

# Reflections on *The Four Valleys* of Bahá'u'lláh

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## *Abstract*

*The Four Valleys* was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad in a mystical language and style, in response to a request made by a prominent Sufi. As such, the text employs traditional Sufi concepts, language, and symbolism, and studies of *The Four Valleys* often address this context. However, when the text is studied with a focus on a different context—the totality of the Bahá'í Writings—it becomes evident that its main purpose is to guide spiritual wayfarers to the recognition of the Manifestation of God—Bahá'u'lláh Himself, as revealed after the composition of this work. Furthermore, when the two paradigms discernable in the text—four parallel paths towards God and the four stages of a single path—are seen as complementary to each other, new insights into humankind's nature and capacities are revealed. Such a reading can point to practices that help the wayfarer to maintain a balance between various human capabilities and potentials while attempting to acquire the full range of human perfections, as prescribed in the Bahá'í Writings.

## *Résumé*

*Les Quatre Vallées* ont été révélées par Bahá'u'lláh, à Bagdad, dans un langage et un style mystiques, en réponse à une demande formulée par un soufi éminent. De ce fait, le texte utilise des concepts,

un langage et une symbolique soufis traditionnels, et les études portant sur *Les Quatre Vallées* sont souvent réalisées dans ce contexte. Cependant, lorsqu'on étudie cette œuvre dans un contexte différent – l'ensemble des écrits bahá'ís – il devient évident que son objectif principal est de guider le voyageur spirituel vers la reconnaissance de la Manifestation de Dieu, soit Bahá'u'lláh lui-même, telle qu'elle a été révélée après la composition de cet ouvrage. De plus, lorsque les deux paradigmes que l'on peut discerner dans le texte – quatre chemins parallèles vers Dieu et les quatre étapes d'un seul chemin – sont perçus comme complémentaires l'un de l'autre, on constate toute l'étendue de la vision de l'œuvre quant à la nature et aux capacités de l'humanité. Le lecteur est ainsi guidé vers des pratiques de vie holistiques qui lui permettent de maintenir un équilibre entre les diverses capacités et potentialités humaines tout en essayant d'acquérir la gamme complète des perfections humaines, comme le prescrivent les écrits bahá'ís.

## *Resumen*

*Los Cuatro Valles* fue revelado por Bahá'u'lláh en Bagdad en un lenguaje y estilo místico, como respuesta a una petición que le hizo un Sufí prominente. Como tal, el texto emplea conceptos lenguaje y simbolismo Sufí tradicional, y los estudios de *Los Cuatro Valles* seguido abordan ese contexto. Sin embargo, cuando se estudia con un enfoque en un contexto diferente – la totalidad de los Escritos Bahá'ís – se vuelve evidente que su propósito principal es guiar a los caminantes espirituales al reconocimiento de la Manifestación de Dios, Bahá'u'lláh Mismo, tal como se reveló después de la composición de esta obra. Además, cuando los dos paradigmas discernibles en este

texto – los cuatro senderos paralelos que conducen hacia Dios y las cuatro etapas de un solo sendero – se entienden como complementos el uno del otro, la amplitud del conocimiento que imparte *Los Cuatro Valles* con respecto a la naturaleza y capacidades de la humanidad es revelada, guiando al lector hacia prácticas de vida holísticas que nos permiten tener una armonía entre varias capacidades y potenciales humanas al tratar de adquirir una variedad completa de perfecciones humanas, tal como se prescribe en los Escritos Bahá'ís.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes that there is a thematic coherence between *The Four Valleys*, an early mystical work of Bahá'u'lláh, and His later revealed works—indeed, all the sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>1</sup> This coherence is not merely in terms of a common spiritual, and sometimes mystical, perspective in all of these works. A careful reading of the text of *The Four Valleys* reveals that Bahá'u'lláh is alluding, in an enigmatic style particular to mystical language, to the advent of His own Revelation. In other words, this text—which was revealed soon after Baha'u'llah's return from Sulaymáníyyih—functions as a harbinger

for the advent of the new Manifestation of God, bearing a new Revelation that will convey truth in various modes, including, but not limited to, mystical expression. Understanding the composition of *The Four Valleys* as part of Bahá'u'lláh initiation, soon after His return to Baghdad, of a historical process of revelation, resonates with Shoghi Effendi's description of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His station in the Garden of Ridván: “So momentous a Declaration may well be regarded both as the logical consummation of that revolutionizing process which was initiated by Himself upon His return from Sulaymáníyyih, and as a prelude to the final proclamation of that same Mission to the world and its rulers from Adrianople” (*God Passes By* 151). Furthermore, in *The Four Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh provides a glimpse of the substance of the new Revelation, touching on some of its philosophical and theological underpinnings, and the principles it contains for the development of individuals and the associated progress of society. In that sense, *The Four Valleys* contains the nucleus of Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humankind, which was to be gradually revealed throughout His Revelation. In the course of exploring these allusive qualities of *The Four Valleys*, this paper will also show that a reading of the text as elucidating two complementary paradigms—four parallel paths towards the divine, and four stages of a single path—leads to a balanced and comprehensive understanding of human nature. This insight suggests practices

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by which the wayfarer can nurture all aspects of human perfections and qualities, as envisioned in the totality of the Bahá'í Writings.

*The Four Valleys* is a highly abstruse mystical writing of Bahá'u'lláh written soon after His return from Kurdistan on 19 March 1856 (Cameron and Momen 62), for a prominent leader of the Qádirí Sufi Order, the learned Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Raḥmán-i-Ṭálibání of Karkúk—a city in the Kurdish area of Iraq (Walbridge 157–58). The renowned Shaykh, who “commanded the unwavering allegiance of at least a hundred thousand devout followers” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 122), had presumably asked for an explanation of a treatise written by Kamálu'd-Dín Ḥusayn Khárazmí, in which the author mentions four categories of people yearning for nearness to God (Rádmíhr, *Khoosh-i-Há'í* 172).

The Text was revealed in the Persian language, abundantly quoting from or making references to the Qur'án, *ḥadīth*,<sup>2</sup> and the works of Muslim mystics and poets. Therefore, it might seem reasonable to assume that one's understanding of the text depends on a thorough knowledge of pertinent prior literature and the traditional usage of mystical language, and that full awareness of Sufi thought is necessary. In order to better understand *The Four Valleys*, some scholars such as Rádmíhr (*Samávát* 37–38) deem it necessary

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2 Sayings attributed to Islamic holy figures and particularly to the prophet Muḥammad (*ḥadīth nabaví*), but not found in the Qur'án.

to study not only Islamic mystical philosophy and literature, but also the works of Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá'í, Siyyid Kázim Ráshṭí and the Báb.

Furthermore, as the text is concise, cryptic, and highly allusive, it is a rich source for traditional research and footnoting, describing the cultural, historical, and literary contexts of its concepts, phrases, and terminologies. Such study of the text needs not only a background in Islamic mystical writings generally, but careful consideration of the four paths or stages of spiritual growth described by various Islamic mystic authors, and in particular the very treatise by Kamálu'd-Dín Ḥusayn Khárazmí that Bahá'u'lláh is believed to have been asked to explain. Rádmíhr and Savi have conducted extensive scholarly research in this vein, and have pointed to the similarities between *The Four Valleys* and the texts of Sufi adepts (Rádmíhr, *Samávát* 37; Savi 457). The works of both of these scholars are informed by a Bahá'í perspective and incorporate related Bahá'í Writings.

While the present research has greatly benefitted from the groundwork done by these and other scholars, this study attempts a different approach, largely ignoring the text's Sufi context and, instead, reading *The Four Valleys* in the context of Bahá'u'lláh's overall corpus of writings and the subsequent expositions by the central figures of the Faith.<sup>3</sup> The hope is that this partic-

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3 Nader Saiedi takes a similar approach in *Logos and Civilization* (41–42),

ular focus will complement previous research. As we can appreciate from Shoghi Effendi's elucidations, it is important to take into particular consideration the historical context in which *The Four Valleys* was revealed in order to gain an appropriate understanding of it.

Penned in the period following the Báb's martyrdom but prior to Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His own mission, *The Four Valleys*—along with *The Seven Valleys*, *The Hidden Words*, and several other mystical writings of Bahá'u'lláh—presents a very concise and allusive account of what is to be revealed later. The particular style and language of mystical discourse are uniquely apt for the purpose of bridging the past and the future. Mystical texts are enigmatic and not expected to be easily comprehensible. They can allow for interpretations that might even seem contradictory. As such, these texts assist their readers to gradually become detached from the learnings of the past and develop new understandings, at a pace appropriate to their individual capacity. Bahá'u'lláh's writings prior to the declaration of His station and mission in 1863 were primarily in this mystical mode.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, while certain readers observe in Bahá'u'lláh's mystical texts merely a reflection of old traditions, others see in them glimpses of what was to come,

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with a particular focus on the Fourth Valley and the concept of destiny (*qadar*) (79–88).

4 Saiedi observes that early revelations of Muḥammad and the Báb were in “a predominantly poetic language” (17).

particularly as they develop an understanding of both the later writings of Bahá'u'lláh and His station. Therefore, we can reasonably propose that much of the meaning of *The Four Valleys* can be best understood in light of the totality of the Bahá'í Writings, despite the seeming aim of this text to respond, in the Sufi style, to questions relevant to Sufi beliefs and practices.

In addition to a careful reading of *The Four Valleys* itself, interpretations presented here are rooted in the texts revealed by the Báb, by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and the works of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. While the intertextual analysis of this research focuses on the Bahá'í Writings, our intra-textual analysis pays special attention to the relationships among concepts presented throughout the text, how these concepts are repeated or emphasized, how they precede, supersede, or complement each other, and how the wayfarer is guided progressively along the path of ever-higher perfection.

At the same time, the readers are asked to bear in mind that certain sacred texts, in particular those of a mystical nature, are not intended to convey merely one level of meaning. Therefore, through an intertextual comprehension of the Writings and the holy books of the past, one might be able to discover multiple layers of credible meanings that are in harmony with both Sufi doctrine and the Bahá'í Faith. This activity requires the reader to reflect and contemplate, just as Bahá'u'lláh counsels in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My

words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths” (§21). Thus, this paper attempts to identify what, in the light of the totality of the Bahá'í Writings, can be understood as the primary message of the Four Valleys, while at times introducing alternative understandings.

### THE FOUR VALLEYS

Bahá'u'lláh introduces the purpose of His composition, *The Four Valleys*, in this manner: “O my eminent friend! They that seek to ascend to the heaven of mystic wayfaring are of four kinds only. I shall describe them in brief, that the signs and degrees of each may become plain and manifest to thee” (§8).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, there are four kinds of wayfarers, each treading a particular path of spiritual progress. Bahá'u'lláh begins the introduction to each valley by mentioning a certain attribute of God as the objective which the wayfarers of that particular path pursue. The paths are different in that their final objective is stated differently; one can conclude that each type of wayfarer possesses a certain character, and particular dispositions and capacities, based on which they select their particular objective and path. The objectives which these different types of

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5 Unless indicated otherwise, throughout this paper the notation “§” refers to paragraph numbers of *The Four Valleys* or, when specifically stated, *The Seven Valleys*, as they appear in *The Call of the Divine Beloved*.

wayfarers seek to approach are, in the order of the valleys, “the Sanctuary of the Desired One” (§9), “the Court of the All Praised” (§15), “the Abode of the Lodestone of hearts” (§20), and “the Beauty of the Beloved” (§28).

Before exploring how the text of each valley is illumined by the context of the Writings as a whole, a couple of preliminary points which will inform that exploration should be addressed. First, we can ask what the wayfarer's intended destination is. As the goal in each valley is associated with an attribute or name of God, all four paths lead the wayfarer to a single sublime and divine destination. One can interpret that single divine destination in different ways. According to the common Sufi understanding it is the realm of the divine, God Himself. The accomplished wayfarers ultimately join this realm, losing their own identity (Yathrebi 176). A detailed treatment of Sufi beliefs is beyond the scope of this paper, but generally speaking the Sufi conviction is that with God's assistance and through persistent pious exertion the wayfarer can reach that supreme divine objective and become one with it.<sup>6</sup> The

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6 This is the “dying to the self and living in God” (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys* §76) which, in various Sufi models of wayfaring, is generally considered to be the ultimate destination of the mystic wayfarers' journey (Nicholson 28). The concept has been interpreted in various ways by Sufis adepts (see, for example, Yathrebi 451–65). Yet, Bahá'u'lláh considers this not to be the final point of the spiritual journey (*The Seven Valleys* §88).

Four Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh, written in the language and terminologies of the Sufis, would likely be understood in this way by a Sufi reader.

If we read the text in light of all the Writings, however, we see an important difference. We realize that, although each valley explains a certain aspect and attribute of God, these attributes are revealed to us through the intermediary Reality of the Manifestation of God, a Reality that represents God in the realm of creation. Furthermore, we understand that even the divine aspect of the Manifestation of God is beyond human comprehension and reach (Dávudí 328–29). Only through His attributes and signs can the Manifestation of God be known and that, too, is by degrees and relative to the wayfarer's capacity. This is because, in the hierarchy of existence, the lower level cannot comprehend the nature of the higher level: "differentiation of stages in the contingent world is an obstacle to understanding" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet 15*). These points are merely alluded to in the Four Valleys itself, but the reader familiar with Bahá'u'lláh's later writings on the ontology of God, His Manifestations, and human beings will understand that they are implicit. The first passage in *Gleanings*, for example, bears directly on these questions. In this prayer, Bahá'u'lláh first clarifies that human attempts to praise and understand God actually pertain to the Manifestation of God, Who is Himself "wholly subjected to [God's] sovereignty":

Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art Thou above the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy mystery, to describe Thy glory, or even to hint at the nature of Thine Essence. For whatever such strivings may accomplish, they never can hope to transcend the limitations imposed upon Thy creatures, inasmuch as these efforts are actuated by Thy decree, and are begotten of Thine invention. The loftiest sentiments which the holiest of saints can express in praise of Thee, and the deepest wisdom which the most learned of men can utter in their attempts to comprehend Thy nature, all revolve around that Center Which is wholly subjected to Thy sovereignty, Which adoreth Thy Beauty, and is propelled through the movement of Thy Pen. (*Gleanings 1:3*)

Bahá'u'lláh then continues by pointing out that even the Manifestations, inasmuch as They manifest the Self of God, cannot be properly praised and comprehended by human beings, as there is no direct relationship between the created things and the divine reality of the Manifestation of God:

Nay, forbid it, O my God, that I should have uttered such words as must of necessity imply the existence of any direct relationship between the Pen of Thy Revelation and the essence of all created things. Far, far are They Who are related to Thee above the



conception of such relationship! All comparisons and likenesses fail to do justice to the Tree of Thy Revelation, and every way is barred to the comprehension of the Manifestation of Thy Self and the Dayspring of Thy Beauty. (*Gleanings* 1:4)

Therefore, an essential aspect of The Four Valleys is its focus on the station of the Manifestation of God, a unique, divine and sublime station whose essence cannot be understood, though its attributes can be to a degree perceived and emulated. This is quite different from the Sufi belief that the wayfarer's objective is to achieve a station higher than that of the prophets and become united with God Himself.<sup>7</sup>

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7 In Sufism the objective of the wayfarer has been "Union with Reality" (*faná fi 'l-Haqq*) (Nicholson 28). *Haqq* also refers to God and, in that sense, the early prominent Persian Sufi, Báýazíd Bastámí, in relation to his own wayfaring proclaimed: "thirty years the high God was my mirror, now I am my own mirror" (Nicholson 17). His biographer explained this as meaning: "that which I was I am no more, for 'I' and 'God' is a denial of the unity of God . . . I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O Thou I!'" (Nicholson 17–18). Saiedi refers to the "frequent claims by many prominent Sufi that the station of Sufi saintliness (*viláyah*) is superior to the station of prophecy and apostolic legislation" (20). Yet, Schimmel believes that, despite some controversies among Sufis, "the traditional Sufi schools have always agreed upon the superiority of the prophet [over the Sufi saints]" (203).

The ways in which the text points to the Manifestation will be considered later in discussing each valley as a parallel path.

As a second preliminary point, we can consider in more detail the notion noted earlier, that there are two ways of understanding the four valleys in relation to each other. On one hand, the four valleys can be viewed as four different and parallel paths toward a sublime destination. Each path allows the wayfarer to make progress towards that ultimate objective. In this parallel understanding of the valleys, we cannot assume that each valley is a static state or station with fixed qualities in which a certain type of wayfarer resides. In this respect, the terms "plane" and "station" (*rutbih* and *maqám*, translated interchangeably), which refer to the valleys in the text, mean a path that one advances along,<sup>8</sup> a field in which one struggles for progress. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh says of the First Valley that "at the beginning this plane is the realm of conflict, yet it endeth in the ascent to the throne of glory" (¶9); and of the second: "On this plane, the traveller meeteth with many a trial and reverse" (¶16) and "one must make ready the receptacle and become worthy of the descent of the heavenly bestowals . . . 'For this let the striving strive!'" (¶19). The wayfarers strive, move, advance, and occasionally regress within

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8 The word "wayfarer" (*sálik*) literally means a traveler, especially on foot (among other meanings), and in mystical texts refers to the one who travels or walks on the path towards God.

their particular valleys. The text, on various occasions, explains the challenges and trial of the valleys, explicitly or implicitly advises the wayfarer on what should be done or avoided, and sets standards of excellence for the wayfarer.

Accordingly, this paper assumes that, based on an interpretation of the valleys as parallel paths, there exist different degrees of progress within each valley, leading the wayfarer nearer to the objective of that valley. If we go by Savi's interpretation that each valley can indicate a "different aspect of the mystic wayfaring of the same seeker" (80), a wayfarer can make progress in any or all of the four aspects. In that sense the four types of wayfarers can also represent four archetypes of wayfaring, reflecting the individual's inclinations and capacities, which can be different at different times in one's life. The parallel model, then, can apply either to four types of wayfarers, or the four kinds of wayfaring.

An alternative way of understanding The Four Valleys is that, in their path of progress, wayfarers sequentially move from one valley to the next—with each subsequent valley being at a higher level. In that sense, each valley specifies a certain level of progress. That would entail making progress in each valley before moving to the next. I call this paradigm the sequential model. The following exploration of how the text guides the seeker to the recognition of the Manifestation of God proceeds by first describing each of the four valleys from the perspective of the parallel

paradigm. This will be followed by an exploration of the sequential model. Ultimately, as we will see, one can arrive at the conclusion that the two models complement each other as the text does not strictly require a parallel or sequential understanding of the valleys.

### THE PARALLEL MODEL OF *THE FOUR VALLEYS*

Although *The Four Valleys* is written in a poetic and mystical language, a language that does not lend itself to a fixed and rigid structure, one can observe a general organization and a consistency of form throughout the body of the text. The description of each valley begins by mentioning the type of wayfarer that treads it and the distinct spiritual objective which the wayfarer of that valley strives for—an attribute of God or, more properly, of His Manifestation. This is immediately followed by introducing the specific theme of the valley—respectively, self, intellect, love, and the inmost heart—and then qualifying it by describing what is in fact meant by that theme and, in the case of the last two valleys, particularly emphasizing that what is meant is a mystery that cannot be readily described in words. Subsequently, the text explains in detail what is intended by treading the valley (and what is not), the tests and trials of the path, what the wayfarer needs to do or avoid doing, and the qualities of the exemplar wayfarers of that valley.



## THE FIRST VALLEY

In this valley, Self (*nafs*, at times translated as “soul”) is the path that those wayfarers in search of the Desired One pursue: “If the wayfarers be among them that seek after THE SANCTUARY OF THE DESIRED ONE, this plane pertaineth to the self—but the self which is intended is ‘the Self of God that pervadeth all His laws’” (¶9). The journey through this valley is fundamentally concerned with the transformation of the self. To see why this is so, and what this transformation entails, we can consider the implications of the “self” that this plane pertains to.

On its surface, the “Self of God” might be taken to mean God’s Essence. However, I would suggest that the way in which this very term is used elsewhere by Bahá’u’lláh shows that, in His Revelation, it consistently points to the Manifestation of God. For instance, He writes: “For the Ancient Being and Ocean of divine Truth hath eternally been exalted above the reach of all else besides Him. Therefore, the comprehension of the devoutest of mystics reverts to the recognition of the Manifestations of His Cause. They are the Self of God (*nafsu’lláh*) among His servants” (*Daryáyi-Dánish* 162).<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, in a prayer, we read that it is the Manifestation of God Who reveals God’s Self: “Him Who is the Manifestation of Thine own Self, and

the Revealer of Thy signs, and the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, and the Repository of Thy Cause” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers* 139:4). In another prayer revealed by Bahá’u’lláh we read:

From everlasting Thou hast existed, alone with no one else beside Thee, and wilt, to everlasting, continue to remain the same, in the sublimity of Thine essence and the inaccessible heights of Thy glory.

And when Thou didst purpose to make Thyself known unto men, Thou didst successively reveal the Manifestations of Thy Cause, and ordained each to be a sign of Thy Revelation among Thy people, and the Day-Spring of Thine invisible Self amidst Thy creatures. (*Prayers* 78:3–4)

For a clear equation of the Self of God with the Manifestation, we can look at how Bahá’u’lláh describes the station of His forerunner, the Báb. In an untranslated Tablet, He advises the recipient:

Say: O people of the Bayán, to what religion do you adhere and which path are you faithful to? . . . If they say “To that of the Point of the Bayán [the Báb]”. . . ask them by what proof and evidence . . . and if they say “We recognized Him by His own Self,” Say: this is a clear lie, as up to now you have not even known your own selves, how much less the Self of God that pervadeth all

<sup>9</sup> Throughout this paper, if the source cited is not in English, what is quoted is my provisional translation.

things (*nafsu'lláhu'l-qá'imah alá kull-i-shay'*).<sup>10</sup>

Then Bahá'u'lláh asks why they have not confessed to the truth of Himself, “the visible Self of God, shining as manifest as the sun” (Ishráq-i-Khávári, *Ma'idiyi-Ásmání* 26–27). Bahá'u'lláh expresses a similar concept with reference to Himself:

Say: Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My beauty but His Beauty, and in My being but His Being, and in My self but His Self, and in My movement but His Movement, and in My acquiescence but His Acquiescence, and in My pen but His Pen, the Mighty, the All-Praised. There hath not been in My soul but the Truth, and in Myself naught could be seen but God. (*Summons*, Súriy-i-Haykal ¶44, emphasis added)

Thus, when one looks at the Manifestation, one sees “but His [God's] Self . . . and in [Himself] naught could be seen but God.” It is clear from these other writings of Bahá'u'lláh that He uses the term “The Self of God” to refer to the Reality of the Manifestation of God, a reality that reveals God's names and attributes in the world of existence.<sup>11</sup>

10 This phrase resonates with “the Self of God that pervadeth all His laws,” a phrase found in the First Valley, originally from a prayer attributed to Imam ‘Alí (¶9).

11 While the object of the wayfarer is not attaining to God's Essence, the station

The Manifestation of God, then, is central to the process of transformation described in the journey of the First Valley. The nature of that transformation, too, is illumined by the context of the Bahá'í Writings as a whole. “Self” (*nafs*) in the Writings assumes a hierarchical set of meanings, as will be described later in detail. In relation to human beings, the lowest station in this hierarchy—what might be called the “lower self”—is a state and condition that is despised by God and needs to be transformed. The highest level that human beings can achieve—what we can refer to as our “higher self”—is a state that is aligned with God's Will: “This is the plane of the soul that is pleasing unto God” (¶10). Regarding the exalted station of this self, Bahá'u'lláh

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of the Manifestation of God—the Self of God—is in itself supremely lofty: as the phrase “the Self of God that pervadeth all things” suggests, the whole universe depends for its existence on the station of the Manifestation of God. As such, we observe a relationship between the notions of “Self of God”—referring to the Reality of the Manifestation of God—and “all things” (*kull-u-shay'*), the universe as a whole. Likewise, the Báb explains that the Sun of Will, i.e. the Primal Will (*mashíyyat-i-avvalíyyih*), one of His own titles, is observed in all things, because it is through the agency of the Primal Will that everything comes into existence (Bayán-i-Fársí 85). This resonates with Bahá'u'lláh's assertion in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*: “Say: It is in Our power, should We wish it, to cause all created things to expire in an instant, and, with the next, to endue them again with life” (¶75).

quotes a verse from the Qur'án (41:53): "Hence it is said: 'We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves, until it become plain to them that there is no God save Him'" (§11). The self of "themselves" in this verse of the Qur'án logically refers to the higher self that is a sign of God.

Treading the First Valley, then, means moving from the lower self towards the higher self, the station nearest to the Self of God (i.e., the Manifestation of God). Such a journey entails the realization of the higher nature of the human being, fulfilling the capacity with which it has been endowed. It is changing the self that is rejected into the self that is loved by God: "In this station the self is not rejected but beloved" (§9). It is in reference to this transformation of the self that the First Valley is described in these terms: "[a]lthough at the beginning this plane is the realm of conflict, yet it endeth in the ascent to the throne of glory" (§9). The word "conflict" (*jidál*) is of significance in relation to the nature of the transformation that needs to take place in the First Valley. Overcoming the lower self is unmistakably challenging and it has often been alluded to by the metaphor of war. Bahá'u'lláh elucidates the nature of the conflict at the heart of the transformation of the self in an untranslated Tablet:

Ye have no foe but your own self.  
Comprehend its nature, O people,  
and be not of the heedless. In no  
wise will it be satisfied; when it  
is fed its flame waxeth, and when

deprived, its appetite deepens.  
"Blessed now is he who has kept  
it pure"<sup>12</sup> in the name of His Lord,  
the Omnipotent, the Help in Peril,  
the Self-Subsisting. Say, slay it, O  
people, in my path. This is the true  
sacrifice for the love of the Mer-  
ciful. None but the sincere shall  
understand this. (*Áthár-i-Qalam-  
i-A'lá* 426)

In this last verse, by "sacrifice" Bahá'u'lláh seems to be referring to Abraham's attempt to sacrifice His son to God. Abraham is an emblem of sacrifice, a theme Bahá'u'lláh refers to in the First Valley as well, quoting a poem by Rúmi:

As it hath been said:

O Abraham of the Spirit and God's  
Friend in this day!  
Slay! Slay these four thieving  
birds of prey!  
that after death the mystery of life  
may be unravelled. (§9)

As we read in the endnote for this verse: "Here Rúmi tells a story of four evil birds which, when put to death, changed into four birds of goodness. The allegory refers to subduing evil qualities and replacing them with good" (*Call of the Beloved* 110).

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12 A reference to the Qur'án 91:7-10: "By a soul [*nafs*, self], and Him who balanced it, And breathed unto it its wickedness and its piety, Blessed now is he who hath kept it pure, And undone is he who hath corrupted it!" (Rodwell).

The formidable challenge of successfully transforming one's lower self into the self desired by God is elucidated in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: "The only people who are truly free of the 'dross of self' are the Prophets, for to be free of one's ego is a hall-mark of perfection. We humans are never going to become perfect, for perfection belongs to a realm we are not destined to enter. However, we must constantly mount higher, seek to be more perfect" (*Unfolding Destiny* 453).<sup>13</sup> The Manifestations of God hold an exalted station that no human being can reach. Taken together, then, the concept of the transformation of the self, and the identity of the Self of God with the Manifestation, along with the broader context for both of these provided in the Bahá'í Writings, clarifies the nature of the journey described in the First Valley. We can conclude that there exist varying degrees of progress for the wayfarers in the First Valley. The Sufi idea of attaining the station of the "Perfect Man" (*insán-i-kámil*)—a station equal or even higher than the station of Muḥammad, which certain Sufis believed to be an achievable objective—is replaced with the unending striving to draw ever nearer to the essentially inaccessible station of the Manifestation of God. Therefore, within the First Valley there is progress to be made toward the station of "the Self of God" by manifesting in one's

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13 In this letter, by "Prophets" is meant the Manifestations of God and not the minor prophets, as will be discussed later.

self the attributes of the Manifestation of God.

Our understanding of the concept of self in this valley can be further enriched by considering what Bahá'u'lláh might mean by stating that "[t]his station hath myriad signs and countless tokens" (¶11). In one of His tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions that there are numerous degrees and uncounted levels of the self (*nafs*), explaining fourteen levels or types that exist in the contingent world (*Makátib* 85–99).<sup>14</sup> These levels include various signs and tokens of God in nature and in the human world, but also the concepts of the destruction (*iḍmihlál*) and fall (*suqút*) of the self in human beings—concepts that relate to the most corrupt level of the self.<sup>15</sup> As such, the concepts of self in this Tablet relate to the process of transformation of the self from the most corrupt level to the loftiest.

The first three levels of the self that 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines are, in order of ascent, the mineral, vegetable, and animal realms—what we commonly call nature. The next ten are the hierarchy

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14 Refer to Rádmíhr 184–98 and Savi 332, 338–39 for a discussion of different levels of self in Islamic and Bahá'í texts.

15 This distinction between the lower and higher self in relation to human beings is important, as certain Sufi Orders (*Bekhtáshí* Sufis, and other Sufi orders referred to as "lawless dervishes") believe that, since God manifests His signs in the *whole* of existence, nothing in the world of being is undesirable—there is no right or wrong (Nicholson 95).

of the levels of self in humankind from the lowest to the loftiest, followed by the highest station in the hierarchy of selves, which belongs solely to the station of the Manifestation of God—the Self of God, as I argue, of the First Valley. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the lowest level of self in the human being as the “insistent self” (*nafs-i-ammárah*). Regarding the “human self” or “human essence”<sup>16</sup> (*nafsu ’l-insániyyah*) He writes:

Therefore, in each station it is referred to with a different term. For example, in the station of its descent to the lowest grades of animalistic selfish desires and its engagement with the vanities of the world, and its joy in wicked transitory wants and its stagnation by the chill of the world of being and its dampening of the warmth of the love of His Lord, the Most Glorious, the All-Bounteous, and its sinking in the abyss of waywardness and its vehement evil and rebellion, it is referred to as the insistent self<sup>17</sup> (*nafs ammárah*) even as He Himself hath said, and His word, verily, is the truth: “the soul is insistent on evil, unless

my Lord bestoweth His Mercy.”<sup>18</sup>  
(*Makátib* 87)

Furthermore, in relation to the insistent self, we read in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “O people of the world! Follow not the promptings of the self, for it summoneth insistently to wickedness and lust” (§64). This self is the lower nature of human beings that needs to be controlled and conquered, the self that is “rejected,” as referred to in the text of the First Valley (§9).

In contrast to the lower self that is rejected by God there exists the self that is loved by God. The highest level that human beings can achieve as defined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—the level placed below the station of the Manifestation of God—is the self that God does not despise, but, rather, is pleased with. This seems to be the ultimate objective that the wayfarer can achieve in treading the First Valley: “This is the plane of the soul that is pleasing unto God, whereof He saith: ‘Enter thou among My servants, and enter thou My Paradise’<sup>19</sup>” (§10). Here again, I suggest that the soul that is pleasing unto God can be read as the soul that is pleasing to the Manifestation of God, Who, as Bahá'u'lláh elucidates in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, has the authority to decide what is acceptable and what is not: “Say: The very life of all deeds is My good pleasure, and all things depend upon Mine

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16 In *Gleanings* Shoghi Effendi translates *nafs* as “essence,” as among the meanings of the word are “essence” and “nature.”

17 The “insistent self” is the translation adopted most often in the Bahá'í Writings for the term *nafs ammárah* mentioned in the Qur'án 12:53.

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18 Qur'án 12:53, my translation based on the previous footnote. Rodwell's is: “for the heart is prone to evil, save theirs on whom my Lord hath mercy . . .”

19 Qur'án: 89:29–30

acceptance. Read ye the Tablets that ye may know what hath been purposed in the Books of God, the All-Glorious, the Ever Bounteous" (§36).

In sum, then, when read in the context of the Bahá'í Writings as a whole, and taken as one of four parallel paths, the First Valley describes the journey of the wayfarer who, by keeping the Self of God—the Manifestation—in view as the goal, transforms her or his own self, subduing the lower nature and becoming ever more pleasing to God.

## THE SECOND VALLEY

The Second Valley is the realm of intellect (*aql*): "If the wayfarers be among them that dwell in THE COURT OF THE ALL-PRAISED, this is the station of the Intellect" (§15). This valley is associated with the faculties of reasoning, knowledge, and learning, and in the text of this valley we find concepts and terms related to education and the fostering of knowledge: "the school of God" (§15), "to seek after knowledge," "God will teach you" (§16), "[t]his station is that of the true standard of knowledge," and "[k]nowledge is a light" (§18). These concepts, viewed in light of the Writings as a whole, elucidate the relationship between knowledge and "Intellect" which is at the core of the Second Valley.

Bahá'u'lláh explains that by "Intellect" in this valley He intends "the universal divine Intellect, whose sovereignty fostereth the growth of all things, and not every vain and feeble

mind" (§15). Accordingly, the universal divine Intellect nurtures the world of creation. As was the case with the Self, Intellect in this valley refers to an aspect of the Reality of the Manifestation of God. Differentiating between the human intellect and divine Intellect, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

But the universal divine Intellect, which transcends nature, is the out-pouring grace of the pre-existent Power. It encompasses all existing realities and receives its share of the lights and mysteries of God. It is an all-knowing power, not a power of investigation and sensing. The spiritual power associated with the world of nature is the power of investigation, and it is through investigation that it discovers the realities and properties of things. But the heavenly intellectual power, which is beyond nature, encompasses, knows, and comprehends all things; is aware of the divine mysteries, truths, and inner meanings; and discovers the hidden verities of the Kingdom. This divine intellectual power is confined to the holy Manifestations and the Day-springs of prophethood. A ray of this light falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous, that they may also receive, through the holy Manifestations, a share and benefit of this power. (*Some Answered Questions* 58:4)

In a Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that, as opposed to the "lesser



intellect” (*aql-i-juz'í*, translated as “meagre reason” in *The Four Valleys* ¶15) of certain human minds, Intellect refers to the station of “the ultimate Source of knowledge,” the Manifestation of God:

By the Intellect mentioned above is meant the universal divine Mind. How often hath it been observed that certain human minds, far from being a source of guidance, have become as fetters upon the feet of the wayfarers and prevented them from treading the straight Path! The lesser intellect being thus circumscribed, one must search after Him Who is the ultimate Source of knowledge and strive to recognize Him. And should one come to acknowledge that Source round Whom every mind doth revolve, then whatsoever He should ordain is the expression of the dictates of a consummate wisdom. His very Being, even as the sun, is distinct from all else beside Him. The whole duty of man is to recognize Him; once this hath been achieved, then whatsoever He may please to ordain is binding and in full accordance with the requirements of divine wisdom.<sup>20</sup>

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20 This twin duty, recognition of “Him,” and obedience to whatever “He” ordains, along with the reference in the next sentence to the ordinances and prohibitions laid down by the Prophets, makes it clear that the “Him” referred to here is the Manifestation of God. It mirrors the opening passage of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, which

Thus have ordinances and prohibitions of every kind been laid down by the Prophets of the past, even unto the earliest times. (*Tabernacle* 2:23)

It is also clear in the Bahá'í Writings that the Manifestation is the supreme source of knowledge and enlightenment. For example, Bahá'u'lláh, referring to the Manifestations of God, says: “They are the Treasuries of Divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom” (*Gleanings* 19:3). He also refers to His own Revelation as the appearance of the sun of knowledge: “The Daystar of knowledge is manifest and the Luminary of insight hath appeared. Fortunate indeed is the one who hath attained, who hath witnessed, and who hath recognized” (*Tabernacle* 3:10). He also writes: “In such wise, we bestow upon you the fruit of the Tree of divine knowledge, that ye may gladly and joyously abide in the Riḍván of divine wisdom” (*Kitáb-i-Íqan* 12).

#### HUMAN INTELLECT

Recognizing that the Intellect referred to at the outset of the Second Valley refers primarily to the station of the Manifestation of God helps illumine

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makes the first duty the recognition of “Him who is the Dayspring of His [God’s] Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation” – an unmistakable reference to the Manifestation (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 1).

the nature of the wayfarer's journey. The wayfarer is instructed to recognize that Source of divine knowledge and benefit from His bounties. After quoting the *hadith*, "Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth" (§18), Bahá'u'lláh continues: "Wherefore, one must make ready the receptacle and become worthy of the descent of heavenly bestowals, that the all-sufficing Cup-Bearer may give one to drink of the wine of bounty from the crystal chalice of mercy. 'For this let the striving strive!'" (§19).

Yet, in contrast to the knowledge that is the fruit of the heavenly bestowals, there exists knowledge which is the product of "meagre reason" (*'aql-i-juz'í*), as we noted earlier. Regarding the limitations of the unaided human intellect Bahá'u'lláh quotes a poem: "How can meagre reason comprehend the Book, Or the spider trap a phoenix in its web?" (§15).

The context provided by the treatment of human reason in the Writings as a whole can elucidate the nature of the knowledge-centered journey of the Second Valley. While those Writings emphasize the meagerness of the human intellect from a certain perspective, they also assign great value to the God-given faculties of intellect and the power of reflection (*quvviyi mutafak-kirih*): "O people of Bahá! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being

and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 72). In the Bahá'í Faith the power of rationality is highly esteemed, and all are urged to take advantage of their capacity of intellect and reflection for acquiring sciences, crafts and arts:

Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book in this conspicuous station (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 26–27).

The Bahá'í Writings also insist that human rationality, sciences and arts are not adequate by themselves; they do not make humanity independent of spiritual education, the insight bestowed by God. Humans stand in need of the divine intellectual power, and to obtain a share of that power they must recognize the station of the Manifestation of God, as the knowledge bestowed by God can only be learned in "the school of God" (§15). Manifestations of God are divine educators. They reveal the true source of enlightenment, but to be able to attain such enlightenment

one needs to fully obey Their laws and commandments. This full obedience to divine teachers is associated with the concept of the fear of God—a fear that leads to learning, as we read in the First Valley: “Fear ye God; God will teach you” (¶18, Qur’án 2:282). This is a fear that inspires pious action as the word “fear ye” (*ittaquú*) is a derivative of the word *taqvá* meaning piety. In fact, it is only by meeting certain mental and spiritual criteria that one can qualify for acquiring knowledge bestowed by God. In *Some Answered Questions* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the characteristics of a true seeker of “the knowledge of the Sun of Truth”:

[T]he seeker must therefore be endowed with certain attributes. First, he must be fair-minded and detached from all save God. His heart must be entirely directed towards the Supreme Horizon and freed from the bondage of vain and selfish desires, for these are obstacles on the path. Furthermore, he must endure every tribulation, embody the utmost purity and sanctity, and renounce the love or hatred of all the peoples of the world, lest his love for one thing hinder him from investigating another, or his hatred for something prevent him from discerning its truth. This is the station of search, and the seeker must be endowed with these qualities and attributes—that is, until he attains this station it will be impossible for him to gain the knowledge of the Sun of Truth. (10:7)

Impurity of heart and the “bondage of vain and selfish desires” can lead one to rely solely on one’s “meagre reason” and its futile and deceitful knowledge. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqan*, Bahá'u'lláh rejects superstitious sciences and philosophies that were the source of pride for a certain clergyman, Karímkhán Kirmání, reputed as a prominent scholar of his time, one who “imagined himself a learned man and regarded the rest of the people ignorant” (185). Karímkhán had considered knowledge of more than twenty sciences as a requirement for understanding the ascent of Muḥammad to heaven, among them “the science of metaphysical abstractions, of alchemy, and natural magic.” Bahá'u'lláh continues: “Such vain and discarded learnings, this man hath regarded as the pre-requisites of the understanding of the sacred and abiding mysteries of divine Knowledge” (185–86).

Referring to the fact that knowledge obtained through “meagre reason” by itself can become a veil, preventing one from understanding spiritual truth, Bahá'u'lláh further elucidates: “We have consumed this densest of all veils, with the fire of the love of the Beloved—the veil referred to in the saying: ‘The most grievous of all veils is the veil of knowledge.’ Upon its ashes, We have reared the tabernacle of divine knowledge. We have, praise be to God, burned the “veils of glory” with the fire of the beauty of the Best-Beloved” (*Kitáb-i-Íqan* 187–88). We see that in these verses Bahá'u'lláh provides a standard for avoiding the

trap of knowledge that is derived from the human intellect alone, which becomes a veil. He advises that by the fire of “the love of the Beloved” one can burn the veil of limited knowledge and acquire “divine knowledge.”

### THE THIRD VALLEY

This valley is the realm of love: “If the lovers be among them that abide within the precincts of THE ABODE OF THE LODESTONE OF HEARTS, no soul may dwell on this kingly throne save the countenance of love” (¶20). In relation to this verse, certain terms need particular attention. The phrase “them that abide” (*‘ákifín*) often refers to devoted believers who remain or dwell in the proximity of holy places.<sup>21</sup> They reside in “the precincts,” the quarters, grounds, or areas surrounding that holy place—in this case “the abode of the Lodestone of hearts.” This is the abode housing the “kingly throne,” a throne that can only be occupied by the “countenance of love.” On this reading, the “kingly throne” is not occupied by the wayfarers of this valley; it is rather the seat of “the countenance of love.” Love in mystical texts refers to the wayfarer’s love for God. The Bahá’í Writings often refer to the love for the Manifestation of God, the One who represents God in the world of creation, as in: “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty” (Bahá’u’lláh,

Kitáb-i-Aqdas ¶4). I would argue that, in keeping with the allusions in the first two valleys to the Manifestation of God, the “countenance of love” in this valley also refers to the Reality of the Manifestation.

We come across the term “countenance” (*tal’at*, which can also mean “figure” or “shape”) referring to the Manifestation of God in several writings of Bahá’u’lláh. For instance, in the following passages from the Kitáb-i-Íqán, *tal’at* is the word translated as “Soul”:

When the Unseen, the Eternal, the Divine Essence, caused the Day Star of Muḥammad to rise above the horizon of knowledge, among the cavils which the Jewish divines raised against Him was that after Moses no Prophet should be sent of God. Yea, mention hath been made in the Scriptures of a Soul Who must needs be made manifest and Who will advance the Faith, and promote the interests of the people of Moses, so that the Law of the Mosaic Dispensation may encompass the whole earth. (¶147)

From these statements therefore it hath been made evident and manifest that should a Soul in the “End that knoweth no end” be made manifest, and arise to proclaim and uphold a Cause which in “the Beginning that hath no beginning” another Soul had proclaimed and upheld, it can be truly declared of Him Who is the Last and of Him Who was the First that they are

21 For instance, “Those who reside constantly at Jerusalem from motives of piety” (Steingass 831).

one and the same, inasmuch as both are the Exponents of one and the same Cause. (¶171)

In these cases, Soul—as a translation of *tal'at* (countenance)—refers to the Manifestations of God. We also read in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, in an explanation of biblical prophecy: “Thereupon, they will behold the countenance of the promised One, the adored Beauty, descending from heaven and riding upon the clouds” (¶74).

The use of “countenance” in reference to the Manifestation can also be found in the “Ode of the Dove,” where Bahá'u'lláh recounts His vision of the Maiden of Heaven: “The light from such a countenance so attracted me; its brightness outshone every bright sun” (45). The Maiden of Heaven whose countenance Bahá'u'lláh was enthralled by is “a symbolic personification of the divine reality of Bahá'u'lláh” (Hatcher, J., A. Hemmat and E. Hemmat 9). In the “*Rashh-i-Amá*,”<sup>22</sup> Bahá'u'lláh uses *tal'at* in a similar way, as well as its derivative *tal'*, and another term also meaning countenance (*vajh*). Thus, He refers to “that mystic truth which from His Countenance is raining down” (*Call* ¶3) and calls on the listener to “Behold the Lord’s leviathan, behold His sacred countenance” (¶12) and to “[b]ehold the Countenance Divine! Behold the Maid of Paradise!” (¶15). Given the

context of the poem, in which He is summoning creation to recognize His own dawning Manifestation, the “countenance” in each case can reasonably be interpreted as a reference to that Manifestation. Likewise, then, “the countenance of love” in the opening sentence of the Third Valley—“no soul may dwell on this kingly throne save the countenance of love”—can be perceived as the Reality of the Manifestations of God.

Bahá'u'lláh begins the explanation of this valley with: “I am powerless to describe this station or to depict it in words” (¶20). He later points out that “[i]n this station, neither the reign of the intellect is sufficient nor the rule of self” (¶22). In this valley one’s heart is drawn to God rather than knowing God through logic or comprehension. Being filled with awe and wonder at the beauty of the Beloved, the wayfarer is not in need of knowledge or reasoning:

The lovers’ teacher is the Loved  
One’s beauty,

His face their lesson and their  
only book.

Learning of wonderment, of  
longing love their duty;

Not on learned chapters and dull  
themes they look. (¶25)

Given that this valley is explicitly beyond description, much of what we might learn of it will be through this contrast and comparison that Bahá'u'lláh makes between the Love of this valley, and the Self of the First Valley and in particular the Knowledge

22 Bahá'u'lláh’s mystical poem, composed during His captivity in the *Síyáh-Chal* where He received the first intimation of His Revelation.

or Intellect of the Second Valley. An exploration of this contrast is better suited to the sequential paradigm for studying the Four Valleys, and will thus be taken up later.

## THE FOURTH VALLEY

The Fourth Valley begins with: “If the mystic knowers be among them that have attained THE BEAUTY OF THE BELOVED, this station is the throne of the inmost heart and the secret of divine guidance. This is the seat of the mystery ‘He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth’” (¶28). In these opening verses Bahá'u'lláh refers to the station of Manifestation of God by the phrase “the throne of the inmost heart,” and by the maxim “He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth.”

“Inmost heart,” is a translation for the Arabic word *fu'ád*, meaning heart. The word is used in certain cases in the Bahá'í Writings to refer to the station of the Manifestation of God. For instance, the Báb makes a reference to the Qur'anic verses about the nightly ascent of Muḥammad to heaven (53:6–8), which brought Him to within a short distance of the throne of God. The Báb then declares that His own call is issued from the light of the inmost heart in the precincts of the throne of God: “O exponents of love, hearken to My call raised in very truth from the radiance of the inmost heart, before the loftiest Point of adoration, round the exalted throne of God. He is God, the All Glorious, the Eternal”

(qtd. in Rádmíhr, *Samávát* 394). In this context the inmost heart is referring to the inner reality or the divine aspect of the Manifestation of God. Similarly, in the opening section of the Fourth Valley the word “inmost heart” is used in a context that suggests a station beyond the full attainment of human beings, the station of the Manifestation of God (though see the discussion of the sequential paradigm, below, in which “inmost heart” can also be construed as a reference to the ultimate attainment of the wayfarer).

Another allusion made to the station of the Manifestation of God is “He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth,” a saying that appears with similar translation in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* to underline the authority of the Manifestation of God:

The significance and essential purpose underlying these words is to reveal and demonstrate unto the pure in heart and the sanctified in spirit that they Who are the Luminaries of truth and the Mirrors reflecting the light of divine Unity, in whatever age and cycle they are sent down from their invisible habitations of ancient glory unto this world, to educate the souls of men and endue with grace all created things, are invariably endowed with an all-compelling power, and invested with invincible sovereignty. For these hidden Gems, these concealed and invisible Treasures, in themselves manifest and vindicate the reality



of these holy words: “Verily God doeth whatsoever He willeth, and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth.” (97)

Therefore the Fourth Valley begins by making a reference to the station of the Manifestation of God.

#### THE REVELATION OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The sequence of elucidations made by Bahá'u'lláh in the Fourth Valley further suggests that the text is primarily meant to convey the station of the Manifestations of God, while simultaneously hinting at the imminent advent of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Highlights of the systematic expositions of Bahá'u'lláh about His own station and His Revelation will be briefly discussed, followed by an exploration of the meanings of certain allusions made in this regard.

The text of the Fourth Valley begins by portraying an exalted station that cannot be fully comprehended: “a bottomless sea that none shall ever fathom” (¶28). Bahá'u'lláh also elucidates that this mystery refers to the station and authority of the Manifestations of God: “This is the seat of the mystery ‘He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth’” (¶28). He makes it clear that no human striving will suffice to understand the mystery of “He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth.” This passage merits quoting in full, for it contains one of the clearest allusions to His own station in the text:

This is the seat of the mystery “He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth.” *Should all that are in heaven and on earth attempt to unravel this exalted allusion and subtle mystery, from now until the Day whereon the Trumpet shall sound, yet would they fail to comprehend even a letter thereof, for this is the station of God’s immutable decree and His foreordained mystery.* Hence, when asked regarding this matter, He made reply: “It is a bottomless sea that none shall ever fathom.” And when the question was repeated, He answered: “It is the blackest of nights through which none can find his way.”

Whoso comprehendeth this station will assuredly conceal it, and were he to reveal but the faintest trace thereof, they would assuredly hang him from the gallows. *And yet, by God, were a true seeker to be found, I would divulge it to him;* for He saith: “Love is a distinction never conferred upon a heart possessed by fear and dread.” (¶28–29, emphasis added)

Having asserted flatly that all of humanity combined could never unravel this mystery, pertaining to the station of “God’s immutable decree and His foreordained mystery,” Baha'u'llah then claims that He *can* divulge the station, and would in fact do so “were a true seeker to be found.” He alludes here to His privileged understanding as a Manifestation of God, an understanding

beyond that of “all that are in heaven and on earth.” Bahá'u'lláh also explains that His concealment of this mystery is not due to His fear of tribulations, even though persecution is sure to follow the revelation of “but the faintest trace thereof”; indeed, were it left to Him (“were it not contrary to the commandment of the Book”) Bahá'u'lláh would enrich and thank His “would-be murderer.” (¶29–32)

It will be noted that the persecutions that await the one who reveals the mystery might have been read, in the Sufi context, as a reference to the fate of mystics such as the legendary Sufi figure Manṣúr Ḥalláj (d. 922 A.D.) who was brutally tortured and hanged after he allegedly identified himself with the divine, implying the unification of his own self with the Self of God (Schimmel 62–77). To Sufis, Ḥalláj has been a symbol for disclosing secrets and mysteries that others are not able to comprehend. On one level, then, the reader may derive insight from seeing this quotation as a reference to the wayfarer possessing spiritual insight that cannot be readily shared with others. But in the context of Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be ready, and waiting, to reveal a mystery that all those in heaven and earth can never unravel by themselves, it can be also understood as the story of the persecution of the Manifestations of God when they reveal Their unique station, a spiritual rank beyond the comprehension of the masses. In particular it can be a foretelling of the calamities Bahá'u'lláh Himself will face by revealing His station.

#### *THE GARMENT OF JOSEPH*

Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh continues by alluding to the fact that the time to reveal this exalted and mysterious station is near. The vehicle for this allusion is His reference to Joseph: “Methinks at this moment I perceive the musk-scented fragrance of the garment of Há' from the Joseph of Bahá; verily He seemeth near at hand, though ye may think Him far away” (¶33).

The use of this reference is particularly apt. On the one hand, Joseph, in the Islamic tradition, represents divine beauty, and the Báb had already associated Joseph with the concept of a new Revelation by framing His first revealed work, begun on the evening of His declaration to Mullá Ḥusayn, as a commentary on the Quranic Surih of Joseph. The story of Joseph is the story of reunification with the divine beauty; as such it is well suited to express the idea of humanity's “reunification” with God through the advent of a new Manifestation. When Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, his father Jacob suffers terribly from the loss of his beloved son, and goes blind in his grief. But he does not give up hope of Joseph's return, and when Joseph has his garment sent to Jacob, the father detects his son's fragrance from afar, even before the garment reaches him. Jacob's long years of suffering come to an end as the garment of Joseph cures his blindness, and he attains reunion with his lost son. In light of this story, the reference to Joseph in the passage of the Fourth Valley cited earlier can

be perceived as referring to the advent of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. The quotation of Rúmi's poem immediately following again alludes to Joseph through the invocation of "fragrance," and hints at a renewal of bliss—the arrival of a particularly felicitous time in human history:

My soul doth sense the fragrant  
breath  
Of a well-beloved soul:  
The fragrance of that kindly  
friend  
Who's my heart's desire and  
goal.  
The duty of long years of love  
obey,  
And tell the tale of blissful days  
gone by,  
That land and sky may laugh  
aloud today,  
And it may gladden mind and  
heart and eye" (§33).

But there is further reason for Bahá'u'lláh's identification with Joseph. One of Bahá'u'lláh's greatest sources of suffering as He revealed His unique and exalted station as "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest" was to be His half-brother, Mirza Yahyá, who out of jealousy attempted to usurp Bahá'u'lláh's authority. While the beginnings of Yahyá's rebellion were already present in the Baghdad period, it would not be until after Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration of His station as Manifestation that this rebellion would reach its zenith, leading to a full rupture in Adrianople. It was due in large part to

the machinations of Yahyá and his allies that Bahá'u'lláh was finally exiled from Adrianople to 'Akká. Joseph, too, was the victim of his brothers' jealousy: they sold him into slavery, leading to his exile in Egypt and his long separation from his father. While this layer of meaning in the invocation of Joseph might not have been apparent to the early readers of The Four Valleys, Bahá'u'lláh returns to it in other places in His Revelation. In explanations of verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas it is brought to our attention that "Bahá'u'lláh, in one of His Tablets, describes Himself as the 'Divine Joseph' Who has been 'bartered away' by the heedless 'for the most paltry of prices'" (165).

There are still other levels of meanings associated with the allegory of the garment of Joseph pertinent to the current discussion. In a Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh interprets garment to mean religion,<sup>23</sup> and in that sense "the garment of Há' from the Joseph of Bahá'" refers to the new divine teachings appropriate for this age, to be revealed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself:

And now concerning thy question  
regarding the nature of religion.  
Know thou that they who are truly  
wise have likened the world unto  
the human temple. As the body of  
man needeth a garment to clothe

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23 Also refer to Bahá'u'lláh's *Gems of Divine Mysteries* where garment symbolizes borrowed beliefs adopted by people that need to be removed and replaced with "the robe of His mercy and the raiment of His guidance" (§17).

it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. Whenever this robe hath fulfilled its purpose, the Almighty will assuredly renew it. For every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God. Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitted the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared. (*Gleanings* 81)

In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* this connection to Joseph is more explicit “Say: From My laws the sweet-smelling savor of My garment can be smelled” (¶4). The idea of the savor or fragrance of a garment is again an unmistakable allusion to the story of Joseph and Jacob. Thus, for the reader of *The Four Valleys* who is also familiar with the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the “musk-scented fragrance of the garment of Há from the Joseph of Bahá’” can be seen as an allusion to Baha’u’llah’s impending Revelation – “verily He seemeth near at hand” (¶33).

#### *THE CHOICE WINE AND HEAVENLY BREAD*

In addition to the symbolic references to the Quranic story of Joseph, his garment and its fragrance, the text of the Fourth Valley alludes to the advent of the new Revelation through a variety of other metaphors and Islamic verses. There are certain noteworthy allusions made to food and drink in the text of the Fourth Valley: “This is the food

whose savour changeth not and whose colour altereth not” (¶37). “How clear this crystal water that the enraptured Cup-Bearer passeth round! How exquisite this pure wine that the intoxicated Beauty doth proffer! How pleasing this draught of joy that floweth from the Heavenly Cup! Well is it with him who drinketh thereof, and tasteth of its sweetness, and attaineth unto its knowledge” (¶38).

We can locate various interpretations of these allusions in the Writings, explaining how drink and food symbolize what is revealed by the Manifestations of God. We read in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*: “We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power” (¶5). In His writings, Bahá’u’lláh identifies the “choice Wine” with His Revelation whose “musk-laden fragrance” has been wafted “upon all created things” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* notes 165–166). Also, we see in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* that Bahá’u’lláh likens His own elucidations to food and bread, quoting verses from the *Qur’án* (76:9, 5:114):

“We nourish your souls for the sake of God; we seek from you neither recompense nor thanks.” This is the food that conferreth everlasting life upon the pure in heart and illumined in spirit. This is the bread of which it is said: “Lord, send down upon us Thy bread from heaven.” This bread shall never be withheld from them that deserve it, nor can it ever be exhausted. . . . O the pity! that man should deprive himself of

this goodly gift, this imperishable bounty, this everlasting life. It behooveth him to prize this food that cometh from heaven, that perchance, through the wondrous favours of the Sun of Truth, the dead may be brought to life, and withered souls be quickened by the infinite Spirit. (23–24)

As such, we can conclude that Bahá'u'lláh's allusions to food, wine, and water in the Fourth Valley refer to the Revelation, the Word of God, the religious truth revealed by the Manifestations of God; in the context of Bahá'í history, they refer specifically to His own Revelation, and the new laws, principles and counsels soon to be disclosed.

#### *HIS WAYS DIFFER EVERY DAY*

In the Fourth Valley, Bahá'u'lláh also alludes to the progressive and periodic nature of the Revelation of God, bestowed upon humanity through the reality of the Manifestation of God Who, in each age, reveals what is appropriate for that specific time in the history of mankind. As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of this valley we read: “This is the seat of the mystery ‘He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth’” (¶28). What Bahá'u'lláh quotes here is an Islamic saying that according to His Own later elucidations refers to the authority of the Manifestation of God: “O *Shaykh*! Every time God the True One—exalted be His glory—revealed Himself in the

person of His Manifestation, He came unto men with the standard of ‘He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth.’ None hath the right to ask why or wherefore, and he that doth so, hath indeed turned aside from God, the Lord of Lords” (*Epistle* 67). Among the powers bestowed upon the Manifestations of God is the power to change the laws revealed by the previous Manifestation or to bring new laws appropriate to the current age.

Yet, although the laws of the new Revelation may differ from those of a previous Revelation, they are issued from the same divine source and in that sense they are not different: “Albeit at every moment a new condition be displayed, yet that condition is ever the same. Wherefore He saith in one instance, ‘Nothing whatsoever keepeth Him from being occupied with any other thing.’ And in another He saith, ‘Verily, His ways differ every day’” (¶36). The first passage quoted by Bahá'u'lláh is a Qur'anic verse (55:29) and the second a famous Islamic adage. The two are often quoted together in literature and can be understood as meaning that God is aware and attentive to all conditions and situations and therefore can attend to the needs and requirements of each particular age. The late scholar *Ishráq-i-Khávarí* understands the quotes as referring to the process of progressive revelation through the appearance of the Manifestations of God. In his observation, the Qur'anic verse is stating the fact that the Manifestations, being representatives of God, are aware of all realities

of the world of existence (*Qámús-i-Mukhtaṣar* 62). Furthermore, he explains that the saying “Verily, His ways differ every day,” refers to the concept of progressive revelation—in each age the Manifestations of God reveal what is in accordance with the requirements of that age (62–63). Accordingly, the Manifestations of God being at once aware of all states and conditions of the world have the authority to change religious laws to make them appropriate to the present condition of the world. In that sense, the Fourth Valley alludes to the occurrence of a historical event, the appearance of a new Manifestation of God, in accordance with God’s plan for the progressive advancement of humanity.

We can conclude this exploration of the paradigm of four parallel paths by reiterating that it is impossible for human beings to comprehend the divine nature of the station associated with each of the four valleys—“the Self of God that pervadeth all His laws” (§9), “the universal divine Intellect” (§15), “the countenance of love” (§20), and “the throne of the inmost heart and the secret of divine guidance” (§28)—all being aspects of the Manifestation of God. In that sense, we can consider the four valleys as four possible paths toward the same hidden and transcendent Reality. The four types of wayfarer each find a certain path to be the most direct—or the one most suitable to his or her capacity and inclination—in their journey towards that sublime Reality, eternally approachable yet forever out of reach.

#### THE SEQUENTIAL MODEL OF THE FOUR VALLEYS

Yet, this paradigm might not be sufficient for a complete understanding The Four Valleys, as we can observe a sequential relationship between the valleys as well. As we have noted earlier, the explanation of each valley begins with a description of the unique character of the kind of wayfarer who traverses it, with phrases such as: “If the wayfarers be among them that dwell in the court of the All-Praised” (§15). On its face, the text does not designate a sequential or hierarchical relationship between the four types of wayfarers—none is qualified as preceding the other or as being more advanced on the path of search. Furthermore, treading a valley is not explicitly conditioned on the completion of another valley, unlike in The Seven Valleys. As such, whereas The Seven Valleys can be viewed as describing the seven stages of a single mystical path, The Four Valleys appears to be explaining four distinct parallel paths that can each be trodden by a specific type of wayfarer.

Although, based on the above description, The Seven Valleys has a sequential character and The Four Valleys a parallel one, neither the sequential nor the parallel model is a sufficient representation of what we read in these texts. The seven valleys can be traversed “with but one step” (§56) and the four valleys, as implied in the text, possess a progressive and sequential nature. Ascribing both parallel and sequential characters to The Four Valleys



may seem contradictory, and scholars have generally settled upon one or the other reading. For example, Savi explains: “The Valleys described in the Four Valleys do not seem to be four successive stages of a single spiritual journey, but each Valley seems to describe a different kind of mystic wayfaring or different aspect of the mystic wayfaring of the same seeker” (80). Walbridge, on the other hand, sees the four Valleys as sequential stages of one path, as he believes is the case with The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh (58).

This paper proposes that in The Four Valleys, although the four paths can be perceived as possessing a parallel nature, they also demonstrate a sequential, progressive character.<sup>24</sup> Understanding the sequential character of The Four Valleys is important as it has implications not only for individual life practices but also for one's family, community and society, as will be briefly discussed later.

The parallel model of the valleys assumes that each type of wayfarer treads a specific path. In the sequentially progressive model, instead, wayfarers maintain what they have gained in the previous valley and supplement it with what is learned in the new valley.

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24 Similarly, while the sequential character of the valleys is strong in The Seven Valleys, I would argue that this should not be understood in absolute terms because in one sense each of the seven valleys describes a certain aspect of the wayfarer's spiritual progress, aspects that can in certain cases and to various degrees be developed in parallel.

In this paradigm the wayfarer needs to retain harmony between approaches, integrating the various faculties and capacities that human beings are endowed with. The sequential aspect of The Four Valleys can be demonstrated in two ways: first, through a careful attention to certain expressions used in the text, and secondly, through a meticulous reading of what is implied in the whole of the text.

On the first point, certain specific words and phrases in the text of The Four Valleys strongly suggest that the First Valley is the starting point and the Fourth Valley is the final point of the wayfarer's spiritual journey (Saiedi 79–83). Let us look, for example, at the words emphasized in the two following excerpts. In the First Valley we read “If *the wayfarers* be among them that *seek* after the *sanctuary* of the desired one” (¶9, emphasis added) whereas in relation to the Fourth Valley we read “If *the mystic knowers* be among them that have *attained the beauty of the beloved*” (¶28). We see that the term “wayfarer,” the one who treads the path mentioned in the First Valley, is replaced in the Fourth Valley with “the mystic knower,” the one who has achieved spiritual understanding. Furthermore, the wayfarer's condition in the First Valley as one of those who “seek” is replaced in the Fourth Valley with the condition of one who has “attained.” Likewise, the “sanctuary” wherein “the Desired One” resides, is replaced with the “Beauty of the Beloved” itself. The seeker who has been seeking the sanctuary is now beholding

the countenance of the Beloved. This comparison between the two sets of images suggests a clear distinction between the First Valley as the starting point of the wayfaring and the Fourth Valley as the final destination.

On the second point, when read as a whole, the text of *The Four Valleys* reveals an integrated, sequential relationship between all the valleys: there is language linking each valley and the next, indicating progression, completion of the previous stage, and at times a re-emphasis of the earlier stage(s).

We can begin with the relationship between the First Valley, which prescribes the transformation of the self of the wayfarer to the highest spiritual state possible, and the Second Valley, which is concerned with intellect and knowledge. The text suggests that one can achieve divine knowledge in the Second Valley only to the degree one has achieved the objective of the First Valley—completely overcoming one's will by fully aligning it with God's Will. In the First Valley, this is described as the dying of self, the slaying of evil qualities (“these four evil birds of prey”) that “after death the mystery of life may be unraveled” (§10). This highly challenging transformation of one's lower self can be achieved through God's assistance, which requires supplication to, remembrance, and even fear of God, as highlighted at the conclusion of the First Valley: “Likewise He saith, ‘And be ye not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves. Such men are

the evil doers’” (§14). Moving into the Second valley, we see that the theme of self-effacement and obedience to God's commandments is repeated and emphasized. Divine knowledge is bestowed only upon those who fear and obey God, wayfarers who have prepared their hearts for receiving such knowledge: “for He hath said concerning the guidance of wayfarers on this plane, ‘Fear ye God; God will teach you’, and again, ‘Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.’ Wherefore, one must make ready the receptacle and become worthy of the descent of heavenly bestowals, that the all-sufficing Cup-Bearer may give one to drink of the wine of bounty from the crystal chalice of mercy. ‘For this let the striving strive!’” (§18–19). Accordingly, treading the First Valley and transforming one's lower self to “the soul pleasing unto God” (§10) is arguably a pre-requisite for the wayfarer to become a receptacle ready for “the descent of heavenly bestowals” (§19) in the Second Valley—always bearing in mind that such transformation and change is not absolute but relative to the wayfarer's capacity.

Once we arrive at the Third Valley, the text explicitly points to the need for moving beyond the perfections gained in the first two valleys. As noted above, after Bahá'u'lláh has addressed the notions of self in the First Valley and intellect in the second, He writes of the station of love, which is the focus of the Third: “In this station, neither the reign of the intellect is sufficient nor

the rule of self” (§22). That intellect and self are not “sufficient” implies that there are qualities associated with each of them that have already been gained in the first two valleys but that are not adequate for the further progress to be made in this Third Valley. In other words, the Third Valley requires new qualities not attained in the first two valleys, perfections associated only with the virtue of love. Furthermore, in the Third Valley, referring to the wayfarer’s gaining of knowledge, Bahá’u’lláh mentions: “In this station, both instruction and apprenticeship are assuredly of no avail” and continues by quoting a poem: “The lovers’ teacher is the Loved One’s beauty, His face their lesson and their only book” (§25). The poem is followed by the wayfarer’s supplication to, “[a]llow this mote of knowledge hidden in my soul/To free itself of lowly clay and reach its goal” (§26). As such, in the context of the Third Valley’s discourse on love, the only purpose of the fruits of the Second Valley—what the wayfarers have learned through intellect—is to get nearer to the objective of this next Valley, the “countenance of love” (§20). Accordingly, learning, instruction, and knowledge attain their objective when joined with the agency of love; and this is contingent on detachment from the world of clay, the objective of the First Valley. In this sense one can say that the first two valleys are not complete by themselves; they need to fulfil their object with the aid of love.

At this juncture the reader familiar with *The Seven Valleys* might question

the idea of sequential progress from a knowledge-centered valley to one focused on love. After all, in that text, it is the Valley of Love that *precedes* the Valley of Knowledge. Addressing this question requires an exploration of The Seven Valley’s “Realm of Knowledge” (§23), comparing it with The Four Valley’s “station of the Intellect” (§15). Although they both address the theme of knowledge and have as their ultimate objective spiritual understanding and enlightenment, considering the two as equivalent stages of the wayfarers’ progress is problematic, as each seems to have a different point of departure and addresses a different aspect of the wayfarer’s knowledge. Even a brief comparison of the two paradigms reveals important differences. For example, the word “knowledge” in “the Realm of Knowledge” is a translation of the Arabic word *ma’rifat*, which is also rendered in some places in the Bahá’í Writings as “divine knowledge” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 46). Generally speaking, this word and others related to it—including *irfán*, translated in the Seven Valleys as “true knowledge” (§29), and those possessing such a knowledge, *‘arif* in its plural forms, often translated with phrases like “mystics” and “sages”<sup>25</sup>—are terms associated with mystical understanding in Persian literature. In contrast *‘aql*, the word for “intellect,” is associated with rational understanding. In

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25 “Mystics” (§45, §54), “mystic knowers” (§88, §63), “sages” (§53), and “the wise.” (§45)

that sense, “the Realm of Knowledge,” which pertains to spiritual and divine knowledge, entails the mystical quality of love of God. Mystical understanding is a condition of heart rather than mind: “The bliss of *mystic knowers* [*‘arifán*] can be only told from heart to heart” (§63). It can therefore be considered a higher level of understanding that goes beyond what we normally consider as knowledge.

But despite the differences between them, the two paradigms of wayfaring represented by “the Realm of Knowledge” and “the station of Intellect” both pursue the same objective, since mystical and rational approaches are both paths to God (and, as I have argued in my exploration of the four valleys, to the Manifestation of God). In both cases the wayfarers can make progress to the next valley. While in The Four Valleys, as previously discussed, intellect fulfills its objective in the realm of love, in The Seven Valleys love leads the wayfarer to the next stage, the divine knowledge and spiritual understanding.

Taking into consideration that knowledge can take different forms including “meagre reason,” rational understanding gained through intellect, and “Knowledge” as divine and mystical enlightenment, the relationship between these two vital facets of human reality and existence—knowledge and love—is doubtless more than we can hope to fully understand, and it is conceivable that, considered from different perspectives, either might be taken to precede the other. Therefore, we see

that even in the Seven Valleys—where we expect knowledge to supersede love—there are hints that love may supersede knowledge, as in much other mystical poetry and prose. Thus, in this text, we find references to the obliteration of rationality and reasoning by the consuming power of love: “and when the fire of love is ablaze, it burneth to ashes the harvest of reason” (§14). Yet, it is important to note that in this verse “reason” is the translation for *‘aql* (intellect). Therefore, as is the case with The Four Valleys, love supersedes “intellect.” Furthermore, in The Seven Valleys love is described as “[t]he leviathan” that “swalloweth the master of reason and slayeth the lord of knowledge,” (§20) and here also “reason” is a translation of *‘aql* or “intellect,” while “knowledge” is a translation of *dánish*, which refers to rationally acquired knowledge as opposed to mystical and divine “Knowledge” (*ma‘rifat*). Therefore, we observe that in The Seven Valleys “the Realm of Knowledge” or “True knowledge” (*ma‘rifat* and *‘irfán*)—spiritual and divine understanding—takes a superior position in relation to love; but throughout that text, when knowledge assumes the meaning of the rationality of the intellect, the relationship is reversed, consistent with what we observe in The Four Valleys.

Returning to the discussion of the sequential aspect of The Four Valleys, in relation to the wayfarers of the Third Valley Bahá'u'lláh writes: “They find all words of sense to be meaningless, and senseless words to be full of meaning” (§24). Love is, therefore, a realm

qualitatively different from the realm of intellect, as if it maintains its own logic, independent of ordinary comprehension. As such, the wayfarer of the Third Valley seeks the Beloved in a different manner, not relying on intellect.

In keeping with the sequential aspect of the valleys, we can note that the love of the Third Valley entails not only detachment from knowledge and learning but also complete forgetfulness of the self. The paradigm of perfecting one's self, as found in the First Valley, is replaced with the wayfarer's consuming love for the Perfections of the Beloved. "This plane demandeth pure love and unalloyed affection" (¶21). There are numerous passages in the Bahá'í Writings where the reality of love for God (or the Manifestation) is equated with complete forgetting of self. This is expressed in a number of Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Words, including the following: "O Son of Man! If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee" (Arabic no. 7). Love, here, is a call to absolute devotion and full detachment from all that is not of God.

Of course, this sequential paradigm can be overstated. From one perspective, the death of self may be seen as a prerequisite for realizing true love of God. Yet, from another perspective (and taking into account the reality, pointed out in Shoghi Effendi's letter quoted above, that in this life we will never succeed in completely obliterating the self), that love is itself the great

motivating force that allows the self to be progressively conquered. From this perspective, while overcoming the lower self requires sacrifice, the divine Beloved not only demands sacrifice, but also makes sacrifice possible. According to the Bahá'í Writings, human beings have been created with the capacity to love their Creator: "I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover" (Bahá'u'lláh, Arabic Hidden Words no. 19). The "Lodestone of hearts," the Manifestation of God, absorbs the wayfarer's heart and makes it its home: "My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be obscured" (Arabic Hidden Words no. 20). Responding to the divine call, one's heart becomes the locus of the Beloved's love, making one able to make progress in the path of love. The presence of the Beloved in the wayfarer's heart assists the wayfarer to overcome attachments to the physical world. The possibility for such a felicitous condition of the heart needs to be recognized and acknowledged: "My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest find Me near unto thee" (Arabic Hidden Words no. 10). We might surmise, then, that to the extent that the Self, Knowledge/Intellect, and Love of the first three valleys represent a sequence, it is one that can be repeated and iterated as the wayfarer makes progress in their unending spiritual journey.

Finally, we can consider how the Fourth Valley fits within the sequential paradigm. From a certain perspective,

this final valley can be viewed as the culmination of the previous three. The text of the Fourth Valley appears to indicate that progress in this last stage can be achieved to the degree that the wayfarer has attained the objectives of the first three valleys. The perfections gained in the first three valleys are concurrently emphasized and strengthened, and reach their ultimate fulfilment in this final valley.

In the First Valley, the wayfarer should have made progress toward the state of complete self-effacement, and total submission to God's Will, exemplified by the quality of fear of God (¶18). This fear of God leads to obedience to God's commandments and laws, which in turn leads to the transformation of the self and detachment from all else save God, including detachment from learnings that are merely a source of pride:

With renunciation, not with grammar's rules, one must be armed:

Be nothing, then, and cross this sea unharmed (¶13).

Likewise, we read regarding the Fourth Valley: "In truth, the wayfarer who journeyeth unto God . . . will never reach his heavenly home unless his hands are empty of such worldly things as are cherished by men. 'And he that feareth not God, God shall make him to fear all things; whereas all things fear him who feareth God'" (¶30).

The Second Valley, which is the station of "the true standard of knowledge"

(¶18), addresses the knowledge gained through God's guidance and bestowals: "Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth" (¶18). True knowledge is therefore an emanation of divine guidance. Likewise, we observe that the Fourth Valley concerns "the secret of divine guidance" (¶28). This elucidation at the beginning of the Fourth Valley is in fact in one respect the continuation of the closing part of the Third Valley which addresses the joining of the wayfarer's knowledge with the higher, divine level of knowledge: "Allow this mote of knowledge hidden in my soul / To free itself of lowly clay and reach its goal. / And grant this drop of wisdom that / Thou gavest me To be at last united with Thy mighty sea." (¶26)

As we see in the opening sentence of the Fourth Valley, the spiritual station of "inmost heart" (¶28) is associated with God's guidance, "the secret of guidance" (¶28). This station is, however, a mystery that transcends common knowledge. It cannot be readily explained in words and if revealed it will lead to the persecution of its revealer. In short, then, the theme of knowledge, which is the focus of the Second Valley, is further developed in the Third and Fourth Valleys.

The relationship between the theme of the Fourth Valley and knowledge can be better understood by exploring the notion of inmost heart (*fu'ád*), a culminating station that entails both the fulfilment of treading the path of love and the wayfarer's attainment to the



highest level of knowledge, a knowledge that is gained through self-effacement as will be discussed below. In that sense, the inmost heart is an exalted reality integrating perfections gained in previous valleys.

We can next consider how the Third Valley finds its culmination in the Fourth. Love, the theme of the Third Valley, is a condition of the heart: the attraction of the heart to the object of love, the Manifestation of God. Therefore, the Third Valley is “the abode of the Lodestone of hearts,” the plane where the heart of the wayfarer is drawn to the Beloved. Yet, the Fourth Valley is the station of “the throne of the inmost heart” (¶28). The wayfarer entering the Fourth Valley has already attained the presence of the Beloved and therefore the objective of love has been achieved, as we see in the opening sentence of this valley: “If the mystic knowers be among them that have attained THE BEAUTY OF THE BELOVED, this station is the throne of the inmost heart and the secret of divine guidance” (¶28). As such, love is inadequate to play any role in this last valley: “This is the realm of pure awareness and utter self-effacement. Not even love can find a way to this plane, nor doth affection have a place therein. Wherefore is it said: ‘Love is a veil betwixt the lover and the beloved.’ Here love becometh but an obstructing veil, and aught save the Friend but a curtain” (¶34). Beyond even love, “this station is the throne of the inmost heart”; thus, in addition to its reference to the Manifestation discussed above, the “inmost heart” can

refer to the most perfect and befitting station of the heart, the highest level of the heart’s enlightenment and the realization of the ultimate progress of the wayfarer. This is a meaning for “inmost heart” offered by the Báb in one of His writings, a meaning that is closer to the Shaykhí (Rámíhr 394) and Sufi traditions. He defines it as the ultimate degree of understanding, illumination, and insight a human being can develop: “And know thou that God—glorified be He—hath made His most great gift to man to be the perception of the inmost heart. Indeed the inmost heart is man’s greatest susceptibility” (Mázandarání 107). Likewise, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His interpretation of the Qur’anic verse, “His heart falsified not what he saw” (53:11) considers the heart to be the highest standard of understanding (*Makátib* 112). Comparing various standards for human understanding He explains: “But, the veritable divine standard, that which is never fallacious nor fails and which comprehends universal realities and sublime inner meanings, is verily the standard of the inmost heart . . . for it is indeed the illumination of the spreading rays of the lights of divine bestowal, and the mystery of the All Merciful, and the revelation of spirit, and the heavenly sign. It verily is the eternal bounty and the manifest effulgence and the most great gift” (112–13).

It is thus possible to view the Fourth Valley as the highest level of enlightenment for the wayfarer, the ultimate level of spiritual progress. From this sequential perspective, it is

the culmination of all qualities gained in the previous valleys, the end of the wayfarer's journey.

This view of the Fourth Valley as the completion of the journey is suggested by the reference to Joseph which, in addition to hinting at the nearness of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, can also be understood as alluding to the wayfarer's nearness to the ultimate objective of mystic wayfaring. In this interpretation, Jacob's sensing the fragrance of the garment of Joseph, which signaled Joseph's return home and reunion with his father, alludes to the felicitous completion of the wayfarer's journey. In short, from this perspective, the Fourth Valley is the culmination of the wayfarer's spiritual journey, and in that sense it is a state superior to previous valleys.

Although we can perceive a degree of sequential progress in The Four Valleys, this characteristic is stronger in The Seven Valleys, where Bahá'u'lláh clearly makes entrance to each valley conditional upon the successful completion of the previous valley. For instance, on the wayfarer's transition from the Valley of Wonderment to the next valley we read: "After scaling the high summits of wonderment, the wayfarer cometh to the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness" (§76). Yet, regardless of the priority we can assign to the sequential or the parallel nature of The Four Valleys, both paradigms are concerned with assisting the wayfarer in treading the path of spiritual progress towards the recognition of the station of the Manifestation of

God, as a careful reading of each of the valleys shows.

#### THE EXEMPLARY WAYFARER AND THE PATH OF PERFECTION

While we can say that the primary purpose of *The Four Valleys* is to explain the station of the Manifestation of God, the text can also be seen as a guide for the spiritual progress of the wayfarer treading the mystical path—or, in the context of the Bahá'í Writings, a believer in the Faith who has recognized the Manifestation of God and is striving to deepen this recognition and acquire spiritual perfections. Certain allusions made in the text of The Four Valleys can in one sense be understood as referring to what we may call "exemplary" wayfarers, those who have undertaken their spiritual journey in an exemplary manner. For instance, we read about "companions" (*aṣḥáb*): "In describing these companions He saith: 'They speak not till He hath spoken, and act according to His commandment.'"<sup>26</sup> Or when we come across the term "men" (*rijál*): "Such indeed are those whom He hath extolled as 'men whom neither merchandise nor traffic beguile from the remembrance of God'" (§17).

References to the idea of being spiritually exemplary can be found elsewhere in the Writings of the Central Figures and the Guardian. Shoghi Effendi, for instance, uses the term

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26 This elucidation can also be understood as referring to the Manifestations of God.

“perfect souls” (*nufús-i-kámilih*) to refer to those who demonstrate through their actions truths that would be difficult to prove in words:

[The believers] should beyond all else through their conduct and actions demonstrate that divine promises are irrevocable and pre-ordained and heavenly glad-tidings are manifest and fulfilled, and thereafter, by means of utterances and proofs. Unless perfect souls step into the arena and become centers of attraction in every assemblage, proving this matter to the men of wisdom among nations would be a formidable task. Yet, if the male and female believers make such perfections manifest, there would be no need for utterance and persuasion; their very acts are proofs and guarantors of the protection, preservation and might and power of the Cause of God. (*Tawqí 'át-i-Mubárákih* 170)

Shoghi Effendi's use of the term “perfect souls” must be considered in light of the Bahá'í understanding of perfection as an ideal to strive for. The believer in this path makes degrees of progress through personal effort and God's assistance. To the degree that individuals recognize the Manifestation of God and act in accordance with His will, God's mercy encompasses them, His grace fills their heart, and their earthly and physical existence is transformed to reflect heavenly bestowals. This is a process of moving toward the

ideal of the exemplary wayfarer, the qualities defined in the Bahá'í Writings.

The Four Valleys specifies four paths to spiritual growth and explains the ultimate objective of each of these paths—a particular aspect of the Manifestation of God. While the paths are meant to be trodden by human beings, no individual can achieve the paths' ultimate objective, which refers to the Manifestation of God, a Reality beyond human reach. However, the perfection to which the human *can* attain in this “Day of God” is remarkable: true believers can even attain the station of the lesser prophets of the past: “In confirmation of the exalted rank of the true believer, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, He reveals the following: ‘The station which he who hath truly recognized this Revelation will attain is the same as the one ordained for such prophets of the house of Israel as are not regarded as Manifestations “endowed with constancy”’ (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 111).<sup>27</sup> Bahá'u'lláh also proclaims that “[t]he day is approaching when God will have, by an act of His Will, raised up a race of men the nature of which is inscrutable to all save God, the All-Powerful, the Self-Subsisting” (109–110).

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27 The exalted spiritual station of such believers is, of course, infinitely below the station of the Manifestations of God “endowed with constancy” such as Moses, Buddha, Christ, Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh. As discussed earlier in this paper, the Manifestation is an ontologically distinct being Who represents God Himself in the realm of existence.

What, then, exactly can be meant by the exalted spiritual rank ordained for the true believer, and how can one strive to approach such a station? In the Sufi context, the station of highly spiritual figures, known by a variety of titles such as *Shaykh* (spiritual authority) and *Qutb* (the center and axis of spiritual energy) has often been associated with possessing esoteric knowledge, performing miracles (Schimmel 199–206), and undertaking extreme ascetic austerities, as is well recorded in the history of Sufism. In the context of The Four Valleys, would spiritual advancement mean making progress by treading a certain valley—seeking perfection in self-effacement, or in knowledge, in love for God, or in the enlightenment of one's heart—as a purely parallel model of The Four Valleys might imply? Perhaps we can find the answer to this question in 'Abdu'l-Bahá' statement that, “a Bahá'í is one who embodyeth all the perfections” (*Selections* 143). In that sense spiritual perfection means harmoniously combining qualities mentioned in all four valleys. Wayfaring entails elevating the self to a station pleasing to God, nurturing the intellectual faculty, enhancing the capacity for loving God, and finally acquiring a pure, enlightened and insightful heart.

In fact, studying The Four Valleys in light of the totality of the Bahá'í Revelation reveals that focusing on a single aspect of human faculties such as improving one's self (the theme of the First Valley), intellect and knowledge

(the theme of the Second Valley), or love (the focus of the Third Valley), is not conducive to getting nearer to the height of spiritual progress delineated in the Fourth Valley, the valley that can be considered as the culmination of the valleys, the final destination pertaining to those that have “attained the Beauty of the Beloved” (¶28). We can observe that in the Bahá'í Writings the four planes of endeavor have not been separated. In the opening paragraphs of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* the essential qualities of a believer are described as the combined and integrated condition of recognition of the Manifestation of God (¶1) and obedience to Him as a token of love (¶4). Recognition entails knowledge of the Revelation, a theme explained in the Second Valley. Obedience to laws is a prerequisite for transforming the “self commanding to evil” to the self “pleasing unto God,” the ultimate objective of the First Valley, but such obedience should be out of love for the Manifestation of God, the quality stipulated in the Third Valley. In that sense, what we read in the opening verses of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is consistent with the understanding that the four valleys are not distinctly separate paths to spiritual progress and that the treading of one valley by itself is not what Bahá'u'lláh prescribes. A prayer by 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides an example for such guidance. He portrays His own condition as being the *Majnún* (“the mad one”) of love, not desiring any intellect and wisdom, only wishing for the bestowals of love. Yet, He prays to God to grant Him a state of moderation.

Addressing the need to strike a balance between love and intellect He writes: “Neither is the excessive intellect and learning that prevents the diffusion of the fragrances of God praiseworthy, nor is the shackle-breaking insanity prized. O God, bestow a state of moderation” (*Majmú‘iyi-Munájathá* 41). In addition to His words and expositions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the “Perfect Exemplar” (*Mathal-i-A‘lá*) has, by His life and conduct, set standards for the path the believers need to follow, demonstrating perfections in all aspects of life. And, indeed, Bahá’ís can reflect on how fortunate they are to not only have been given guidance, in the inspired and life-giving words of the Manifestation, as to what an exemplary wayfarer and “perfect soul” must be, but also the living Example of perfection in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

This concept—not only making progress in each of the faculties and capacities endowed by God, but also integrating these perfections—can be extended and applied to the conditions and nature of progress in social systems. Like individuals, small or large social units and institutions such as families, communities, nations, and civilizations can acquire perfections associated with each of the valleys and, furthermore, harmonize and integrate qualities developed in these different but interrelated paths.

An adequate exploration of the social implications of the four valleys as paths and stages of spiritual development must be left to further research, but a few examples can help illuminate

some possibilities. For instance, in our parallel model of the Four Valleys and in relation to making progress in the Second Valley, intellectual and academic institutions can consider paying stronger attention to contemplating and investigating metaphysical concepts and spiritual questions, in parallel with their exploration of the material aspects of the world of existence. Limited and fragmented “meagre reason” (¶15) can expand its horizon and benefit from the aid and bestowals of the “universal divine Intellect” (¶15). Since the Age of Enlightenment, the study of metaphysical concepts has been decreasing and is even despised in some academic circles. Furthermore, the focus of intellectual investigation has turned toward the hard sciences and technology, while various fields in the humanities have adopted the quantitative and objective methodologies of the hard sciences, leading to a narrow view of reality. Likewise, at the civilizational level, the presently dominant positivism and rationalism, and their associated materialistic philosophies, are symptoms of an undue focus on the physical at the expense of the spiritual, to the point of neglect or even denial of spiritual realities. While *The Four Valleys* does not explicitly address the struggle against these powerful trends, the individual wayfarer might heed the call of: “For this let the striving strive!” (¶19)

A believer in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh can surely anticipate that through its potency the existing forms of scholarship and investigation will be transformed to incorporate spiritual

elements. Yet, we can only imagine what forms the intellectual endeavors of a spiritually enlightened civilization of the future, informed by the Revelation, will take. As we glimpse current areas of inquiry that seem to have some resonance with that Revelation, we might tentatively conjecture that this future civilization will incorporate, among other things, a spiritually informed study of human nature and psychology, holistic healthcare and medicine, ecology, education in ethics, morals and piety, and a new spiritually-based world order in which peace studies and related practical explorations move beyond a purely materialistic and limited view of the universe and humanity.

Beyond the transformation of intellectual endeavors themselves, there is a crucial need in contemporary society for the integration of the intellectual faculty with other capacities. For instance, within the institution of marriage, communication and mutual intellectual understanding between spouses, and with their children, needs to be accompanied by selflessness and ethical and pious life practices (virtues acquired in the First Valley), along with a love among family members that is grounded in the love of God, rendering it unshakable and eternal. These three elements of intellectual capacity, piety, and love, can synergistically facilitate a family life informed, enriched, and safeguarded by the teachings of the Manifestation of God. In the absence of such integration, not only will the peaceful, nurturing, and supporting

environment necessary for the flourishing of the intellectual faculty be hampered or largely eliminated, but fragmented and materialistic education, void of ethics and high motives, will become an obstacle to unity, happiness, service to humanity, and spiritual growth. Yet, we understand from The Four Valleys that such an unfortunate condition in the family does not eliminate the responsibility for spiritual wayfaring by the individual family members; rather they might see it as an opportunity to embark on a spiritual journey. There is much work to be done in exploring the possibilities for applying The Four Valleys' explanation of the individual wayfarer's progress to the transformation of various levels of social systems, as well as in learning about the dynamics of the relationship between the two.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Four Valleys, using the language and terminologies of Sufi discourse and tradition, describes four types of wayfarers each following a certain path for getting nearer to God—which, in light of the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith, means nearness to the Manifestation of God; and in that sense in each of the valleys the final objective to strive for is a certain aspect of the Reality of the Manifestation of God. As the Writings make clear, there is no end to the wayfarer's journey as the perfections of the Manifestation of God are beyond humankind's full grasp. In that sense, struggle with one's lower



nature, “the insistent self” (Qur’án 12:53, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 259), needs to continue throughout one’s life. Accordingly, as long as one lives in the material world, one should not expect to achieve a permanent victory; the wayfarer must always be watchful for the temptations of the lower self. Equally, knowledge and spiritual insight are infinitely vast and cannot be fully attained. Likewise, one can always intensify one’s love for God and search for ways to demonstrate that love. Finally, although one can recognize the station of the Manifestation of God, the exemplary condition referred to in the Fourth Valley as “pure awareness and utter self-effacement,” (¶34) is an ideal, never to be attained, that we must strive for and draw increasingly close to. In principle, one can identify with a certain type of wayfarer and pursue the exemplary model set for that type by Bahá'u'lláh. Such wayfaring in a particular valley corresponds with the parallel model of The Four Valleys.

Yet, in addition to describing four different and parallel approaches to God, the valleys demonstrate a sequential and integrative character to a degree, and we observe a progression taking place in moving from one valley to the next. In that sense The Four Valleys depicts a narrative for the spiritual journey of the wayfarer, a journey that culminates in the Fourth Valley, signifying the utmost progress and development of the wayfarer. But this progress is only possible through the recognition of the station of the Manifestation of God. While the Fourth

Valley alludes to the station of the ideal exemplar wayfarer it is primarily referring to the station of the Manifestation of God at this specific time in history, the advent of a new Revelation leading humanity to the peak of its spiritual development.

I have briefly pointed out how the paradigm of the wayfarers’ progress in the Four Valleys can help us understand the requisites for progress in social systems, from the fundamental level of the family unit to the level of humankind’s civilizations. My understanding is that The Four Valleys, in appearance a mystical treatise, has embedded within it the nucleus and foundation for a new global civilization unique in human history, a divine plan for humankind delineated in other Writings of the Faith. What on its surface appears to be a marvelous poetic rendering of the mystical Sufi discourse can in fact be viewed as the first streaks of the dawn of a new civilization. In that sense, the account of the journey of the mystic wayfarers of The Four Valleys can inform the envisioning of a teleological and evolutionary metanarrative for human existence and history, which can be the subject of further research.

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