

Questions on the Bayan

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I'm delighted that my posting of some of the early chapters of the Bayan has already provoked so much comment. I can't promise to answer all your queries (and I dread how many more may come as I post more of the text), but I'll do what I can. For ease of reference, I've copied your text and will place my answers in the appropriate place.

Comments and Questions, Part 1

In the first chapter of the number of All Things, the decree which God - praised be He and glorified - has rendered obligatory is the declaration: 'there is no god but God, truly, truly'. Wherefore, the whole of the Bayan shall return to this declaration, and the appearance of a new creation shall take place from it.

QUESTIONS: First, regarding this obligatory declaration "There is no god but God, truly, truly", whatever happened to this? Did it get specifically revoked somewhere along the line? What replaced it and why do Bahá'ís not consider themselves obliged to say it? What were the parameters of when it was to be said, how many times, etc.? It seems to be like the "Bismillah" at the beginning of the Qur'an. Denis, is the first 'god' a small g on purpose? How many letters and syllables do these words constitute in the original. Is there any Abjad significance to these letters or their word-sums or overall sums?

ANSWERS: I really don't know. Like a lot of Babi regulations (see my book on ritual for more examples), this just seems never to have got off the ground. To be honest, no individual Babi could have kept up with all the obligations and requirements put on him in the Bayan and elsewhere. I think a lot of these were simply ignored in the Bahá'í period.

The nearest Babi equivalent to the Bismillah is *Bismi 'llah al-amna' al-aqdas*, which appears at the head of the Bayan and many other places.

I always translate *ilaha* in *la ilaha illa 'llah* with a small g, which surely gets across the idea of plurality.

As you might have guessed, it's 19 letters. Syllables don't count. I'm sure there Abjad significances, but if I sit down and calculate them all I'll never finish the translation!

The recognition of this declaration is conditional on recognition of the Point of the Bayan, which God has made the essence of the Letters of the Seven.

QUESTION: We've heard about the Letters of the Living, but what are the Letters of the Seven?

ANSWER: The Bab (Ignoring the doubled *mim*, 'Ali Muhammad - ayn, lam, ya, mim, ha', mim, dal)

Whoever realizes that
he is the
Point of the Qur'an in his end and the Point of the Bayan in his
beginning, and that he is the Primal Will that exists in its own self,
through whose decree all things are created and in whom they subsist, his
essence has borne witness to the singleness of his Lord.

COMMENT: I just want to be sure here. In the first sentence, does the 'he' refer reflexively back to 'whoever', or does it refer back to the Bab, to the 'Point of the Bayan'? Are we being told to look into our own selves, or to the Bab? Or is the translator leaving this deliberately vague because the text itself is deliberately vague and the metaphysical point needs to be ambiguous?

If the 'he' refers back to each individual 'whoever', this would be giving extraordinary emphasis to the sovereignty within each individual to "realize that ... he [himself] is the Primal Will that exists in its own self." In other words, our world/self is what each of us makes of it. We eventually attain responsibility for creating and maintaining our own inner world. Our "I" is the transcendence immanent within us, the god of our own inner world, as God with a big G is the transcendence within and the "I" of, the All, the big world of which I am a part.

If it refers back exclusively to the Bab, however, then what inner richness is this statement supposed to carry with it by mental association in the reader of this passage? Is it, "Bab = Gate in Arabic, and gate means gate to the new world order, to the Kingdom of God on earth?"

ANSWER: It definitely refers to 'the Point of the Qur'an' etc. The Arabic pronoun used is 'ha', agreeing with *nuqta*. I'll leave you to work out the metaphysical implications.

But whoever has not
believed
in him is rejected and shall enter the fire. What fire is further removed than he who has not believed in him?

QUESTION: Can anyone explain to me why 'belief' is so central here, either theologically or historically? I am sorry if this sounds dumb, but I really wrestle with this. I am the type of person who gags at public displays of "mere beliefs" and at the carnage that conflicts of "beliefs" have wrecked upon humanity and for whom Karl Popper's statement "I do not believe in beliefs" came like a lightning bolt illumination from heaven. Does it have anything to do with the inability of many of the Bab's followers to have personal contact with him at various periods because of the Bab's

imprisonment? Or is there a more subtle, general systems sense of this, i.e., we have to project a feed-forward signal (a "belief") into the realm of our own latent powers, our own potentialities, in order to activate them and to get from them a feedback signal into our actuality-state?

ANSWER: This is too big a question to answer easily. If you read more of the Bayan, you'll find that the whole book revolves around one basic concept: affirmation and denial, and the division of men accordingly. I'm also very big on Popper, by the way.

And he who has believed shall enter
into affirmation.

COMMENT: This carries forward what I meant by the general systems function of "belief": affirmation can proceed on the basis of feedback from our own powers (by their signal of being 'ready and able') only after the feed-forward signal has gone into the realm of those powers (our potentiality) (or perhaps into what Bennett calls our hyparchic present) and has probed and activated those potentialities.

ANSWER: I didn't understand any of that.

What paradise is more
exalted than the one who
believes in him?

QUESTION: Here a "paradise" seems to be referred to as a "who". Is this correct?

ANSWER: Yup. This book gets very complicated. Paradise and hell are part of the affirmation/denial polarity. You'll find further unusual examples of both.

It is a declaration that
has praised and
magnified and extolled and
sanctified and glorified its Lord at morn and eventide.

QUESTION: Morn and eventide again being symbols of the 1 and the 9, the beginning and the end?

ANSWER: No idea.

Regard not this
declaration except as you look
upon the sun in the heavens,
and regard not him who believes in him except as you regard the mirror.

QUESTION: the first "him" refers to whom? The second "him" refers to whom?

ANSWER: Him one is any believer, him two is the Primal Point.

COMMENT: From the dyad of the beginning and the end, we move into a

dynamic, triadic metaphor of sun-light-mirror.

ANSWER: Could be, but I think you've lost me again.

QUESTION: Does anyone know when the mirror first entered into human technology and when the "mirror" metaphor first entered into human sacred literature? (Of course, any culture familiar with open water would have experienced the phenomenon of mirror reflection.) I know the mirror metaphor goes back at least to Buddhism. I know the ancient Egyptians had mirrors, although I do not know whether it figures in their sacred literature.

ANSWER: There are remarks on this in the introduction to Ralph Austin's translation of Ibn al-'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam*, where the mirror image is central. The old mirrors were polished metal (and Ralph makes the point that they would not have given an accurate reflection).

Indeed, whosoever
believes in the essence of
the Letters of the Seven, his
inner being shall be given assistance by one of the names of God, praised
be He and glorified, and his outer being shall be a leaf among the leaves
of the Tree of Affirmation.

QUESTION: The essence of the Letters of Seven, would, I assume, be the middle point? i.e.: Now, are the 'names of God' in this context the other six Letters or points? What is the Abjad equivalent of "Letters of Seven"? Are there specific names of God with which the six "letters" are associated? Does this ring any bells with Zoroastrian mythology of Ahura Mazda and the six Amesha Spentas?

ANSWER: As before, the Letters of the Seven refers to the Bab. Forget about the rest.

All things return to this
one thing,
and all things are created through this one thing.

COMMENT: I am reminded of the Pythagorean enigma tradition that the "decad is the essence of number" (by number I would understand creation) and how this is represented by the Pythagorean Tetraktys, namely the symbol of the equilateral triangle consisting of 10 points -- 1 in the center and 9 around the perimeter.

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This symbol, which was considered sacred by the Pythagoreans, is, to me, highly resonant with meaning. It combines the Exclusive One and the Exclusive Many into an Inclusive One. More specifically, it combines the Monad, the Dyad (essence and manifestation, 1/9), the Triad (the equilateral triangle, which is the product of the monad and the dyad coupled with a symmetry requirement), the tetrad (the four horizontal lines

of dots), and the heptad (there are 7 vertical lines of dots). The nine dots around the perimeter remind us in themselves of the 'number of Baha' ('baha' meaning 'glory') and, for those who are "into" it, the nine-pointed configuration of the enneagram. (Notice that the only odd number up to 9 not included here is 5, the number of the Bab.)

ANSWER: I don't think the Bab had this in mind.

This one thing shall be,
in the next resurrection, none other than he whom God shall manifest, who,
in every degree, utters the words, 'Verily, I am God, no god is there
beside Me, the Lord of all things. All save Me is my creation. Wherefore,
O My Creation, worship Me!'

COMMENT: Worship Me = attract yourselves to the Center in order to be whole. Bahá'ís interpret "he whom God shall manifest" as referring to Bahá'u'lláh ('The Glory of the Lord'). Is there any Abjad connection between the sums of these two phrases?

ANSWER: *man yuzhiruhu 'llah* comes out as 1276 and Baha' Allah as 75. Baha' on its own is 9, if you count the hamza. I can't compute anything significant, but no doubt somebody can.

And know that he is the
mirror of God, from
whom the mirror of the
physical universe (mulk) is rendered luminous, which is made up of the
Letters of the Living.

COMMENT: In the Babi religion, there were 18 Letters of the Living (initial disciples of the Bab), with the Bab himself forming the 19th element to form the 'number of all things', correct? 18 is also twice the 'number of Baha' (9). Does this possibly indicate the "step-down transformer" arrangement by which the "light of God" is increasingly de-intensified and dispersed into the Creation?

ANSWER; I haven't a clue. I don't even know what a 'step-down transformer' is, but it's nice to know God has one all the same.

In him none can be seen
except God

Himself. Whoever in the Bayan utters the declaration, 'there is no god but God', turns towards God through him, for his creation began in him and to him his creation shall return.

The fruit of this knowledge is that, at the time of the appearance of him whom God shall manifest, you should not say, 'we say "there is no god but God" and this is the basis of religion'. For what you say is but a reflection from his sun, which has shone forth in his first manifestation.

He is more worthy of this declaration in his own self than are the realities of all created things, for if the mirror should say 'the sun is

in me', it is evident to the sun that it is but its reflection speaking.

O creation of the Bayan, we have caused you to know the exaltation of your existence in the declaration of your Lord, that you may not be veiled by the truth from him whom God shall manifest on the Day of Resurrection. That of which you speak resembles its appearance in your hearts and that concerning which he speaks.

QUESTION: the "declaration of your Lord" refers specifically back to the phrase at the beginning of the text? Or to the Bab's prophetic announcement? Or to the Bab's general revelation?

I suspect it refers back to the phrase at the beginning.

In the last sentence ("That of which you speak ..."), again, what does "its" refer to? And who is 'he' in the next phrase: the Bab? "him whom God shall manifest"?

ANSWER: I have to admit that the Arabic original isn't all that clear. If anyone else with access to the text cares to comment, I'd be grateful. Something may be missing.

That it is to which God
has
borne witness in Himself, that there is no god but He, the Preserver, the Self-Subsistent.

QUESTION: what is "That..." referring to? To the following "that there is no god but He..."?

ANSWER: As I understand it, yes.

In this day, whoever in the Qur'an should utter this declaration, which is the essence of the faith, it cannot be doubted that he shall have uttered what Muhammad, the Messenger of God, uttered before this. The sun of this declaration was in his (Muhammad's) heart, and its reflection shone forth in those who utter (that declaration) today. Wherefore, it returns to him in his second appearance, which is the appearance of the Point of the Bayan, not in his first appearance, for in his first revelation the tree of oneness had not been raised up in the realities of created beings. Now that one thousand two hundred and seventy years have passed, this tree has reached the stage of fruition. Everyone in whom there is a reflection of that sun of the Point of the Qur'an, which is identical with the Point of the Bayan, must needs be manifested before him.

QUESTION: where does 1270 come from? I thought the year of the Bab's declaration was 1260 AH.

ANSWER: Not by the Bab's computation. He calculated all his dates from the year of Muhammad's Call (bi'tha), which is 10 years before the Hijra.

I have used as an example the highest declaration, upon which the faith of all men depends. The beginning of faith is confirmed through its utterance, and all speak it at the moment of death and finally return to it.

QUESTION: Does this mean that we literally should speak this phrase upon our death-bed, so to speak, or that our own inner being, of its own nature, recognizes and "utters" this truth in the face of death?

ANSWER: I defer to higher authority on this one.

Wherefore, the reflections of the mirrors return only to that in which they had their origin. If the mirror should remove that portion of the sun's reflection that lies within it, it will return to it [the sun], for that is where it had its inception. Both its return and its going back exist in nothing but the limitation imposed upon it by being nothing more than a mirror.

COMMENT: All these "it" references are a bit confusing, and the metaphor itself is confusing. If I interpret correctly, the reflection of the mirrors (i.e., the light in the mirrors) returns to its origin, the sun. Of course this is not unique to the light, since *everything* returns to the Source. The metaphor continues, however, by saying that if the mirror, which is the inner being of the human being particularly in its conscious aspects, should "remove" the light reflected in it, i.e., if it turns itself away from the sun, "it" (the light) will return to "it" (the sun). Well, this is a bit confusing, since in the world of physics, light which is not reflected does not "return" to the sun physically; it just keeps on going outward into space. What it retains, I guess one could say, is its purity as original sunlight, its quality of not having been reflected. It is a bit stretched to say that it "returns" to the sun. I guess the deeper point is that not reflecting the sun is no loss to the sun but is a loss to that which needs the light in order to function.

ANSWER: I'm sorry about the 'it's, but I'm trying to keep close to the original.

Since the exaltation of the word of the Qur'an in former times and the elevation of the word of the Bayan after it may be considered thus when face to face with the Sun of Reality, what is the state of those matters that are derived from that word, matters such as the recognition of God's names, or those of the Prophet, the Imams of Guidance, the Gates of Guidance, as well as secondary questions without number or end? Anyone who has been veiled by one of these things from the reality that is the

source of his existence, and unto which it returns, should he belong to the Tree of Affirmation and should the sign of his oneness be a token of the Sun, well and good;

QUESTION: What does "should the sign of his oneness be a token of the Sun" mean? What I am reading here is that even if someone is veiled by a secondary reflection from recognizing the primary reflection of the Sun, it's OK as long as X is the case, but I do not understand what X is.

ANSWER: I can't easily elucidate this. It should mean something like 'should his entire being reflect the Sun of Reality', but I could well be wrong.

but, God forbid, should
it not be a token of it,
he would be unworthy of
any mention.

For how often did those individuals who associated themselves with the Qur'an issue decrees contrary to what God had revealed. This was mentioned with respect to their realities, not with regard to what is connected to the realities;

QUESTION: Here "realities" means their own inner being? "What is connected to their realities" means secondary, outer circumstances, words, etc.?

ANSWER: Unless there's a slip of the pen here, I imagine that's broadly right.

for whatever connects
itself to anything but
God will return to the
reality of that thing. And since its reality is not a token of God, it is
not mentioned in His presence.

QUESTION: Again, what is "its" referring to? To "whatever" or to "that thing"? Why is it said here that "its reality is not a token of God"?

ANSWER: I think of 'that thing'. I don't know why it's not a token of God.

But whatever is
connected to true realities will return to them. If they are signs
(naturally) situated within the mirrors of their own hearts and not
(artificially) placed there, they will return to their own seats in the
beginning and at the end.

QUESTION: Is "they" in the second sentence referring to "whatever" or to "true realities"? I can see why a translator would have a hard time with this text.

ANSWER: True realities, I think. It's often a nightmare of a text for this sort of reason.

Since the sun has been

shining from eternity,
those mirrors have at all
times been tokens of it;

QUESTION: "those" refers to what, now?

ANSWER: I'm starting to flag here. It should say earlier in the text.

God's grace has never
been interrupted under any conditions, nor shall it ever come to an end.

QUESTION: Again, I feel I am missing something in this 'token' language. A token is a sign, indication, or symbol of something other than itself. something which may serve as a sign of genuineness. Archaically, it can refer to a signal. Can someone give me a concrete example of what is being spoken of here by the Bab?

ANSWER: Not offhand.

Whosoever says: 'God,
God is my Lord, and I
associate no-one with my Lord.

The Essence of the Letters of the Seven is the Gate of God [bab Allah], and I do not believe in any gate other than him'; (whoever says this) and believes in the one God shall manifest, such a man has attained to this first gate of the first unity. Blessed be they who have attained to the bounty of a mighty day, the day on which all shall bring themselves into the presence of God, their Lord.

COMMENT: Here again the "shall bring themselves into the presence of God" is indicative of an active, self-evolving role on the part of those who are blessed.

I hope the above (and the preceding answers) help a little. It is a difficult text. Obviously deciding on an interpretation can help make the translation run more easily, but I'm frequently unable to make an arbitrary decision and prefer to leave things as vague as they are in the original.

I don't think I can keep up answering queries at this rate, however, since it will interfere with my plan to keep on typing out my translation and then moving on with more of it. But there should be other people on h-bahai who can do that if you're keen to keep on reading and asking questions at this rate. I do hope you continue to enjoy it.