

Revelation and he was the inaugurator of a new religious dispensation superseding Islam.

The Shrine of the Bab and the terraces above and below it at night. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community

The Creation and Significance of the Haykal

In several of his works, the Bab gives instructions for the writing of a haykal, the pentagram or five-pointed star. In the Persian Bayan he states that the five lines that make up the frame of the pentagram create six chambers.

In the Persian and Arabic alphabet, each letter has a numerical value and this fact was used a great deal by the Bab. Five is the numerical equivalent of the letter H and six the numerical equivalent of the letter W. Together they represent the word Huwa which means "He" and is a common way of referring to God in Islamic mystical literature.[1] The word "Bab" is also equivalent to 5 (B=2, A=1, B=2). The five lines are the outer or manifest and the six chambers created are the inner or hidden. Thus the Bab (= 5) is the outer appearance or Manifestation of the Unseen and Unknowable Divinity (Huwa). In Babi and Bahá'í scripture, the Bab is called a Manifestation of God, which should be understood as the Manifestation of the Names and Attributes of God (not that he is an incarnation of God). Indeed, for Bahá'ís, the prophet-founders of all of the religions have an equal station as Manifestations of God.

The Bab specifies that the pentagram should be carried by men about their person. For women, he gives a different design of six concentric circles, thus forming five spaces in which his verses should be written. Thus the same pattern of five and six also are created in this way. This could be seen as a symbol of the fact that women and men are equal but different.[2] The haykal (temple) represents the temple of a human being, the Perfect Man, and the circle represents the Sun of Truth—both of these representing the Manifestation of God, the Bab.

Da'ira (Circle), drawn according to the instructions given by the Bab. From *Qismati az Alvah-i Khatt-i Nuqtah-'i Ula va Aqa Sayyid Husayn Yazdi* ([Tehran?]: n.pub., n.d.), p. 11. Image Courtesy of the Afnan Library

The wearing of amulets containing passages of the Qur'an as a protective talisman is a common custom among Muslims, usually believed to bring good luck or to give protection. The Bab did not prohibit such practices but rather wanted to educate his followers gradually away from them. He saw their function more as a spiritual protection rather than a physical one. He wanted to direct the thoughts of his followers towards their symbolic meaning, towards God and the Manifestation of God, who guides humanity. In the Persian Bayan, the Bab states that the six chambers within the pentagram and the five partitions made by the six circles in the da'ira should be filled with verses from his writings, but he leaves the creator of the pentagram free to choose which writings to place there. The important point that the Bab makes in this passage, however, is that the purpose of this is not to achieve some magical

effect but rather that what is written on the paper should appear in the soul of that person.[3] In other words that they should become the embodiment of the Divine attributes contained in the passages from his writings. And so, men are called the "possessors of the pentagram (haykals)" and women are called the "possessors of the circle (da'ira)", not just because that is what each carries but because the Manifestation of the Names and Attributes of God is enshrined within the heart of each individual.[4] Bahá'u'lláh was later to put this more succinctly thus (Arabic Hidden Words, no. 13):

Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.

The second important point that the Bab makes in this passage is that his intention in asking his followers to carry these pentagrams and circles is that by having their attention constantly turned towards God, his followers will, in the day when the next Manifestation of God appears, immediately turn to him.

The British Library haykal of the Bab

The haykal which the British Library holds (Or 6887) is on a large sheet of pale pink paper (27.5cm x 40.5cm) in the exquisitely beautiful and carefully written handwriting of the Bab. Although the words are written very small—such that a magnifying glass is necessary to read it—almost every word is clearly legible and elegantly formed. There is no indication of the person for whom this haykal was written. It is possible to speculate that it was written towards the end of the Bab's life because it is similar in wording to such works as the *Kitab al-Asma'* and the *Panj Sha'n*, which were written while the Bab was imprisoned in isolated fortresses in the northwest of Iran in the last three years of his life.

Close-up of the Haykal of the Bab at twice magnification showing the detail of his writing (BL Or 6887). Public Domain

In many religions, there is a tradition of repetitive chanting of short significant phrases; for example dhikr in Sufism, hesychasm in Orthodox Christianity and mantras in Hinduism and Buddhism. This haykal of the Bab is similar in that it comprises repetitions of short rhymed and rhythmical sentences. As with many other writings of the Bab, it is clear that the words are intended to be chanted out loud and experienced as much as understood. The performative aspect is at least as important as the intellectual. The performative nature of the Bab's own composition of such works and the effect it had on others can be gleaned from an incident that is recorded about him. This occurred in Isfahan in the house of the Imam-Jum'ih (the leader of Friday prayers), one of the religious dignitaries of the city, which at that time was the foremost centre for religious studies in Iran. The Bab was accommodated in this house for the first period of his stay in Isfahan and many of the clerics and religious students in the city would come in the afternoons and evenings to hear him speak and to ask him questions. When asked to reveal a commentary on the Surat al-'Asr (Qur'an 103), the Bab began to chant and:

They seemed as if bewitched by the magic of His voice. Instinctively they started to their feet and, together with the Imám-Jum'ih, reverently kissed the hem of His garment. Mullá Muhammad-Taqíy-i-Haratí, an eminent mujtahid, broke out into a sudden expression of exultation and praise. "Peerless and unique," he exclaimed, "as are the words which have streamed from this pen, to be able to reveal, within so short a time and in so legible a writing, so great a number of verses as to equal a fourth, nay a third, of the Qur'án, is in itself an achievement such as no mortal, without the intervention of God, could hope to perform." (The Dawn-Breakers, (ed. and trans. Shoghi Effendi), p. 202

The content of the haykal may be described as a paean of praise to God. The words consist of repeated rhymed and rhythmic sentences, such as:

All the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever lieth between them are God's, and His power is supreme over all things.

Unto God belong the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever lieth between them, and He, in truth, is potent over all things.

Nothing whatsoever can escape His knowledge.

Unto God belong the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever lieth between them, and He, in truth, hath knowledge of all things.

Nothing whatsoever in the whole of creation can thwart His Purpose.

He calleth into being whatsoever He willeth at His behest.

Perhaps the most interesting of these repeated phrases, however, is the one that forms the outline of the haykal. The five lines that form the frame of the haykal are formed from one repeated sentence (and then the six chambers thus formed are filled with the other repeated sentences). The repeated sentence that forms the lines of the frame is:

On that Day, the Kingdom shall be God's, the Incomparable, the Most Manifest.

Given what has been said above about the Bab's stated intention that these haykals be a constant reminder to his followers about the need for them to watch attentively for the coming of "Him whom God shall make manifest" and to obey him when he comes, we can read the Words "On that Day" as meaning "On the Day of the coming of 'Him whom God shall make manifest'". In addition, given that the most manifest aspect of God is the Manifestation of God (the founder-prophets of the major religions), the words "the Kingdom [or sovereignty or dominion, mulk] shall be God's, the Incomparable, the Most Manifest" also points to "Him whom God shall make manifest", the next of these Manifestations of God to come after the Bab. And so this key sentence that frames all the other sentences in this haykal can be considered to say: "On the Day of the coming of Him whom God shall make manifest, sovereignty shall belong to him." [5] Bahá'u'lláh claimed, and Bahá'ís believe that, "He whom God shall make manifest" is Bahá'u'lláh. For example, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the Kitáb-i Aqdas ('the Most Holy Book'):

O people of the Bayan [followers of the Bab]! Fear ye the Most Merciful and consider what He [the Bab] hath revealed in another passage. He said: "The Qiblih [direction of prayer] is indeed He Whom God will make manifest; whenever He moveth, it moveth, until He shall come to rest." Thus was it set down by the Supreme Ordainer when He desired to make mention of this Most Great Beauty [i.e. Bahá'u'lláh himself].

Further reading

Peter Smith, "An introduction to the Bahá'í Faith" in British Library, Discovering Sacred Texts

Moojan Momen, "Bahá'í sacred texts," in British Library, Discovering Sacred Texts

——, "Central figures of the Bahá'í Faith," in British Library, Discovering Sacred Texts

——, "Marking the bicentenary of the birth of the Bab"

Notes:

[1] Persian Bayan, vahid 4, chapter 5.

[2] To be more precise, the Bab says that each circle is a unity (vahid, numerologically equivalent to 19) and so the five circles are equivalent to lillah (for God, numerologically equivalent to 95). Thus both the pentagram (Huwa) and the circle (lillah) are pointers to God.

[3] Persian Bayan, vahid 4, chapter 5.

[4] Nader Saiedi, Gate of the Heart ([Waterloo, Ont]: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008), pp. 329-330.

[5] I am grateful to Dr Omid Ghaemmaghami for his suggestion regarding this point and for his assistance with the provisional translation of these passages.

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