a passage from the *Saddharmapundarika* (*Lotus Sūtra*), the Buddha supposedly said “I am repeatedly born in the world of the living.”¹³⁹ However, Parrinder writes that the idea of succession of Buddhas is already established in the oldest part of the Buddhist *Pāli* canon, the *Sutta Pitaka*,¹⁴⁰ mentions six previous Buddhas where Gautama is the seventh, but the future Buddha—Maitreya—is *not* mentioned here (although He is mentioned elsewhere in the *Pāli* canon). Thus, in the oldest canon it is possible to identify the following succession of Buddhas:

1) Vipassi, 2) Sikhi, 3) Vessabhu, 4) Kakusandha, 5) Konágamana, 6) Kassapa, 7) Gautama, 8) Maitreya

The first Buddha, Vipassi, is supposed to have lived eighty thousand years ago. Later texts, e.g., *Buddhavamsa*, does not mention only *six* different Buddhas but *twenty-five*, where Gautama is identified as the twenty-fifth Buddha and where eighteen Buddhas existed before Vipassi. The Buddhas are as follows:

1) Dipankara, 2) Kondanna, 3) Mangala, 4) Sumana, 5) Revata, 6) Sobhita, 7) Anomadassin, 8) Paduma, 9) Narada, 10) Padumuttara, 11) Sumedha, 12) Sujata, 13) Piyadassi, 14) Atthadassi, 15) Dhammadassi, 16) Siddhattha, 17) Tissa, 18) Phussa, 19) Vipassi, 20) Sikhi, 21) Vessabhu, 22) Kakusandha, 23) Konágamana, 24) Kassapa, 25) Gautama

So far it has been shown that the concept of the Buddha is highly ambivalent and that Buddhism recognizes a limited number in the succession of Buddhas. Yet, other Buddhist writings do not limit the Buddhas but enumerate either a greater number or an infinite number of Buddhas in the universe. For example, although the *Mahāvastu* views Sidhartha Gautama as the last in a succession in the present cycle, it still names *thousands* of other Buddhas. Other texts e.g., the *Lalitavistara* and the *Saddharmapundarika*, mention *millions* of Buddhas.¹⁴¹ Again the *Mahāvastu* treat the “Buddha-lands” and “Buddha-fields” as *asankhyeya* (innumerable) and that the *Buddhas* are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.¹⁴² Finally, the *Lotus Sūtra* states that:

At that time Shākyamunibuddha’s emanations in the eastern quarter, Buddhas of the lands equal in number to the sands of a hundred thousand myriad of millions of Ganges rivers, each Buddha preaching Dharma, assembled in this place, Buddhas of ten directions all gathering in order and sitting in the eight quarters.¹⁴³

Although the previous paragraphs convey the multiplicity of Buddhas there are still Buddhist writings which points in the other direction i.e., towards an underlying unity beyond the multiplicity of Buddhas. For example, the *Milindapanha* states that:

There is not distinction between any of the Buddhas in physical beauty, moral habit, concentration, wisdom, cognition and insight . . . for all Buddhas are exactly the same as regards Buddha-dhammas.¹⁴⁴

This text only treats the physical, moral and mental qualities, but the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṅgraha* and the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* teach the unity of all the Buddhas.¹⁴⁵ Parrinder writes that the unity and identity of all the Buddhas is implied in the concept of the *Dharma-kāya* (Truth or Cosmic Body), and “therefore *the* Buddha was actually *all* the Buddhas of the past.” He labels this idea as a sort of “universal pantheism or rather pan-Buddhism.”¹⁴⁶ Similarly, but writing about the five celestial Buddhas, Lamb also states that:

Buddhism came close to Hindu monism, not to say, monotheism, with the development of the notion of a primordial buddha behind the five celestial buddhas [Vairocana, Akshbhya, Ratnasmbhava, Amitábha, Amoghasiddhi].¹⁴⁷

Moreover, the *Lotus Sūtra* depicts the *vyūha* (manifestations, emanations) of the Buddha.¹⁴⁸ Although the two authors write about different areas of Buddhism, they reach the conclusions that there is the concept of a transcendental Buddha who unifies either the Buddhas of the past or the celestial Buddhas. Parrinder summarizes succinctly what has been said above as follows:

The Buddha is not an Incarnation or Avatar of God or any other superior being. He incarnates himself by himself. Yet there is a transcendental element, and the Buddha is a substitute-deity. The Buddha himself, or the reality behind all the Buddhas, or the Dharma-body, is ultimate and omnipotent. He is either utterly transcendent and absolute, like Brahman, or both transcendent and personal like Vishnu. In Maháyána there are countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, yet as in Theraváda there is a determined move to show that fundamentally they are all one. This is not in the sense that there is only one Buddha at a time, to guarantee his supremacy, but there is a need to get the bewildering multiplicity of Buddhas to their unity in the one Buddha or Dharma.¹⁴⁹

Jainism

The religion of Jainism was founded by Vardhamana (599-527 B.C.E.), better known as Mahávíra (great hero), or Jina (victor, conqueror). The most important concept in Jainism in the context of an idea of a chain of prophecy is the doctrine of the *Tírthankaras* (one who builds the ford, ford-finders, crossing-makers). They are also referred to as *Jinas*, or *Arhants* (saints). Together with the *Cakravartins* (wheel-turners) and other such heroes, they form the class of the venerated sixty-three personages of the Jain universal history. Together they are called *Mahápurushas* (great men).¹⁵⁰ Caillat refers to the *Tírthankaras* as “Prophets who periodically teach the world the truth of the imperishable Jain tradition” and that “Mahávíra was one of an unending succession of *tírthankaras*.”¹⁵¹ Moreover, it is noteworthy that the Jain tradition is referred to as “imperishable,” which could be seen as synonymous with an “eternal” tradition. However, what is interesting is the notion that the *Tírthankaras* occur *periodically* and in a *succession*. Thus, Jainism enumerates twenty-four *Tírthankaras* who “are said to appear at given periods in selected regions.”¹⁵² Parrinder states that this succession may be the oldest and is perhaps the origin of the development of the twenty-five Buddhas of Buddhism.¹⁵³ The twenty-four *Tírthankaras* can be enumerated as follows:

- 1) Rishabha
- 2) Ajita,
- 3) Sambhava,
- 4) Abhinandana,
- 5) Sumati,
- 6) Padmaprabha,
- 7) Supárshva,
- 8) Candraprabha,
- 9) Suvidhi (Pushpadanta),
- 10) Shítala,
- 11) Shreyámsa,
- 12) Vásupújya,
- 13) Vimala,
- 14) Ananta,
- 15) Dharma,
- 16) Shánti,
- 17) Kunthu,
- 18) Ara,
- 19) Malli,¹⁵⁴
- 20) Munisuvrata,
- 21) Nami,
- 22) (Arista)nemi,
- 23) Párshva,
- 24) Mahávíra

According to the Jain tradition, the first *Tírthankara*, Rishabha, lived eight million years ago.

Hinduism

The idea of a chain of prophecy can in Hinduism best be found in the doctrine of avatars. The concept of *avatára* is often thought of as equivalent to “incarnation,”¹⁵⁵ but etymologically speaking, the word means rather “descent” or “down-coming.”¹⁵⁶ It is also interesting that the term was historically coined fairly late and that the word *prádurbháva* (manifestation) is rather more frequent in the older texts.¹⁵⁷ Some authors suggest that the “germ of the doctrine of the Avatar” can be derived from the *Purusha*-sukta in *Rig Veda*.¹⁵⁸ Yet, the word *avatára* neither occurs in the four *Vedas*, nor in the classical *Upanishads*, but it is implicitly referred to in the later *Upanishads*.¹⁵⁹ A classic list over the *dashávatára* (ten avatars) was later established in an appendix to the great Indian epic *Mahábhárata*, called *Harivamshá* (c. 600 C.E.). The names and the numbers of the *avatars* differ in various works (from ten, twenty-two, and thirty-nine, or innumerable), but according to the *ten-avatar*-scheme¹⁶⁰ the common avatars of Vishnu are:

- 1) Fish (*matsya*),
- 2) Tortoise (*kúrma*),
- 3) Boar (*varáha*),
- 4) Man-Lion (*Nara-simha*),
- 5) Dwarf (*vámana*),
- 6) Ráma with the axe (Parashu-Ráma)
- 7) Ráma of the Rámáyana,
- 8) Krishna,
- 9) the Buddha,
- 10) Kalkin.

Although this scheme clearly differs from the Zoroastrian scheme on several points, one can still recognize a few similarities: the fact that there are *ten* “incarnations,” the Boar (*varáha*), and that both Vishnu and *Vérétraghna* appear in both animal and human forms. It is also possible to recognize a few animals that are associated with the Jain *Tírthanakaras*, e.g., Bull, Horse, Boar, and Goat. Moreover, the fourteenth *Tírthanakara*, Anantanatha, is sometimes associated with the Falcon, and *Vérétraghna* also appears as the *Váregan*-bird.

The twenty-two-*avatar*-scheme enumerates the following:

- 1) Primeval man (*Purusha*),
- 2) Boar (*varáha*),
- 3) Nárada,
- 4) Nara and Naráyána,
- 5) Kapila,
- 6) Dattátreya,
- 7) Yajna,
- 8) Rishabha,¹⁶¹
- 9) Prithu,
- 10) Fish (*matsya*),
- 11) Tortoise (*kúrma*),
- 12) Dhanvan-tari,
- 13) Mohiní,

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14) Man-Lion (*Nara-simha*), 15) Dwarf (*vámana*), 16) Ráma with the axe (*Parashu-Ráma*), 17) Veda-Vyása, 18) Ráma, 19) Bala-ráma, 20) Krishna, 21) Buddha, 22) Kalkin.

As was seen in Zoroastrianism, each *Saoshyant* was associated with “his own time” (millennium) and the three soteriological mediators after Zarathustra were concentrated to and identified with the *last* two millennia, but the Indian schemes associates a soteriological mediator with *each* age or cycle.¹⁶²

Comparisons and Conclusions

Having reviewed the idea of a chain of prophecy in the Middle Eastern, Iranian and Indian contexts, it should by now be clear that the idea of a chain of prophecy—above defined as “a sequence of religious mediators who operate between divine (supramundane) and earthly (mundane) realms”—is not the exception but rather the rule in some of the world’s great religions. Yet, it has also been shown that in the great Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) no Indian or Iranian figures could be found. Conversely, in the three Indian religions reviewed (Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism) neither Semitic nor Iranian figures could be located. Moreover, in Zoroastrianism no Semitic or Indian figures could be identified, although a few parallels could be noted between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. Even though it appears as we have three independent religious “strands” (Semitic, Iranian, Indian) it is significant that they all have, nevertheless, developed a family-resemblance of an idea of a chain of prophecy.

If one were to compare which prophets that are the most common in the Semitic strand¹⁶³ with that of the Bahá’í Faith, one would immediately recognize many of the above reviewed religious figures (except Krishna and the Báb). This comparison could be depicted as follows:

The <i>Semitic</i> Strand and the Bahá’í Faith					
Judaism	Christ	Pseudo	Mani	Islám	Bahá’í
		Adam	Adam	Adam	Adam
		Noah	Noah	Noah	Noah
Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham
Moses	Moses	Moses		Moses	Moses
	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus
				Muhammad	Muhammad
			Zarathustra		Zarathustra
			Buddha		Buddha

The only figure that occurs across all the religions in the Semitic strand is Abraham. Jesus appears in all traditions except Judaism. As was mentioned earlier it is noteworthy that neither Adam nor Noah appears in Judaism. Similarly, it is peculiar that Moses does not appear as a prophet in Manichaeism.

The <i>Iranian</i> Strand and the Bahá’í Faith	
Zoroastrianism	Bahá’í
<i>Gay-marctan</i>	(Adam) ¹⁶⁴
Zarathustra	Zarathustra
Ushedar	
Ushedarmah	
<i>Saoshyant (Astvatercta)</i>	(Shah Bahrám) ¹⁶⁵

The <i>Indian</i> Strand and the Bahá’í Faith			
Hinduism	Jainism	Buddhism	Bahá’í
Rishabha	Rishabha		
Krishna			Krishna
Buddha		Gautama	Buddha
Kalkin		Maitreya	(Kalkin/Maitreya) ¹⁶⁶

One major difference, however, between these three strands is that the Semitic and Iranian are predominantly *linear* whereas the Indian is *cyclical*. Moreover, it was also seen that of all the religious contexts reviewed, two religions—Manicheism and the Bahá'í Faith—clearly included prophets/Manifestations of God from *all three* strands.

Thus, Mání includes from the

- *Semitic* strand: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Christ, Paul
- *Indian* strand: Buddha
- *Iranian* strand: Zarathustra

Similarly, but more extensively, the Bahá'í Faith includes from the

- *Semitic* strand: Adam, Abraham, Daniel, David, Ezekiel, Hud, Isaac, Isaiah, Ishmael, Jacob, Jeremiah, Jesus Christ, Jethro, Job, Joel, John the Baptist, Joseph, Joshua, Lot, Moses, Muhammad, Noah, Sálíh, Solomon, Zachariah
- *Indian* strand: Krishna (Kalkin) and Buddha (Maitreya)
- *Iranian* strand: Zarathustra and the Báb
- *Chinese* strand: Confucius

Although Manichaeism and the Bahá'í Faith draw from similar strands, the emphasis is in both cases clearly on the *Semitic* strand. One striking difference, however, is that the Bahá'í Faith does not include Mání in its chain of prophecy.¹⁶⁷ Another difference is that Bahá'í Faith includes a *fourth* strand—the Chinese—although Confucius is *not* regarded as a Manifestation of God in the Bahá'í Faith.¹⁶⁸

Even though it was stated that we could speak of three independent strands, it is clear that scholars of religion believe that these different traditions have directly or indirectly influenced each other. For example, writing on the influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism, Duchesne-Guillemin states that:

[T]he influence of Zoroastrianism on the evolution which came to light in Judaism from the time of the Exile onwards and through the manifold contacts with Iran which were to follow. The development in Palestine of the doctrines of Apocalypse, Kingdom of God, Last Judgment, Resurrection, Man and Son of Man, Prince of this World, or Prince of Darkness, and Saviour, was to prepare a milieu capable of receiving and interpreting the message of the life, the word, and the death of Jesus.¹⁶⁹

Similarly, Amanat writes of the “Perso-Mesopotamian melting pot of the formative Islamic age” where “the Mahdí of Muslim eschatology acquired many features of his Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian predecessors.”¹⁷⁰ Amanat thus seems to be in agreement with other scholars of religion who have noticed that the idea of the *Mahdí*¹⁷¹ is part of a greater and assimilated religious heritage where the Iranian tradition of Zoroastrianism and the Semitic traditions¹⁷² have mixed and recycled ideas in a syncretistic fashion. Thus, although we may see the Semitic and Iranian traditions as distinct, we could also, as Hodgson calls it, speak of “the Irano-Semitic tradition.”¹⁷³

Yet, the idea of “the Irano-Semitic tradition” does not explain the development of the idea of a chain of prophecy in an Indian context. On this point Lamb writes that:

All Buddhists accept the phenomenon of Maitreya the future Buddha, who, according to most views, abides in Tusita heaven as a bodhisattva. Early on, Buddhism may have come under the influence of Zoroastrianism. By the beginning of the Christian era the cult of a Buddhist Messiah was widespread.¹⁷⁴

Thus, Lamb suggests a Zoroastrian influence on Buddhism. Although the Zoroastrian view of cosmos is linear, Widengren calls this the “doctrine of cyclic revelation” and he goes much further than Lamb when he states that this doctrine

is so intimately bound up with the original Zoroastrian teaching of the four successive saviours, viz. Zarathustra and the three Saoshyants, that its ancient Iranian origin cannot well be challenged . . . And last but not least: the doctrine of cyclic revelation, as an Iranian phenomenon, shows so much resemblance with the Indian avatara speculation that, in all probability, we are able to assume the existence of an ancient Indo-Iranian dogma of revelation as the real background of the doctrine of Mani in this case.¹⁷⁵

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In other words, we may speak not only of “the Irano-Semitic tradition” but of an “Indo-Iranian dogma of revelation.” Buck seems to be in agreement with this when he also refers to the concept of “cyclic revelation”:

The later Elkesaite movement had adopted Jewish-Christian ideas of cyclic revelation which show a strong affinity with the Ebionite-Christian concepts found in the Pseudo-Clementines. It appears from all of this evidence that the doctrine of cyclic revelation itself cyclically recurs, e.g. in the doctrines of Zoroastrianism, Ebionite Christianity, Manichaeism, Islam, and the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, as well as in Buddhist thought and Hindu apocalypse.¹⁷⁶

To oversimplify, a few scholars of religion seem to suggest a pattern of influence in the following manner:¹⁷⁷

(Indian Strand) Hinduism — Jainism — Buddhism

€ <

(Iranian Strand) Zoroastrianism

€

(Semitic Strand) Judaism — Christianity — Elkesaites, Ebionites, Pseudo-Clementines —
Manichaeism — Islam — Shaykhism — Bábism — the Bahá'í Faith

In this view the “Indo-Iranian dogma of revelation” lies at the core and eventually influences “the Irano-Semitic tradition.” Such a tradition is clearly expressed by Mání in the Second Century C.E. who is well aware of not only the Semitic and the Iranian strands but the Indian as well. Being a native of Babylon (Mesopotamia/modern Iraq) he was geographically situated between the Semitic and Indian strands. Aware of Zarathustra, the Buddha and the Christ, he claimed to be their fulfillment. Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh, seventeen centuries later, and although a native of Iran, it was in Baghdad, Iraq where he claimed to be the fulfillment of *all* previous prophets and manifestations of God.

Notes

* This revised and edited paper was originally presented as *The Chain of Prophecy: Progressive Revelation as a Theory of Relativity*.

- 1) I certainly hope that scholars of religion who are competent in the various religious traditions mentioned in this paper and in comparative religion one day will study this idea more in depth.
- 2) Lundberg 1996, 2000.
- 3) Etymologically the word “prophet” comes from the Greek *pro-phéta*, meaning “one who declares, an expounder.” Interestingly, the word prophet is etymologically derived from the Indo-Germanic root *BHÁ* (Skeat 1984:415) which is structurally similar to the three radicals in the Arabic *Bahá* “beauty, magnificence, splendor; brilliancy” (Wehr 1976:80).
- 4) Wittgenstein 1953.
- 5) It is noteworthy that Bahá'u'lláh here combines the words “contemplate” and “inward eye.” I ultimately interpret this to be an esoteric or meditative exercise. Although Bahá'u'lláh does not state, “look with thine outward eyes,” I will show that the idea of a chain of prophecy also can be located in various exoteric religious contexts.
- 6) “And when this process of *Progressive Revelation* culminated . . .” *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 74-75, italics added.
- 7) *Kitáb-i-`qán* 244.
- 8) *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 313-314.
- 9) *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá* 51, italics added.
- 10) *Some Answered Questions* 124, italics and clarification added.
- 11) *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 15.
- 12) *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 103, italics added, 163; *God Passes By* 10.
- 13) *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 163, italics and clarification added.
- 14) *God Passes By* 100, italics and clarification added.
- 15) *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 114-115.
- 16) From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, December 26, 1941, italics added.
- 17) CF 82, italics added.

- 18) PDC 120.
- 19) These terms are sometimes used synonymously. See *Kitáb-i-`qán* 51, 152; *Gleanings* 48; *Some Answered Questions* 23.
- 20) Ar. *mazhar-i-iláhi*. See *Kitáb-i-`qán* 33; *Gleanings* 26, 50, 59; *Some Answered Questions* 127-128.
- 21) *Gleanings* 26, 49-50. For a more detailed study on this concept see Cole 1982.
- 22) Cole 1982:1; Boykin 1982:15.
- 23) Saiedi 1997.
- 24) See *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 114-115, 103; Lundberg 2000.
- 25) *Gleanings* 48-49, italics added.
- 26) *Gleanings* 55-56.
- 27) See *Kitáb-i-`qán* 216:220.
- 28) *Some Answered Questions* 164-166:149-150.
- 29) Ar. *nabí-bi-istiqlál*.
- 30) *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 361-362, Towfigh 1989:171-74; Schaefer 1995:129.
- 31) *Some Answered Questions* 164-166.
- 32) Ar. *nabí ghayr mustaqill*.
- 33) See e.g., Towfigh 1989:171-74; Schaefer 1995:129
- 34) However, both David and Joseph are accounted as Prophets, Messengers, or “Messengers of the Word of God” in *Kitáb-i-`qán* 51, 255.
- 35) *Kitáb-i-`qán* 7-11; *Some Answered Questions* 47; 165-166, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 197-198, 221-222, 346.
- 36) *Kitáb-i-`qán* 174, italics added; *Gleanings* 20.
- 37) *Kitáb-i-`qán* 14, italics added.
- 38) *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 463.
- 39) *Gleanings* 145, italics added. Cf. *Qur`án* 6:42; 10:46, 16:33; 16:63; 35:19.
- 40) Quoted in *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*:116, italics added.
- 41) For more in-depth analyses of the Bábí religion see e.g., Browne 1918; Amanat 1989.
- 42) For a discussion on the Qá'im/Mahdí in Shí'í Islam see e.g., Sachedina 1981; Halm 1991.
- 43) SB:126, clarification added.
- 44) SB:91, italics added. Cf. SB:89.
- 45) SB:105-106.
- 46) I want to thank Dr. Stephen Lambden for this information.
- 47) Lambden 1992:135-136. Cf. MacEoin 1986:142, footnote 48.
- 48) Lambden (personal communication March, 1997).
- 49) SB:125.
- 50) For more in-depth analyses of Shaykhism see e.g., MacEoin 1979; Rafati 1990.
- 51) Rafati 1990:106, italics added.
- 52) Rafati 1990:106-108.
- 53) *El* “Ismá‘ílís” 196.
- 54) Parrinder 1970:197-98.
- 55) In Shí'í Islam it is especially the “extremist sects” (*ghuluw*) which have not only portrayed Imám ‘Alí as *superior* to the Prophet Muhammad, but have even asserted his apotheosis. See e.g., Moo sa 1988.
- 56) Quoted in MacEoin 1986:103. Cf. Abú Yazíd al-Bistámí’s claim “They said: ‘God has servants instead of Abraham, Moses and Jesus . . .’ He [Abú Yazíd] said: ‘I am all of them.’” See ‘Attár 1905:171; Friedmann 1989:144-45.
- 57) Nicholson 1950:142.
- 58) Nicholson 1950:142ff, clarification added.
- 59) Widen gren 1973:44-45.
- 60) Biljefeld 1969: 17.
- 61) *ER* “Nubúwah” : 2, italics added.

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- 62) *Qur'án* 2:87; 3:84; 40:78.
- 63) *CEI* 1989.
- 64) For a list of the prophets mentioned in the *Qur'án* see e.g., 3:36; 4:161; 6:33; 17:57.
- 65) Askari 1991:96.
- 66) Parrinder 1970:268; Biljefeld 1969:40.
- 67) Zaki 1991:42, 50.
- 68) Zaki 1991:50. See also Nadwi 1979:151-217; Noori 1981; Friedmann 1989:49-82.
- 69) Nadwi 2001, italics added.
- 70) Al-Bukhārī *Sahīh, Kitāb al-manāqib* 18 (vol. 2, p. 390).
- 71) Andrae 1960:107.
- 72) Cited in Widengren 1973:43.
- 73) *ERE* 398. See also Augustine's *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, xix, 3.
- 74) Asmussen 1975:12; Lieu 1985:23, 65.
- 75) Lieu 1985:85.
- 76) *ER* 170.
- 77) Lieu 1985:156, italics added.
- 78) Asmussen 1975:11-12; *ER* Manichaeism 166.
- 79) Erroneously attributed to Clement of Rome, the first of the "Apostolic Fathers" (d. ca. 100 C.E.), and hence the name "Pseudo-Clementines."
- 80) Cf. Matt. 5:3; Luke 4:18, 7:22.
- 81) *EER* 144.
- 82) *ABD* 261.
- 83) *ERE* "Ebionism" 145. See also Andrae 1960:100.
- 84) Schoeps 1969: 70.
- 85) Schoeps 1969: 71.
- 86) italics added. See e.g., Acts 3:22-23; 7:23.
- 87) Mark: 6:14-15; Luke 24:19; John 4:19; 6:14; 7:52.
- 88) Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24.
- 89) See Aune 1983: 124-124, 154, 187. See also Matt. 16:13-20; Mark: 6:14-16; 8:27-30; John 1:19-23.
- 90) Cf. Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-31.
- 91) italics added.
- 92) Niehaus 1995.
- 93) 1 Kings 17-19.
- 94) Matt. 11:10-14 "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. . . . For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John . . . He is the Elijah who was to come."
- 95) Cf. Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16.
- 96) Cf. Matt. 3:17 "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."
- 97) Matt. 21:33-41; italics and clarifications added. Cf. Neh. 9:26; Matt. 5:12; 23:34; Luke 11:49; Thess. 2:15.
- 98) Aune 1983: 158, 192, italics added.
- 99) Aune 1983: 175-6.
- 100) *EJ* 1160, italics added.
- 101) *EJ* 1170.
- 102) *EJ* 1175.
- 103) *EJ* 1164, italics added.
- 104) *EJ* "Prophets and Prophecy" 1154.
- 105) An acronym of *Torah* (the Law), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the Books).
- 106) *EJ* "Prophets and Prophecy" 1151. *UJC* "Prophets and Prophecy" 658.

- 107) *EJ* "Prophets and Prophecy" 1176.
- 108) Nyberg 1937:298, Duchesne-Guillemin 1952:18.
- 109) Boyce in *EI* "Apocalypt" 155.
- 110) *Yasht* 13:94.
- 111) The term *saoshyant* is, according to Nyberg 1937: 258, derived from the verb *sav-*, which also is at the root for the noun *savah* (*savá*) "salvation through the ordeal." The term *saoshyant* could be translated as "the one who provides *savah* (salvation)," in other words, a "saviour." Gnoli *ER* 69 translates *saoshyant* as "future benefactor"
- 112) *Yasna* 50:6. See also Nyberg 1937:181, Ringgren & Ström 1968:197-198.
- 113) Nyberg 1937: 337, my translation.
- 114) *Yasht* 14.
- 115) Nyberg 1937:78.
- 116) Nyberg 1937:82, my translation.
- 117) Nyberg 1937:33, my translation.
- 118) Nyberg (1937:32, 338, 437, my translation; Widengren 1971:275, 268-269.
- 119) Literally "mortal life." See also *ER* "Zoroastrianism" 584.
- 120) *Yashts* 19:86-96 and *Yasna* 46:3.
- 121) Gnoli *ER* 69. See also Gnoli's article in *ER* "Zoroastrianism" 586.
- 122) *Yasht* 19:92-93; Boyce 1984: 90.
- 123) Nyberg 1937:259.
- 124) Gnoli *ER* 69.
- 125) Boyce *EI* "Apocalypt" 156.
- 126) Nyberg 1937:34-35; Boyce 1984:21.
- 127) Nyberg 1937:34-35, my translation.
- 128) According to Boyce 1978:42 the name is derived "after Zoroaster's own words: 'May righteousness be embodied,'" which can be found in *Yasht* 43:16. Gnoli *ER*:586 translates *Astvatereta* as "he who embodies truth."
- 129) Nyberg 1937:32, my translation. See also 341-343.
- 130) Nyberg 1937:259.
- 131) Widengren 1971:268-269, my translation.
- 132) According to the Sri Lankan sources, *Dípavansa* and the *Mahávansa*, the dates Buddha's life can be estimated as 624-544 B.C.E. However, other sources (Chinese and Indian) estimate the dates 448-368 B.C.E. Thus, the discrepancies ranges to up to almost two hundred years! See *ER* 321.
- 133) Parrinder 1970:149.
- 134) Parrinder 1970:150.
- 135) *ER* 327.
- 136) By using simple arithmetic and calculating 500 (incarnations) x 80 years (an expected life-time) would amount to a time frame of a minimum of 40,000 years!
- 137) Parrinder 1970:151.
- 138) Momen 1995:35.
- 139) Parrinder 1970:173, my emphasis. This passage is reminiscent of Lord Krishna's statement in the *Bhagava Gita* 4:5-8.
- 140) Cf. the *Maháavadána Sutta* (Discourse on the Great Legend) and the *Samyutta Nikáya* which mention seven Buddhas (except Maitreya).
- 141) See Parrinder 1970: 157.
- 142) See Lamb 1994: 14.
- 143) Quoted in Lamb 1994:14. Cf. The *Avatansaka Súra* which states that "Within each atom are inconceivably many Buddhas."
- 144) Conze 1954:110-111.
- 145) Lamb 1994:20.
- 146) Parrinder 1970:178.
- 147) Lamb 1994:21, clarification added.
- 148) Parrinder 1970:179.

- 149) Parrinder 1970:180.
- 150) *ER* 535.
- 151) *ER* 535.
- 152) *ER* 535.
- 153) Parrinder 1970:181.
- 154) The *Tírthankaras* are usually only male (according to the *Digambaras*), but the nineteenth, Malli, is a female (according to the *Shvetambaras*).
- 155) For a detailed discussion on the relationship between avatar and incarnation see Parrinder 1970 who has titled his book *Avatar and Incarnation*. Gonda 1960:269 defines an avatar as an “appearance” rather than an incarnation.
- 156) “From a verb *trí*, to cross over, attain, save, with the prefix *ava*, down; and so *ava-trí*, descend into appear, become in carnate.” Parrinder 1970:19. It is interesting here to note that the verb *trí* also can mean “save.” Thus, even from an etymological point of view, to label the *avatars* as “soteriological mediators” appears to be fair.
- 157) See Abegg 1928:39 and Parrinder 1970:20. According to Parrinder 1970:71 even such a late work as the *Harivamsha* “speaks of an incarnation as a ‘manifestation’ (*pradúr bháva*) rather than *avatára*, which is a popular term.” Parrinder 1970:230, 226 further states that “It is a modern Hindu belief that the Avatars are . . . *manifestations of God* in them” or that they are “theophanies, *manifestations of the divine* in visible form.” It is also important to note that not all Hindus believe in the *avatar*-scheme as depicted in the classical texts. Parrinder 1970:100 writes that some of the modern Indian movements, e.g. Prarthana Samáj states that ‘God does not incarnate himself’ and that according to the Árya Samáj ‘the doctrine of *avatáras*, or divine incarnations, is denied’.
- 158) Parrinder 1970:16-17. *Rig Veda* 10: 90.
- 159) Parrinder 1970:20.
- 160) The different lists on the ten-avatar-scheme varies. See e.g., *Mahábhárata* (XII. 389, 104, *EM*), *Váyu Purána*, and the entry on “*Avatára*” in *ER* pp. 14-15.
- 161) Rishabha is the first Jaina *tírthankara*.
- 162) Widengren 1971:268-269.
- 163) Omitting Shaykhism and Bábism due to lack of space, but still noting that both of these enumerate the identical prophets as Islam above.
- 164) As was noted earlier *Gayó-maretan* was referred to as “primordial man,” Adam is also sometimes, e.g., *Promulgation of Universal Peace*:229, seen in the Bahá’í Faith as the progenitor of mankind.
- 165) Shoghi Effendi *God Passes By*:94-95 claims that Bahá’u’lláh is the fulfillment of the Zoroastrian expected savior Sháh Bahram. For a more in-depth analysis of this relationship see Buck 1998.
- 166) Shoghi Effendi *God Passes By*:94 claims that Bahá’u’lláh is the fulfillment of the Hindu expected savior Kalkin (“reincarnation of Krishna”) and the Buddhist Maitreya (“fifth Buddha”). For a more in-depth analysis of this relationship see Buck 1981, 1986.
- 167) One explanation of this could be that Manichaeism was a religion that ultimately “failed.”
- 168) “Confucius was not a Prophet. It is quite correct to say he is the founder of a moral system and a great reformer.” *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 41.
- 169) Duchesne-Guillemin 1952:2.
- 170) Amanat 1989:2.
- 171) From *al-Mahdí* (the guided one) and which refers, according to the twelfth *Imám* of the twelver Shí’ah, Muhammad b. Hasan al-’Askari (b. 869), also known as Muhammad al-Mahdí. The *Mahdí* is also known as *al-Qá’im* (the one who will arise, the ariser), *al-Muntazár* (the awaited one), *al-Qá’im al-Muntazár* (the awaited Qá’im), *al-Hujja* (the Proof), *Sáhib al-Amr* (Master of Command), *Sáhib al-Zamán* (Master of the Age). Other frequent terms that are related with the reappearance of the Mahdí are *qiyám* (rise), *qiyáma* (resurrection), *zuhúr* (appearance, emergence), *raj’a* (return) and *khurúj* (coming forth). See Sachedina 1981; Halm 1991; *EI* “AL-MAHDS.”
- 172) The religion of Mání and the subsequent development of Manichaeism was in itself a great example of a highly syncretistic religion, combining elements from both the Judeo-Christian and Zoroastrian traditions. See e.g., Widengren 1945, 1973; Lieu 1985, 1994.
- 173) Hodgson 1974.
- 174) Lamb 1994:31.
- 175) Widengren 1945:66.
- 176) Buck 1981: footnote 9, emphasis original.
- 177) However, the influence of the idea of the chain of prophecy must not be seen as a *direct* and unilinear process of influence. Fowler 1982:43 makes an important point in this context: “In generic resemblance, the direct line of descent is not so dominant

that the genre theory can be identified with source criticism. We need to leave room for polygenesis . . . and for more remote influences . . . Codes often come to a writer indirectly, deviously, remotely, at haphazard, rather than by simple chronological lines of descent.”

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