

Julio Savi

The Prisoner of Akka



Bologna 2025

The Prisoner of Akka

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Bahíyyih Khánum, ancella di Bahá [Bahíyyih Khánum, Handmaid of Bahá] (Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 1983)

The Eternal Quest for God (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989),

Remoteness, an anthology of poems (Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2002)

A Nest on the Highest Branch: Reflections on Human Success, Prosperity and Happiness (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003)

For the Sake of One God: Notes on Philosophy of Religion (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2004)

Towards the Summit of Reality. An Introduction to the Study of Bahá'u'lláh's Seven Valleys and Four Valleys (Oxford: George Ronald, 2008)

L'esperienza religiosa di Alessandro Bausani [Alessandro Bausani's Religious Experience] (Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2008)

Unsheathing the Sword of Wisdom. Reflections on Human Rights and Terrorism. (Oxford: George Ronald, 2011)

The Prisoner of Akka

*A Short Biography of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith*

Julio Savi

The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness.

Bahá'u'lláh

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Preface

Forty years had passed since August 1852 when the Protagonist of this short biography had been dragged barefoot, amid the clamour of the people, towards a terrible underground prison. And still, while conversing with the well-known British orientalist Edward G. Browne, shortly before His earthly life ended on 29 May 1892, He considered Himself a “prisoner and an exile.” The following pages trace a concise history of the life of this Personage, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, persecuted by two empires, the Persian and the Ottoman, supported and instigated by the most influential members of the Muslim clergy. They offer the Italian reader the possibility of a first examination of the causes and meanings of the long and tormented “imprisonment” and the main events in the life of this important Figure, so historically close and so little known to the vast Italian public. They also take a quick look at the essential themes of His writings, bequeathed to the world’s peoples.

The first pages of the book hint at the family environment and the religious, political, and cultural context in which Bahá’u’lláh, this is the name of our Character, was born and raised, adopting a narrative approach deliberately richer in events and details than in learned historical and cultural references. This initial description of the Protagonist’s childhood and youth, which occupies the entire first chapter, introduces us to the heart of the narration of His story and offers us a clear image of His personality and the salient traits of His character. The story then continues towards the most intense phase of his life, when tumultuous events upset His existence, His closest family members, and all those willing to follow Him. The narration of these events is presented as a set of voices intertwined to form a harmonious chorus that offers

interesting biographical data, all punctually documented. The polyphonic structure adopted by the author results from a careful and detailed examination of the vast historical material on Bahá'u'lláh's life and works produced in English and Persian. It responds to the need for rigorous historical research without sacrificing the charm of a genuine narrative that makes the flow of the discourse stimulating and pleasant, without ever giving in to the ambiguous suggestion of a fictional or fantastic paraphrase.

The narrator guides us through the events, letting their protagonists tell their story. Often, Bahá'u'lláh Himself speaks in the first person about His life, making us hear His voice, which resonates powerful and authentic, as He confides to us His innermost feelings. Together with Him, His relatives, companions who were faithful to Him in pain and joy, disciples near and far, those who knew Him personally, those who read His writings and recognized the truth in His message, and finally, the historians who collected the vast repertoire left by His biographers, participate in the narration.

All these testimonies and these voices lively compose, like so many tiles, the complex mosaic of the existence of a Person who, in His works, written in prison and in exile, also addressed directly many of those who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, were the most potent sovereigns on earth. Chapter 9, "The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission," contains excerpts from the letters which the Prisoner of Akka wrote and sent to these important rulers and religious leaders of the East and West, a clear sign of the Personage's dimension and charisma.

The events of Bahá'u'lláh's life are repeatedly juxtaposed with episodes that marked the earthly existence of ancient Masters who were also invested in the divine Mission of spiritual guides. The analogies testify to the repetition of history and men's mistakes towards these Figures. Reading these events further stimulates historical reflection and allows us to observe the events narrated from a broader and more objective perspective.

The passages of some of His works, quoted in chapters 7, 9, 12, 13, and 14, form a brief sample of His substantial writings that occupy about one hundred volumes, including letters, mystical compositions, and doctrinal works. These passages deal with the main themes of His message, which is its pivotal and focal point: the unity and brotherhood of the human race. Reflection on these themes allows the reader, who has travelled, page after page, through the various seasons of the life of the Prisoner of Akka, to perceive the foundations on which he intends to build a “new race of men”.

The book is enriched with photographs, drawings, and images of the places and characters of the episodes recounted, which help the reader to follow and better visualize the story’s unfolding. The portrait of the Protagonist is missing because His followers consider it too precious a document to divulge it indiscriminately.

With the suggestion of his passionate narration, Julio Savi, the author of this book, manages to build an invisible bridge of communication through History, accompanying us to discover and get to know a noble and fascinating Character who dedicated His whole life to promoting principles that, put into practice, can guide humans towards a better world.

Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli
Reggio Emilia, 28 November 2012

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Introduction

Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called *táj* by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

These are the words written by Edward Granville Browne,^{*} in those days a young and promising professor at the University of Cambridge, to describe Bahá'u'lláh, Whom[†] he met between 15 and 20 April 1890 in His home, in Bahjí, a small hamlet north of Akka, in the Holy Land. The celebrated Orientalist goes on in his description to mention words uttered to him by Bahá'u'lláh:

^{*} 1862-1926.

[†] Bahá'is usually use the reverence capital letter for any reference to Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, His Herald, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His successor.



Praise be to God that thou hast attained . . . Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile. . . We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as

brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? . . . Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come. . . Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? . . . Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. . . Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind. . .²





These words, and others similar to these, Bahá'u'lláh said to Browne, who became renowned for his deep knowledge of Persian language, literature, history and culture in the following years. For five days, he was a guest in the house of the “Prisoner of ‘Akká,”³ and was admitted to His presence four times. He remained there long enough to come to know Bahá'u'lláh, His family and His followers and to understand that he had attained the presence of an extraordinary Person and had met a movement of the most significant interest. He wrote that the history of the Bahá'í Faith

must be interesting in different ways to others besides those who are directly engaged in the study of Persian. To the student of religious thought it will afford no little matter for reflection; for here he may contemplate such personalities as by lapse of time pass into heroes and demi-gods still unobscured by myth and fable he may examine by the light of concurrent and independent testimony one of those strange outbursts of enthusiasm, faith, fervent devotion, and indomitable heroism—or fanaticism, if you will—which we are accustomed to associate

with the earlier history of the human race; he may witness in a word, the birth of a faith which may not impossibly win a place amidst the great religions of the world.⁴

About a hundred and twenty years after those interviews, we would like to briefly narrate the story and concisely expound on the teachings of the Personage described by Browne with such admiration so that other people may become better acquainted with them. We will not write a detailed biography rich in historical and background details. Nor will we exhaustively illustrate His teachings. We will confine ourselves to relate those aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's life which seemed to us suitable for enlightening the uniqueness of His human experience and to mention those elements of His Faith which we considered essential to understanding His message in the hope of having responded to the request of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy to write "a book capable of inspiring its readers . . . in the style of a tale, but absolutely true to life."

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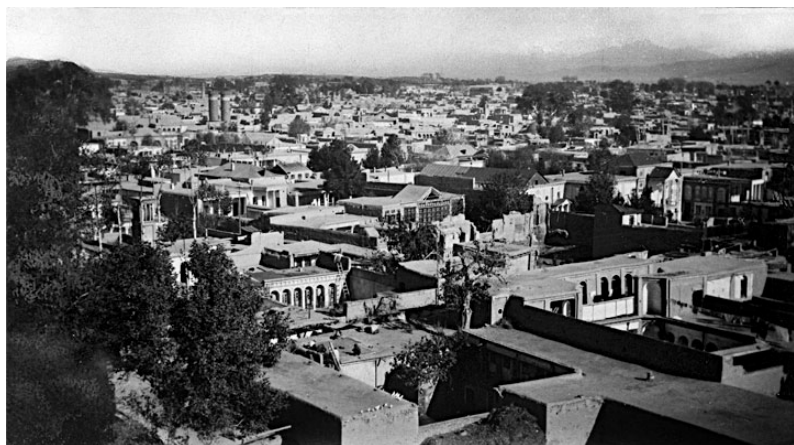
Page xxv. *Edward Granville Browne in Oriental attire.*

Page xxvi. *A táj of Bahá'u'lláh displayed in His room at Bahjí.*

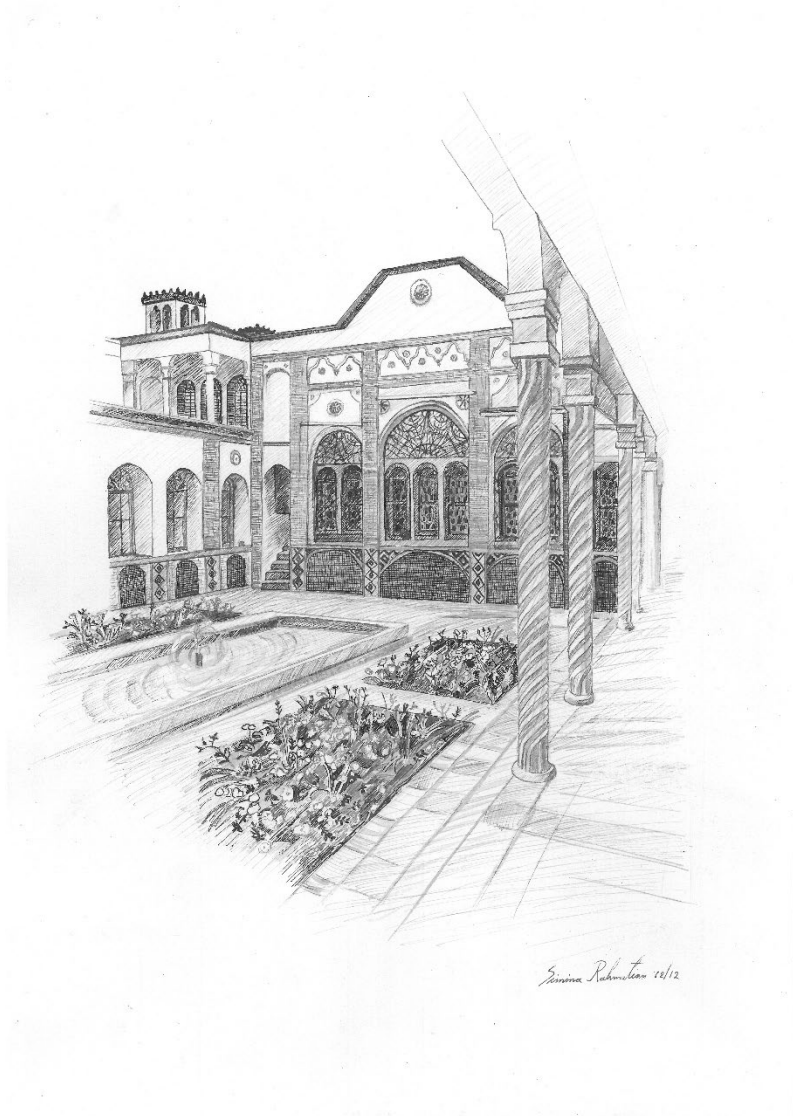
He was born in Teheran on 12 November 1817 at dawn and was named Ḥusayn-‘Alí. Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God, is the title whereby people know Him today, like Jesus is known as the Christ, the anointed one of the Lord, and Siddharta Gautama as the Buddha, the awakened one. He was not the firstborn nor the son of a first marriage. He was the sixth child of the second wife of ‘Abbas-i-Núrí, * known as Mírzá Buzurg, which we could translate into English as “great lord.” That man was a real gentleman, indeed, renowned not only as a Vizier and a great calligrapher—a form of art highly appreciated in nineteenth-century Iran—but also for his openness of mind, nobility and magnanimity, which were unusual qualities in a man of such a high social standing in those days in Persia. He was so rich that his home in Teheran, near the Gate of Shimírán, in the North-Eastern part of the city, a precious exemplar of the Iranian Islamic architecture of the nineteenth century, was considered one of the most beautiful mansions of the capital.† The building comprised seven connected houses, and the rich Vizier kept one of his four wives and three concubines in each. His lineage also commanded great respect. According to an ancient manuscript later discovered, his family descended from Yazdigird III,¹ the last Sasanian emperor of Iran, dethroned in the seventh century CE by the Arabian expansion favoured by Islam. Mírzá Buzurg’s forefathers had a reputation of being “people of illumined mind, of great wealth and distinction.”²

* d. 1839.

† This building has been recently registered by the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage as a historical site in Iran, known as House of Mírzá Buzurg-i-Núrí, and thus it is subject to building restrictions.



They had immense properties and many herds. They had “built for themselves a great palace on the side of the mountain where the magnificent view took in valley and river. In this palace, they entertained in princely fashion their summer guests.”³ Their properties had come into the hands of Mírzá Buzurg, who thus owned the grand family palace, magnificently located in the village of Tákur, a hamlet nearby the town of Núr, in the Northern part of Mazandaran, on the Caspian Sea. The palace’s rooms were more splendid than the most beautiful rooms of the mansions of Teheran, and its furnishings were of priceless value. Mírzá Buzurg also had a residence in the village of Afchih near Teheran, a summer resort in Shimírán, the residential zone of the wealthiest people of the Iranian capital in the foothills of the Alborz Range, known as Murgh-Mahallih, the abode of the birds. He was the owner of the village of Qúch-Hisár, such a joyful locality for the abundance of its pure waters and the luxuriance of its greenery that the Grand Vizier aspired to come into its possession. The lineage of the wife who gave him Bahá’u’lláh was equally noble. They said that she descended from Abraham, through his second wife Katurah,⁴ from Jesse, the father of King David⁵ and from Zarathustra, the prophet of the Zoroastrian.⁶ This made Bahá’u’lláh the descendant of the prophets of both great groups of monotheistic religions, the Aryan religions (like

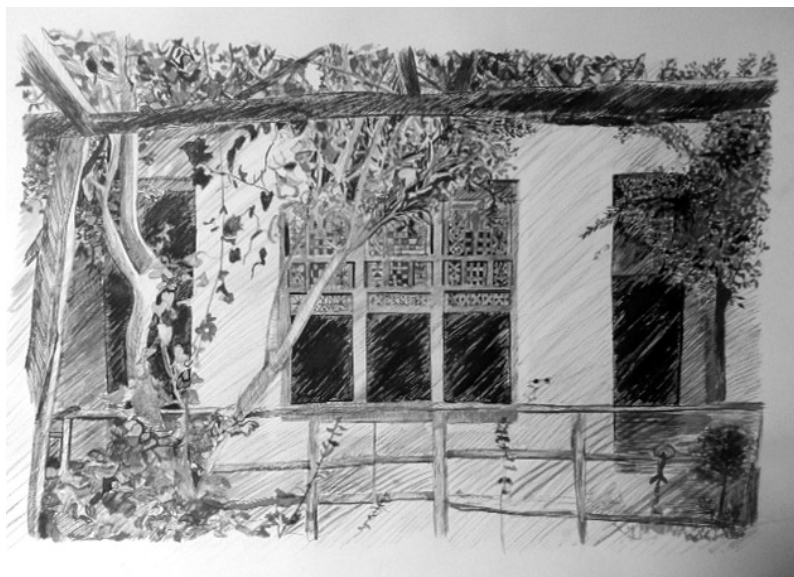


Zoroastrianism) and the Semitic ones (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).⁷

The Child immediately showed uncommon features. His mother was worried because her son was always serene and unshaken, and he never called for her attention with the typical cries of newborn babies. His father was especially fond of Him. One of His biographers* narrates that when Bahá'u'lláh was still a child, His father had a dream in which His son appeared to him immersed in the waters of a boundless ocean. His body emanated light, and His long raven locks floated around His head. He was surrounded by thousands of fish, which held fast to His wavering hair. Although those fishes were many, He seemingly did not perceive their weight. He moved above the waters, and they followed Him wherever He went, holding fast to Him. Mírzá Buzurg was so impressed by his dream that, according to the usages of the place and the time, he summoned a famous soothsayer and asked him to interpret it. The soothsayer listened to the words of the Vizier, attentively looked at the Child, admiring His strength and beauty, and then said:

The limitless ocean that you have seen in your dream, O Vazir [Vizier], is none other than the world of being. Single-handed and alone, your son will achieve supreme ascendancy over it. Wherever He may please, He will proceed unhindered. No one will resist His march, no one will hinder His progress. The multitude of fishes signifies the turmoil which He will arouse amidst the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Around Him will they gather, and to Him will they cling. Assured of the unfailing protection of the Almighty, this tumult will never harm His person, nor will His loneliness upon the sea of life endanger His safety.⁸

* Muḥammad-i-Zarandí, known as Nabil-i-A'ẓam, 1 31-1892.



Bahá'u'lláh grew healthy and strong, fondly loved by His father and mother, surrounded by affluence, and immersed in an atmosphere of nobility of lineage, integrity of conduct and high intellectuality. His childhood, spent in Teheran during the winter and in His ancestral estates in Núr during the summer, is vaguely reminiscent of Prince Siddharta, another great personage of world religious history. As early as His childhood, He amazed everyone with His wisdom and magnanimity. He was considered so precocious by His father that when He was seven years old, His parent entrusted Him with the demanding task of pleading for him in front of the Shah himself, who at that time was Fa ḥ-'Alí.* At the same age, one day, He was disturbed by a tax collector who had arrogantly approached His father to ask him to pay his share. His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá† has related that, despite His young age, He “mounted His horse and rode for two days until He arrived in Ṭihrán. He sought the dismissal of this unjust and

* 1772-1834.

† 'Abbas Effendi (1844-1921), son of Bahá'u'lláh and Ásiyyih and the Successor of His Father as the Head of the Bahá'í Faith.



tyrannical tax collector. He succeeded in obtaining the necessary papers ordering the dismissal, and returned to His parents.”⁹ He was a little older than an adolescent when He came upon a group of seminarians who were discussing an intricate theological dispute and solved their perplexities with a few words in front of their amazed master, who could not put up with the idea that a very young layman could be more proficient than his grown-up disciples, to whom he had devoted long years of care and instruction. An episode of His childhood also illustrates the inborn depth of His thought that He related in a letter addressed to the Grand Vizier of the Sultan ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz.* He narrates that when He was a child, His father organised a magnificent feast for the marriage of one of his children, which lasted for a whole week as was customary. A puppeteer was also summoned, who mounted a play on the life of the famous Turkish Sultan Salim I.[†] The cream of

* 1830-1876.

† Selim I (c. 1465-1520), a Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1512 to 1520. During his reign the Ottoman Empire was greatly expanded and came to include Egypt and Hejaz. Thus Selim could take the title of

the high society of the Persian capital attended the play. The young Ḥusayn-‘Alí was struck by the sumptuousness of the performance and the pompous beauty of the puppets and the scenes. When all was finished, the curtain was dropped, and in about twenty minutes, the puppeteer came out with a box under his arm. Bahá’u’lláh approached him and asked where Sultan Salim, his princely court, and the powerful army had gone. The puppeteer answered that he had put them all into the box he was keeping under his arm. His answer deeply impressed the Child and made Him ponder on the ephemerality of worldly things. He wrote in His letter to the Sultan’s Grand Vizier:

Ever since that day, all the trappings of the world have seemed in the eyes of this Youth akin to that same spectacle. They have never been, nor will they ever be, of any weight and consequence, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed. How greatly I marveled that men should pride themselves upon such vanities, whilst those possessed of insight, ere they witness any evidence of human glory, perceive with certainty the inevitability of its waning.¹⁰

Bahá’u’lláh also relates another meaningful episode of His childhood, that is, the effect produced upon Him by the perusal of the story of the massacre of the tribe of the Qurayzah. The Qurayzah were a Jewish tribe in Medina who, in 627 CE, betrayed Muhammad and, therefore, were harshly punished by the Muslims. According to Islamic traditions, 600-900 men were killed, their women and children were enslaved, and all the properties of the tribe were confiscated. Bahá’u’lláh writes that after He read the description of this event, His heart was overwhelmed by sad feelings of distress, sorrow and grief for the pains suffered by all those people. He also writes that He was immediately

Caliph of Islam, a position that his successors occupied to the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922.

consoled by the thought of God's boundless forgiveness and mercy and that He beseeched Him "to vouchsafe unto all the peoples of the world that which would establish unity and love among them." Twelve days followed, filled with a profound spiritual transfiguration, which endowed Him with an immense inner fortitude. He then became assured that the Spirit would gain ascendancy over human life, that whatever had been the cause of pain and disharmony among humankind would be removed from religious life, and that teachings conducive to the oneness of humanity would be established in the world.¹¹ No wonder in those years, He wrote in a short letter He addressed to one of His aunts that, although He was an unlettered Child, He could still read and write without having been taught by anyone because He enjoyed a special divine blessing.¹²

As Jesus had astonished the Jewish doctors in the great Temple in Jerusalem as a child, so Bahá'u'lláh as an adolescent charmed everyone through His character, insight and deep understanding of spiritual issues, of which He had never studied, because He had received the usual schooling of the youth of His social standing. This training included riding, fencing, calligraphy and classical poetry, but not theology. He was also endowed with an extraordinary power of exposition, arousing everyone's admiration. Despite His exceptional gifts, "He was never assertive nor argumentative; rather, always courteous and patient. Only one thing aroused His ire: any disrespectful reference to the Messengers of God and His Chosen Ones. Even then, He would admonish the offender with kindness and calm."¹³ One day, He attended a conference delivered by a celebrated Sufi master, known for his great wisdom and was a personal friend of the Shah. While discussing detachment, the Sufi said: "Should my servant come to me and say that Jesus the Christ was at the door, asking for me, my detachment is such that I would express no wish to see Him." Although these words were disrespectful towards Jesus, none of the attendants dared to counter them. However, Bahá'u'lláh asked: "You are very close to the person of the

sovereign, and he is very devoted to you, but if the chief executioner with ten of his men were to come to this door and tell you that the monarch wanted to see you, would you take it calmly or would you be perturbed?" The wise man pondered briefly and then answered: "In truth, I would feel anxious." "In that case," said Bahá'u'lláh, "you should not make such an assertion."¹⁴

His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá has described His generosity:

He was most generous, giving abundantly to the poor. None who came to Him were turned away. The doors of His house were open to all. He always had many guests. This unbounded generosity was conducive to greater astonishment from the fact that He sought neither position nor prominence. In commenting upon this His friends said He would become impoverished, for His expenses were many and His wealth becoming more and more limited. "Why is he not thinking of his own affairs?" they inquired of each other; but some who were wise declared, "This personage is connected with another world; he has something sublime within him that is not evident now; the day is coming when it will be manifested." In truth, the Blessed Perfection* was a refuge for every weak one, a shelter for every fearing one, kind to every indigent one, lenient and loving to all creatures.¹⁵

In October 1835, He married. His family had arranged His marriage according to the cultural practices of that time, with an adolescent of an equally noble lineage. She also was the daughter of a Vizier, was very beautiful and clever, and was one of the very few of her sex in Persia who could write and read. The young

* Blessed Perfection is one of the titles whereby Bahá'u'lláh was known among His followers, as well as the Ancient Beauty and Blessed Beauty.



woman was related to her Groom's family because her brother had married a sister of Bahá'u'lláh. Her name was Ásíyih,^{*} but her family called her Navvábih, the feminine form of *navváb*, a title denoting majesty, grace and nobility, used for the descendants of the Šafavíd and Qajár kings.[†] Her daughter Bahíyyih Khánum[‡] described her to Lady Blomfield:[§]

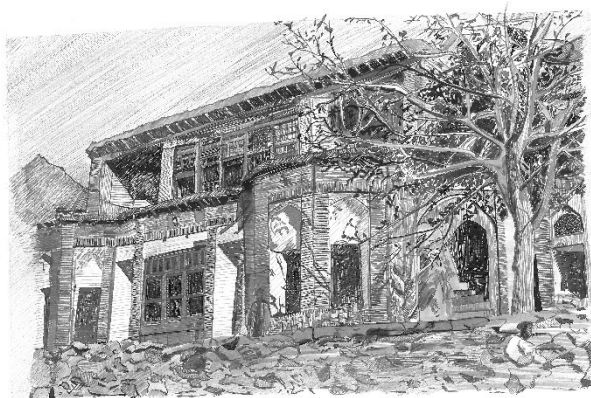
I wish you could have seen her as I first remember her, tall, slender, graceful, eyes of dark blue—a pearl, a flower amongst women.

^{*} The name of one of the sisters of the Egyptian Pharaoh, who according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá left the court of her brother to follow Moses and serve the Faith He had founded (see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets* 1:218).

[†] Two dynasties of Persian kings.

[‡] 1846-1932.

[§] Sara Lady Blomfield (1859-1939), one of the founders of *Save the Children Fund* and an eminent Irish Bahá'í.



I have been told that even when very young, her wisdom and intelligence were remarkable. I always think of her in those earliest days of my memory as queenly in her dignity and loveliness, full of consideration for everybody, gentle, of a marvelous unselfishness, no action of hers ever failed to show the loving-kindness of her pure heart; her very presence seemed to make an atmosphere of love and happiness wherever she came, enfolding all comers in the fragrance of gentle courtesy.¹⁶

For six months, a skilful goldsmith worked to chisel the bride's jewels and carve the buttons of her precious clothes, setting multicoloured gems in pure gold. Her dowry included one servant, two maids, a considerable amount of money and a sizeable plot of land. The beauty, gentle manners, wisdom and queenly dignity of this young woman well suited the seventeen-year-old Man to Whom she was given as a bride: raven hair, piercing black eyes, brave, noble in His lineage and character, magnanimous, and generous. Years later, their daughter Bahíyyih told Lady Blomfield it was a marriage of love. Bahá'u'lláh

always called her Navváb, the masculine form of Navvábih, the title her family had given her. He also gave her the title of the Most Exalted Leaf, to mean her surrender to the will of God and her steadfastness under the scourge of tribulations. Finally, after her passing, He wrote that she was His “perpetual consort in all the worlds of God.”¹⁷ The young couple often went to the ancestral mansion of Bahá’u’lláh in Tákur, surrounded by pleasant gardens rich in trees, fruit plants, and flowers of every kind. The two youth loved country life and disliked the worldly superficiality of court life, to which they had full access out of their birthright. They spent many days of their youth there, benefitting whomever they met and who needed assistance. They came thus to be called the Father of the Poor and the Mother of Consolation.



In 1839, when His father died, Bahá’u’lláh was only 22 years old, but He was the most authoritative member of his large family. In the last years of his life, Mírzá Buzurg, after the death of Fath ‘Alí Shah, who had been his great admirer, had been hit by many calamities, which had put to the test his huge assets due to the enmity and jealousy of the Grand Vizier of Muhammad Shah,* Fath ‘Alí Shah’s successor. Besides this awkward sit-

uation, a flow seriously damaged his splendid mansion in Tákur. Bahá’u’lláh, wise, brave and generous as He was, was of great help. He also took charge of the education of His younger half-

* 1808-1848.

brothers, especially Yahyá* and Muhammad-Qulí,† who, when their father passed away, were but eight and two years old, respectively. Therefore, His father's position as a Vizier was offered to Him, not to any other member of His large family. But He refused. They say that the Grand Vizier commented: "Leave him to himself. Such a position is unworthy of him. He has some higher aim in view. I cannot understand him, but I am convinced that he is destined for some lofty career. His thoughts are not like ours. Let him alone."¹⁸

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* 1831-1912.

† 1837-1910.

On 22 May 1844, a phenomenon began in Persia, which Westerners very soon called the Bábí movement, from the title of the Báb, that is, The Gate, whereby its Founder Siyyid* ‘Alí Muḥammad from Shiraz† was known. The West immediately showed an interest in this movement and was impressed by its innovative power, a real revolution in Iran. This movement was superficially considered an attempt to challenge the power of the State and the enormous political ascendancy of the powerful Iranian clergy. In reality, it was a new religion that paid little attention to politics and preached a spiritual and ethic renewal, which, when achieved, would have produced among its many consequences the result of putting an end to the ingrained corruption that characterised the political life of Iran in those times. The Báb presented Himself to Iran and the Islamic world as the “Promised One,” awaited by them for many long years. Muslims of the age of Queen Victoria‡—like the Jews of the times of Emperor Augustus,§ who waited for the Messiah as a liberator of their people from the yoke of foreign oppression— were waiting for the Promised One of Islam as a warrior who would conquer the world. Thus, when the Báb, a meek merchant, claimed to be their Promised One, they mocked Him, persecuted Him, and finally shot and killed Him on 9 July 1850. The Báb explained that the power of the Promised One was not of this world, that He was

* Siyyid is a title ascribed in the Islamic world to the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

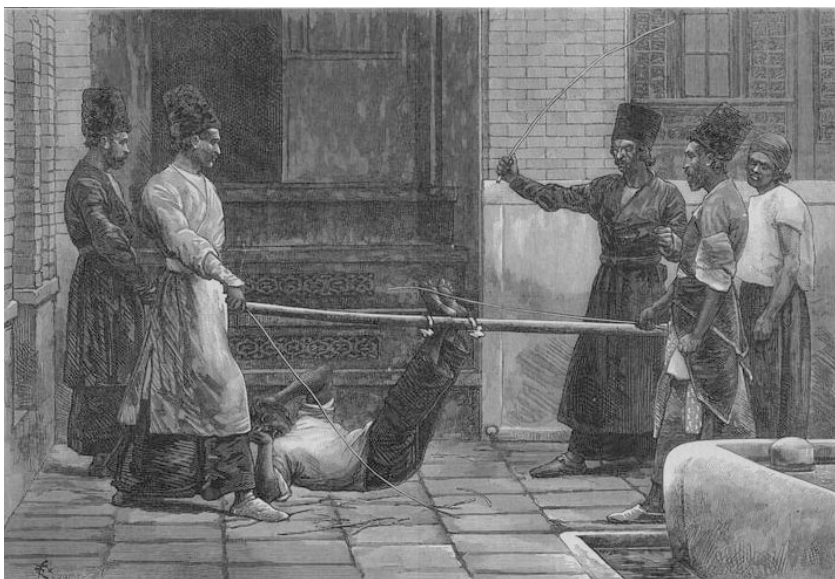
† 1819-1850.

‡ 1837-1901.

§ 23 a.C.-14 d.C.

not a military subduer of peoples and nations but a conqueror of souls and hearts. He asked those souls and hearts for a total renewal: a life wholly devoted to the Spirit in a steady effort to manifest its qualities in their daily lives. These are the words He addressed to His first disciples, as related by a meticulous chronicler:

It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness, His power and glory. The very members of your body must bear witness to the loftiness of your purpose, the integrity of your life, the reality of your faith, and the exalted character of your devotion . . . Ponder the words of Jesus addressed to His disciples, as He sent them forth to propagate the Cause of God. In words such as these, He bade them arise and fulfil their mission: "Ye are even as the fire which in the darkness of the night has been kindled upon the mountain-top. Let your light shine before the eyes of men. Such must be the purity of your character and the degree of your renunciation, that the people of the earth may through you recognize and be drawn closer to the heavenly Father who is the Source of purity and grace. For none has seen the Father who is in heaven. You who are His spiritual children must by your deeds exemplify His virtues, and witness to His glory. You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? Such must be the degree of your detachment, that into whatever city you enter to proclaim and teach the Cause of God, you should in no wise expect either meat or reward from its people. Nay, when you depart out of that city, you should shake the dust from off your feet. As you have entered it pure and undefiled, so must you depart from that city. For verily I say, the heavenly Father is ever with you and keeps watch over you. If you be faithful to Him, He will assuredly deliver



into your hands all the treasures of the earth, and will exalt you above all the rulers and kings of the world.” . . . The time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him. “The good word riseth up unto Him, and the righteous deed will cause it to be exalted before Him.” . . . Beseech the Lord your God to grant that no earthly entanglements, no worldly affections, no ephemeral pursuits, may tarnish the purity, or embitter the sweetness, of that grace which flows through you.¹

At the same time, the Báb announced that He was the Herald of an incoming day, whose secret was still concealed, the Day of “Him Whom God shall make manifest.” He said: “The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age.”² Like John the Baptist had said



about Jesus, “he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear,”³ so He wrote about “Him Whom God shall make manifest:” “The germ . . . that holds within itself the potentialities of the Revelation that is to come is endowed with a potency superior to the combined forces of all those who follow me.”⁴ And although He had fascinated, through the charm of

His person and the depth of His Words and Writings, not only simple people but also eminent Iranian personages as well as sundry Westerners, who later on studied His Writings, like the

Comte of Gobineau* and Lady Sheil,[†] the Báb addressed “Him Whom God shall make manifest” with the following words: “Exalted art Thou, O my Lord the Omnipotent! How puny and contemptible my word and all that pertaineth unto me appear unless they be related to Thy great glory. Grant that through the assistance of Thy grace whatsoever pertaineth unto me may be acceptable in Thy sight.”⁵

Immediately after He had announced His divine mission to His first 18 disciples, the Báb sent an epistle to Bahá’u’lláh. His letter reached His addressee in August 1844 while Bahá’u’lláh was in Teheran together with His brother Músá.[‡] The messenger who delivered it into His hands has related

* Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), a French diplomatic, writer and philosopher.

† Mary Leonora Woulfe Sheil (m. 1869), wife of Sir Justin Sheil, a British diplomatic who lived for many years in Persia.

‡ ca.1819-1887.



that He immediately read aloud a part of it and, after He had read a page, said to His brother:

Músá, what have you to say? Verily I say, whoso believes in the Qur'án and recognizes its Divine origin, and yet hesitates, though it be for a moment, to admit that these soul-stirring words are endowed with the same regenerating power, has most assuredly erred in his judgment and has strayed far from the path of justice.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh never personally met the Báb in this world, but He had a correspondence with Him. He became an eager upholder of the Báb and His spiritual and moral renewal message. And this was not unimportant for that newborn Faith because Bahá'u'lláh emanated a mysterious charm from which it was difficult to escape. "His [Bahá'u'lláh's] speech was like a 'rushing torrent' and his clearness in exposition brought the most learned divines to his feet,"⁷ wrote Thomas K. Cheyne. * Through Him, many of his fellow-citizens embraced the Bábí Faith. They heroically defended it against the fierce persecutions that immediately raged against its Founder and followers, seen as enemies of the religious and political establishment.

It would take too long to describe Bahá'u'lláh's commitment to the diffusion of the new divine Word, the bringer of a spiritually regenerating lifeblood to all who decided to follow its stern precepts, and the respect showed towards Him by the most eminent among the followers of the Báb. His home became a centre of activities of the new Faith and hosted many of its great personages. He was present at most of the fundamental events of the short but pregnant history of the Bábí Faith. In June-July 1848, He attended the conference of Badasht, a hamlet on the border of Mazandaran, the meeting during which the complete independence of the Bábí Faith from Islam was openly proclaimed, and its

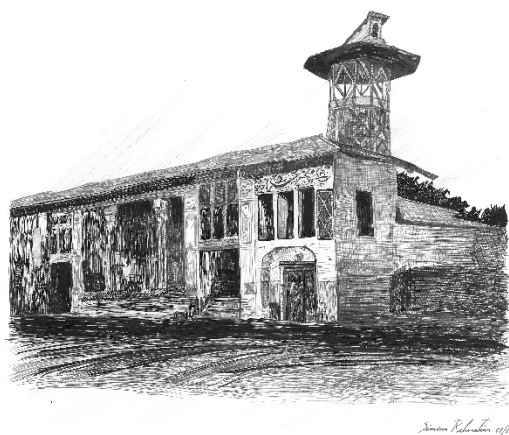
* Thomas Kelly Cheyne (1841-1915), an English theologian and Biblicist.

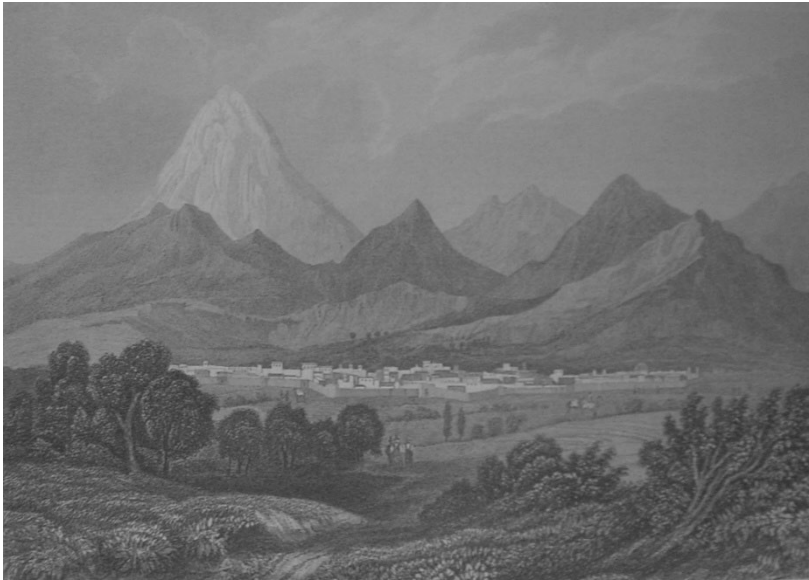
followers forsook the Muslim cultural practices and entirely adopted those sanctioned by the Báb. During that conference, He adopted the title of Bahá, and His companions began to use that title to refer to Him. In 1849, He visited the group of Bábís that had assembled around the Shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí in Mazandaran to defend themselves from the aggressions they had been continuously subjected to. And, when the imperial army besieged the Shrine, He was arrested while trying to join the besieged Bábís with eleven companions. He accepted to be bastinadoed in place of his companions, comprising His half-brother Yaḥyá, to spare them the excruciating pains of that punishment. The penance was inflicted with such harshness that His feet bled. After the Báb was shot and killed in Tabríz on 9 July 1850, He made every effort to put the remains of the martyred Prophet and His precious Writings in a safe place. He did all He could to uphold, sometimes with conspicuous sums of money, and to cheer up through His wisdom, His love and His courage the Bábís, heartbroken from the martyrdom of their Master.

Last but not least, He protected Zarrín Táj,* the poetess from Qazvín, known first as Qurratu'l-‘Ayn, Solace of the Eyes, and then as Ṭáhirih, the Pure One, the “Persian Joan of Arc,” accepted by the Báb among His first 18 disciples.† For reasons that do not seem very clear, the Báb had invested Yaḥyá, Bahá’u’lláh’s half-brother, with the title of figurehead of the Bábí community pending the upcoming advent of “Him Whom God shall make manifest.” Nonetheless, the most authoritative personage of the Bábí Faith, due to His greatness, was Bahá’u’lláh.

* 1817ca.-1852.

† The great French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) asked the French poet Catulle Mendès (1841-1909) to write a tragedy about her life.





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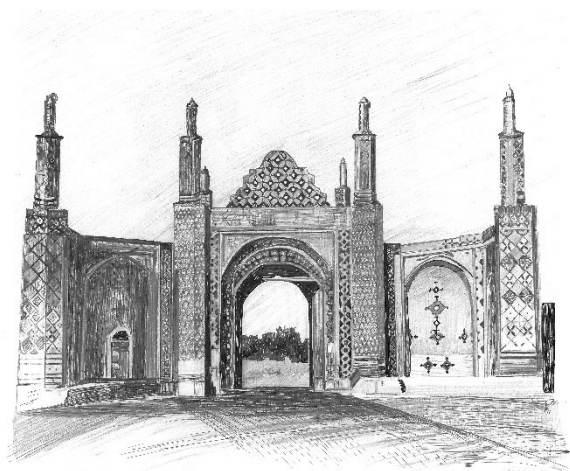
Page 22. *Teheran, around 1850.*

The Síyáh-Chál and the Intimation of His Prophetic Mission

On 15 August 1852, three Bábí youth, whom the martyrdom of their beloved Master had driven crazy, made an attempt on Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh's* life with weapons apt for killing at most a sparrow. Given the position occupied by Bahá'u'lláh among the Bábís, it was natural for the anger of the sovereign, his relatives, and upholders, rightly filled with indignation because of this crime, to focus on Bahá'u'lláh. However, the three young men had acted on their initiative in a fit of madness produced by their pain for the recent death of their spiritual Leader and against the obligation to obey the governmental authorities and to be lovers of peace inculcated by the Báb and later by Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh was wholly innocent of any guilt or responsibility for that event. The attempt stirred up an unprecedented wave of persecution against the Bábís. Such were the horrors perpetrated in those days in the capital and throughout the country that their echoes arrived as far as in the West, arousing indignation and compassion for those poor innocent people who were being struck so harshly. An emblematic document is a letter written on 29 August 1852 by Captain Alfred von Goumöens, an Austrian officer attending the Shah. Disgusted and horrified in front of the cruelties he was obliged to witness, he resigned and hastened back to his country. Here is his letter:†

* 1831-1896.

† This letter appeared in *Soldatenfreund*, no. 291, 17 October 1852, a Prussian military review published between 1833 and 1914.

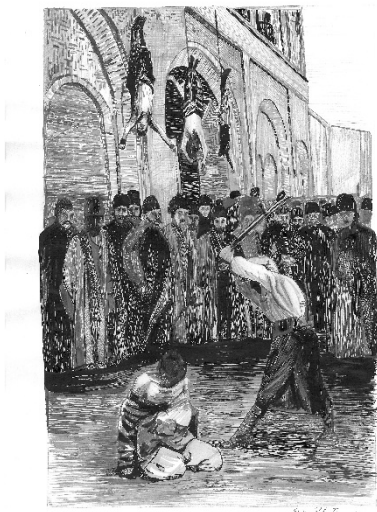


James Robertson 1813

Dear Friend, My last letter of the 20th inst. mentioned the attempt on the King. I will now communicate to you the result of the interrogation to which the two criminals were subjected. In spite of the terrible tortures inflicted, the examination extorted no comprehensive confession; the lips of the fanatics remained closed, even when by means of red-hot pincers and limb-rending screws they sought to discover the chief conspirator . . . But follow me, my friend, you who lay claim to a heart and European ethics, follow me to the unhappy ones who, with gouged-out eyes, must eat, on the scene of the deed, without any sauce, their own amputated ears; or whose teeth are torn out with inhuman violence by the hand of the executioner; or whose bare skulls are simply crushed by blows from a hammer; or where the bazar is illuminated with 1 unhappy victims, because on right and left the people dig deep holes in their breasts and shoulders and insert burning wicks in the wounds. I saw some dragged in chains through the bazar preceded by a military band, in whom these wicks had burned so deep that now the fat flickered convulsively in the wound like a newly-extinguished lamp. Not

seldom it happens that the unwearying ingenuity of the Orientals leads to fresh tortures. They will skin the soles of the Bábí's feet, soak the wounds in boiling oil, shoe the foot like the hoof of a horse, and compel the victim to run. No cry escaped from the victim's breast; the torment is endured in dark silence by the numbed sensation of the fanatic; now he must run; the body cannot endure what the soul has endured; he falls. Give him the coup de grace! Put him out of his pain! No! The executioner swings the whip, and—I myself have had to witness it—the unhappy victim of hundredfold tortures and runs! This is the beginning of the end. As for the end itself, they hang the scorched and perforated bodies by their hands and feet to a tree head downwards, and now every Persian may try his marksmanship to heart's content from a fixed but not too proximate distance on the noble quarry placed at his disposal. I saw corpses torn by nearly 150 bullets . . . When I read over again what I have written I am overcome by the thought that those who are with you in our dearly beloved Austria may doubt the full truth of the picture, and accuse me of exaggeration. Would to God that I had not lived to see it! But by the duties of my profession I was unhappily often, only too often, a witness of these abominations. At present I never leave my house, in order not to meet with fresh scenes of horror. After their death the Bábís are hacked in two and either nailed to the city gate, or cast out into the plain as food for the dogs and jackals. Thus the punishment extends even beyond the limits which bound this bitter world, for Musulmans who are not buried have no right to enter the Prophet's Paradise. Since my whole soul revolts against such infamy, against such abominations as recent times, according to the judgment of all, present, I will no longer maintain my connection with the scene of such crimes.¹

Later, Ernest Renan* spoke of a great massacre perpetrated in a single day of persecution in August 1852, defining it “a day perhaps unparalleled in the history of the world.”² And according to Myron Henry Phelps,[†] in that period, more than ten thousand people were martyred.



Influential personages in the capital informed Bahá'u'lláh of the attempt and the dangers looming over Him. They offered Him shelter and their protection until the time the situation would have quieted down. However, Bahá'u'lláh, who was innocent of any guilt, refused their offers and rode alone towards the capital to defend himself from those unwarranted accusations in front of the Shah. He was arrested, unsaddled, ac-

companied to the capital, with bared head and bare feet in the summer heat, and held up to public scorn. When the procession of people was approaching the prison where it had been decided to incarcerate Him, an old woman emerged from the crowd with a stone in her hand, anxious to hurl it at the Prisoner's face. A biographer narrates that Bahá'u'lláh stopped and said to the guards: “Suffer not this woman to be disappointed . . . Deny her not what she regards as a meritorious act in the sight of God.”³

* 1823-1892, a French historian of religions.

† 1856-1916, the New York lawyer, who upheld Indian independence from the British rule, and in 1912 published the first biography of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the English language.



In Teheran, He was thrown into the most horrible imperial prison, the notorious Siyáh-Chál, the Black Pit. It was a vast subterranean dungeon, transformed into the harshest prison for the worst criminals in the kingdom, located not far from the royal palace. Its obscurity, its filth, its stink, the presence of the most heinous dregs of society and the cruelty of the jailers made it an overwhelming place. A chain was fastened around His neck weighing 51 kilos, known as Qará-Guhar, a Turkish locution which could be translated as “the blackest,” where black stands for pernicious, evil. The wounds it produced on His skin left indelible scars. His enemies, anxious to gain the favour of the mother of the monarch, she being antipathetic to Bahá’u’lláh, went as far as intercepting and poisoning His food. They were not wholly successful, and He did not die, but this attempt compromised His health for many long years.⁴ His son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who one day was allowed to enter into the courtyard where His Father went once a day for an out-of-cell hour, narrates that “He was terribly altered, so ill He could hardly walk, His hair and beard unkempt, His neck galled and swollen from the pressure of a heavy steel collar, His body bent by the weight of His chains.”⁵ That horrifying sight made the sensitive child, who was only nine



years old, faint. Although Bahá'u'lláh was in disgrace, some eminent personages went to the prison to visit Him, as the illustrious teacher who had been the preceptor of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, a demonstration of the great respect in which the people still held him. He remained there from the middle of August 1852 to December of the same year. Together with him were scores of Bábís, all chained in pairs. Every day, the executioners went down into that horrific dungeon through the one flight of stairs that connected it to the outside and called the names of those who would be led to their execution. A chronicler has recorded the words whereby Bahá'u'lláh Himself described those terrible days:

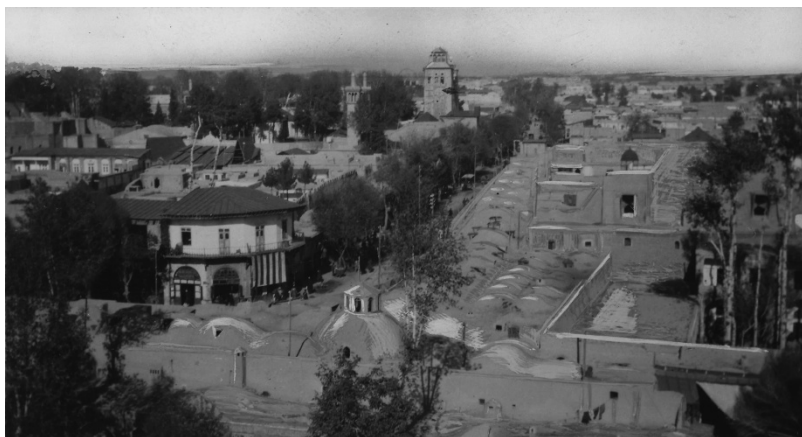
We were all huddled together in one cell, our feet in stocks, and around our necks fastened the most galling of chains. The air we breathed was laden with the foulest impurities, while the floor on which we sat was covered with filth and infested with vermin. No ray of light was allowed to penetrate that pestilential dungeon or to warm its icy-coldness. We were placed in two rows, each facing the other. We had taught them

to repeat certain verses which, every night, they chanted with extreme fervour. "God is sufficient unto me; He verily is the All-sufficing!" one row would intone, while the other would reply: "In Him let the trusting trust." The chorus of these gladsome voices would continue to peal out until the early hours of the morning. Their reverberation would fill the dungeon, and, piercing its massive walls, would reach the ears of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, whose palace was not far distant from the place where we were imprisoned. "What means this sound?" he was reported to have exclaimed. "It is the anthem the Bábís are intoning in their prison," they replied. The Shah made no further remarks, nor did he attempt to restrain the enthusiasm his prisoners, despite the horrors of their confinement, continued to display . . . Every day Our gaolers, entering Our cell, would call the name of one of Our companions, bidding him arise and follow them to the foot of the gallows. With what eagerness would the owner of that name respond to that solemn call! Relieved of his chains, he would spring to his feet and, in a state of uncontrollable delight, would approach and embrace Us. We would seek to comfort him with the assurance of an everlasting life in the world beyond, and, filling his heart with hope and joy, would send him forth to win the crown of glory. He would embrace, in turn, the rest of his fellow-prisoners and then proceed to die as dauntlessly as he had lived. Soon after the martyrdom of each of these companions, We would be informed by the executioner, who had grown to be friendly to Us, of the circumstances of the death of his victim, and of the joy with which he had endured his sufferings to the very end.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh narrates that the day when the youth who was chained together with Him was called for his execution, this man



James McNeill Whistler 1865



“throwing off his chains . . . sprang to his feet, embraced each of his fellow-prisoners, and, taking Us into his arms, pressed Us lovingly to his heart.” “That moment,” goes on Bahá’u’lláh in His narration, “We discovered that he had no shoes to wear. We gave him Our own, and, speaking a last word of encouragement and cheer, sent him forth to the scene of his martyrdom. Later on, his executioner came to Us, praising in glowing language the spirit which that youth had shown. How thankful We were to God for this testimony which the executioner himself had given!”⁷

Only the Hand of Providence spared Bahá’u’lláh’s life in those dark times. Many wanted His head, especially the mother of the young Shah, who saw Him, the most authoritative personage among the rank and file of the Bábís, as responsible for the attempt on the life of her royal son, who was in his early twenties. Nevertheless, in those perilous days, Bahá’u’lláh experienced the most extraordinary mystical visions that confirmed Him in the awareness of the seal of greatness that had been impressed upon His soul in that immemorial time when God had shaped it.

Those experiences were very similar to those described by the great divine Masters that came before Him.⁸ Moses on Mount Sinai saw “the angel of the Lord . . . in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” and heard the voice of God calling Him to entrust Him with the mission of rescuing the Jews from the Egyptian

oppression.⁹ When Zarathustra was thirty years old, He had a vision of *Vohu Manah* (the Good Thought), the angel which the Zoroastrians consider “the medium through which God prefers to reveal Himself,”¹⁰ in the form of a personage dressed in light. This angel guided Him to the presence of the Godhead.¹¹ In the course of seven talks with the Almighty, on a mystic mount in “the forest of the sacred talks,”¹² Zarathustra was appointed by Him as His Prophet and received the revelation of His message from Him.¹³ The Buddha was enlightened under a tree of *Ficus religiosa*, called the *Bodhi* (awakened), near a town called today Bodh Gaya, in the Indian region of Bihar. He had stopped there to meditate when He thought that all his ascetic efforts for His spiritual liberation had been useless. He spent several hours in tranquil meditation under that tree. When the sun rose at the end of the full moon night of May/June 486 BC, He was finally enlightened. Jesus, while coming out of Jordan’s waters where He had been baptized by John the Baptist, “saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him” and heard “a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”¹⁴ Muhammad heard in front of a cave on Mount Hira, nearby Mecca, the voice of the angel Gabriel saying to Him: “Muhammad! You are the Messenger of God, and I am Gabriel!”¹⁵ Bahá’u’lláh Himself has left, in His extensive Writings, His testimony of those luminous experiences:

During the days I lay in the prison of Tihrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.¹⁶

In those days, probably around October 1852, He also heard a voice saying to Him:

Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.¹⁷

Most importantly, He beheld a Maiden, a symbol of the divine “Most Great Spirit” whose human Manifestation He was:

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God’s honoured servants.

Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. This is He Whose Presence is the ardent desire of the denizens of the Realm of eternity, and of them that dwell within the Tabernacle of glory, and yet from His Beauty do ye turn aside.¹⁸

His divinely assigned Mission had been clearly announced to His human Temple. Later, He explained that His advent was the fulfilment of the ancient messianic prophecies of all religions, which now, like mighty rivers of divine grace, merged into the boundless Ocean of His Revelation. In Him the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled, which called Him “Glory of the Lord,”⁹ the “Everlasting Father,” the “Prince of Peace,” the “Wonderful,” the “Counsellor,”²⁰ the “Rod come forth out of the stem of Jesse,”²¹ He Who “shall judge among the nations,”²² Who “shall be established upon the throne of David,”²³ Who “shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”²⁴ He fulfilled the prophecies of the Zoroastrian religion, which had announced “the advent of the World-Savior Sháh-Bahrám, Who would triumph over Ahriman* and usher in an era of blessedness and peace.”²⁵ He was the “Most Great Spirit,” the “Tenth Avatar,” the “Immaculate Manifestation of Krishna.” foreseen in the Bhagavad Gita and the “Buddha named Maitreya, the Buddha of universal fellowship” announced by Buddha.²⁶ Jesus had announced Him as the “Son of Man” Who “shall come in the glory of His Father”²⁷ “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,”²⁸ with “all the holy angels” about Him, and “all nations” gathered before His throne.²⁹ The Revelation had described His Law as “a new heaven and a new earth,”³⁰ as the “New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”³¹ Finally, the Koran had depicted the Day of His Advent as the day whereon “God” will “come down” “overshadowed with clouds,”³² the Day whereon the “Lord shall come, and the angels rank on rank,”³³ the “Day of Meeting” with God,³⁴ the Day “when the earth shall shine with the light of her Lord, and the Book shall be set, and the Prophets shall be brought up, and the witnesses; and judgment shall be given between them with equity; and none shall be wronged.”³⁵

* According to Zoroastrians, the evil spirit who leads the demons (*daēva*).

He did not reveal this divine Intimation to anyone for many years. At the beginning of His Revelation, He merely composed a short ode of twenty couplets, later entitled *Rashh-i-'Amá*, that could be translated as “Dewdrops of the Realms Above,” in which, adopting the ancient modes of the Persian mystical lyric, He describes His ecstasy in Teheran. Considering the cryptic character of that mystic poetry, no one in that time could understand, while reading those twenty pregnant couplets, that Bahá'u'lláh was claiming to be the Promised One of all the peoples, the prophesied “He Whom God shall make manifest” that had been announced by the Báb.

While He was languishing in that sombre dungeon, the population, aroused by both the clergy and the governmental authorities, continued to give vent to its barbarian cruelty in its fanatical hate of the Bábís. In the meantime, the religious and civic authorities thoroughly examined His case in a vain effort to demonstrate that He was involved in the attempt on the life of the Shah and to find a pretext to put Him to death. At last, the truth prevailed. His innocence of the crime hastily and recklessly ascribed to Him was demonstrated in the eyes of the sovereign, His angry family, his indignant court, the shocked religious establishment, and the furious people. It was about the middle of December in 1852 when the Grand Vizier* decided to set Him free. Bahá'u'lláh presented Himself to him, by whom He had been summoned for an immediate meeting, with His hair and beard unkempt and the same torn and dirty clothes He had worn in the prison. The Grand Vizier was horrified and told Him: “Had you chosen to take my advice, and had you dissociated yourself from the faith of the Siyyid-i-Báb, you would never have suffered the pains and indignities that have been heaped upon you.”³⁶ And Bahá'u'lláh answered: “Had you . . . followed my counsels, the affairs of the government would not have reached so critical a stage.”³⁷ The Grand Vizier remembered that

* Mírzá Áqá Khán Núrí (ca. 1807-1865), who was tied by bonds of friendship to Bahá'u'lláh's family, because he also came from Núr.

after the execution of the Báb Bahá'u'lláh told him that the event would kindle a flame that “will blaze forth more fiercely than ever.”³⁸ Therefore, the Grand Vizier asked Him: “What is it that you advise me now to do?” Bahá'u'lláh answered: “Command the governors of the realm . . . to cease shedding the blood of the innocent, to cease plundering their property, to cease dishonouring their women and injuring their children. Let them cease the persecution of the Faith of the Báb; let them abandon the idle hope of wiping out its followers.”³⁹ The Grand Vizier heeded His advice and immediately ordered all the kingdom governors to stop persecuting the Bábís and reestablish peace and tranquillity.

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Page 28. *Afchih. The village near Teheran, where Bahá'u'lláh was at the time of the attempt against the life of the Shah.*

Page 30. *Teheran. The Síyáh-Chál.*

Page 31. *Teheran. A view of the city around 1930.*

4 His Exile from Iran and His Move to Iraq

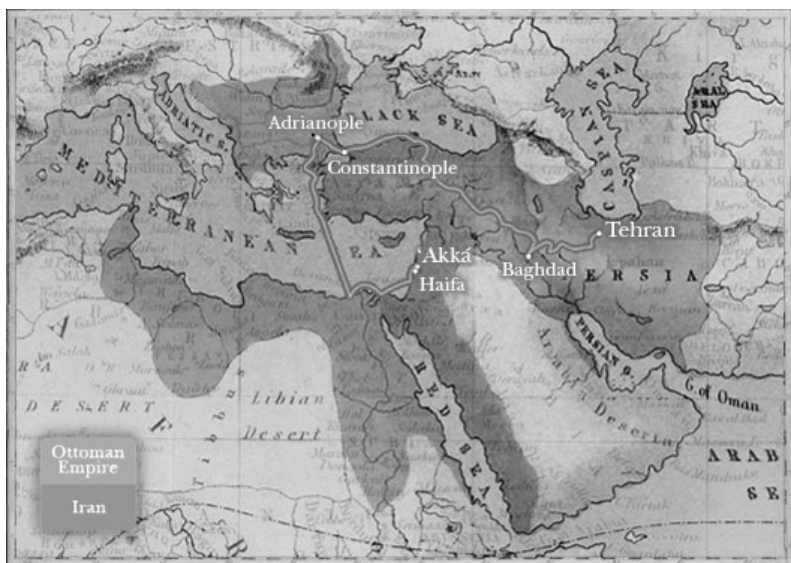
When Bahá'u'lláh came out of the prison, He did not have a home. The angry mob had besieged, assailed and looted it, while the Prisoner's family had a narrow escape in the house of an uncle, which was not far from the Síyáh-Chál. Everyone had abandoned them except a servant and a maid. The mansion in Tákur, which Bahá'u'lláh had inherited from His father, had been looted and partially destroyed; the same fate had overtaken the adjacent village, which also belonged to Him.* All His possessions had been seized. Most treasures of His family, such as an ancient parchment manuscript by the Imam 'Alí,[†] a cousin and the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, and a manuscript of the Divan of the poet Hafez,[‡] the Persian Petrarch, written and illuminated by a celebrated calligrapher, whose value was twelve thousand golden sovereigns, one for each of its twelve thousand verses, passed to the hands of the Grand Vizier, who had been for a long time eager to acquire them. His son, 'Abbas, Who later came to be known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá and was His successor at the head of the Bahá'í Community and the appointed Interpreter of His Writings, had contracted tuberculosis. Bahá'u'lláh was hosted by one of His brothers, a physician¹ who had married one of Bahá'u'lláh's cousins, Maryam.[§] This lady assisted Bahá'u'lláh's wife while nursing her Husband back to health,

* The mansion, later bought and restored by the Bahá'í community, has been once more destroyed in 1981 during the on-going persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

[†] d. 661 C.E.

[‡] c.1320 – c.1390.

[§] c.1826-c.1868.



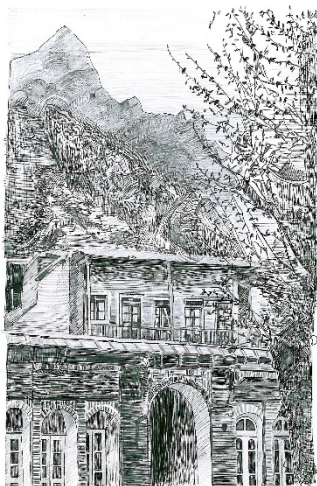
whose physical condition, after that tough experience, was greatly impaired. When His relatives saw Him ragged and dirty, His limbs covered in sores, they were heartbroken. However, behind that evident physical decay, they perceived that something unusual must have happened to their beloved Relative while He was in prison. His daughter Bahíyyih said, many years later to Lady Blomfield, that Bahá'u'lláh immediately appeared to their eyes surrounded by a mysterious light which seemed “to enfold him like a shining vesture.” The family members did not understand the meaning of that light, nor did he inform them of the extraordinary mystical experiences He had while He languished in prison. Bahíyyih told the Irish Lady they learnt its significance only several years later. At that time, they “were only aware of the wonder of it, without understanding, or even being told the details of the sacred event.”²

Bahá'u'lláh had been chosen as the Mouthpiece of God, a weighty and arduous mission, which He had in no way solicited. Two thousand years ago, Christ said: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”³ Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “Had there been any expounder



or speaker discernible, We would not have made Ourselves the object of the censure, ridicule and slander of the people.”⁴ “But the divine call was clear and imperative and He obeyed. God’s will became His will, and God’s pleasure, His pleasure; and with ‘radiant acquiescence’ He declared:—‘Verily I say: Whatever be-falleth in the path of God is the beloved of the soul and the desire of the heart. Deadly poison in His path is pure honey, and every tribulation a draught of crystal water’.”⁵

A few days after His liberation, Bahá’u’lláh received an imperial edict ordering Him to leave Iran with all His family within one month. The edict recognized His right to choose the country of His exile. The Russian government offered Him citizenship, shelter in its country and a privy purse. However, He kindly declined this offer and decided to move to Baghdad. After a month, having scarcely regained His energy and having assured that the Báb’s remains, secreted by His followers immediately after His martyrdom, were put into safety, He left. It was 12 January 1853. He was accompanied by His wife, Ásíyyih, who was pregnant, and His two children ‘Abbas and Bahíyyih, nine and seven years old, respectively. The youngest child, Mihdí, born in 1848, was only five. He



James Robertson 1863

was too frail to face that journey in the heart of winter through impervious mountains and was left with his mother's grandmother, with whom he remained for about seven years. Bahá'u'lláh also was followed by His brother Músá and His young half-brother, Muḥammad-Qulí, of whom He had taken care since his infancy and who was always faithful to Him even after His passing.⁶ The

group was escorted by a member of the imperial guard and an officer of the Russian Embassy. The journey, which included crossing the treacherous mountain ranges of Western Iran, was arduous because of the cold weather and the lack of means at their disposal after all their properties had been looted and confiscated. Bahá'u'lláh described those difficulties in one of His prayers:

My God, My Master, My Desire! . . . Thou hast created this atom of dust through the consummate power of Thy might, and nurtured Him with Thine hands which none can chain up Thou hast destined for Him trials and tribulations which no tongue can describe, nor any of Thy Tablets adequately recount. The throat Thou didst accustom to the touch of silk Thou hast, in the end, clasped with strong chains, and the body Thou didst ease with brocades and velvets Thou hast at last subjected to the abasement of a dungeon. Thy decree hath shackled Me with unnumbered fetters, and cast about My

neck chains that none can sunder. A number of years have passed during which afflictions have, like showers of mercy, rained upon Me How many the nights during which the weight of chains and fetters allowed Me no rest, and how numerous the days during which peace and tranquillity were denied Me, by reason of that wherewith the hands and tongues of men have afflicted Me! Both bread and water which Thou hast, through Thy all-embracing mercy, allowed unto the beasts of the field, they have, for a time, forbidden unto this servant, and the things they refused to inflict upon such as have seceded from Thy Cause, the same have they suffered to be inflicted upon Me, until, finally, Thy decree was irrevocably fixed, and Thy behest summoned this servant to depart out of Persia, accompanied by a number of frail-bodied men and children of tender age, at this time when the cold is so intense that one cannot even speak, and ice and snow so abundant that it is impossible to move.⁷

That journey has been compared to similar episodes in the lives of His illustrious predecessors. It is reminiscent of Abraham's exile from Ur by the Chaldeans at the command of His king, indignant over the rebellion of the Patriarch against the idolatry practised by his people; of the exodus of Moses, Aaron and the Jews from Egypt, the land where they were born, to go towards their Promised Land; of the flight of the holy family from Egypt, to save the Infant Jesus from the insane rage of King Herod; of the emigration of Muhammad and His companions from Mecca to the town of Medina, to escape the persecutions to which they were exposed by the establishment of the town after Muhammad had proclaimed His prophetic mission and preached monotheism. Bahá'u'lláh's journey included 33 stages, one of which was Kermanshah, in the Zagros Mountains. Yahyá had taken refuge in that town, and Bahá'u'lláh invited him to a meeting. Yahyá was reluctant to accept His invitation because he was afraid to be identified as a Bábí, and then expressed his intention to go himself to Baghdad,



incognito. Bahá'u'lláh gave him a small sum, which he later used to go to the Iraqi capital and start a small trade. The group arrived in Baghdad on 8 April 1853 after a journey of almost three months.

In Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh found but a handful of faithful companions who warmly welcomed Him. Apart from them, He was wholly alone. He described His loneliness: "Upon Our arrival in Iraq We found the Cause of God sunk in deep apathy and the breeze of divine revelation stilled. Most of the believers were faint and dispirited, nay utterly lost and dead."⁸

A little while after He arrived in Baghdad, He was joined by His half-brother Yahyá, who, in any case, was still the figurehead of the Bábí community. Bahá'u'lláh immediately suggested he should return to Persia. However, he was not a very courageous person. During the long months of the slaughter of the Bábís in 1852, he had lurked through the country in disguise because he was afraid to be arrested and killed, forsaking the members of his community to their cruel fate. Even now, he preferred to ignore his brother's suggestion and remain in Baghdad. However, he did not want to share Bahá'u'lláh's house and took his residence in another quarter of the town, adopted a new name and devoted himself to a modest commercial activity, totally failing to fulfil his duties as the nominal head of the Bábí community. Such was

his panic that he went so far as threatening to excommunicate whoever would have revealed that he was the head of the Bábí community or openly recognized him in any casual meeting along the way. In Baghdad, the situation was quite unusual and challenging. The most eminent followers of the Báb had lost their lives, and only Bahá'u'lláh had been preserved by the hand of God. The man who, in his capacity as the figurehead of the community, should have encouraged the believers preferred to remain concealed. Nevertheless, he aspired to succeed the Báb as the head of His community, and in any case, the few times he spoke out on any issue, he proved unable to solve the problems presented to him. Only Bahá'u'lláh had the moral stamina to reinvigorate that scanty and scared community. He alone had the wisdom and the knowledge required to solve their perplexities, not only while dealing with issues of faith but also with the practical questions of their lives. Furthermore, His authority, already recognised by the followers of the Báb, began to win the esteem and the affection of several important personages of the town. Unfortunately, in those days, a sly personage appeared beside Yahyá, a certain Siyyid Muḥammad, who aroused Yahyá's ambition, ignited his envy towards the ascendancy of his Brother, stirred up troubles among the members of the community and did his best to convince everyone that Bahá'u'lláh was an usurper of Yahyá's primacy. All this came to compromise the unity of the community, which was so dear to the heart of Bahá'u'lláh. He wrote to His cousin Maryam, who had assisted Ásíyyih in Teheran to cure Him from the wounds of His imprisonment: "O Maryam! . . . From the Land of Ṭá (Teheran), after countless afflictions, We reached Iraq, at the bidding of the Tyrant of Persia, where, after the fetters of Our foes, We were afflicted with the perfidy of Our friends. God knoweth what befell Me thereafter!"⁹ He wrote moreover in another Tablet:

* The Bahá'ís call the writings, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets.

Oceans of sadness . . . have surged over Me, a drop of which no soul could bear to drink. Such is My grief that My soul hath well nigh departed from My body Give ear . . . to the voice of this lowly, this forsaken ant, that hath hid itself in its hole, and whose desire is to depart from your midst, and vanish from your sight, by reason of that which the hands of men have wrought. God, verily, hath been witness between Me and His servants Woe is Me, woe is Me! . . . All that I have seen from the day on which I first drank the pure milk from the breast of My mother until this moment hath been effaced from My memory, in consequence of that which the hands of the people have committed.¹⁰

Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, has left a description of the feelings that agitated Bahá'u'lláh's heart in those difficult days. He mentions His deep sadness and His heavy concerns. He writes that He said of those faithless friends, to whom He was lovingly trying to explain the importance of giving heed to the new divine call:

These creatures are the same creatures who for three thousand years have worshipped idols, and bowed down before the Golden Calf. Now, too, they are fit for nothing better Bid them recite: "Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants, and all abide by His bidding!"* Tell them to repeat it five hundred times, nay, a thousand times, by day and by night, sleeping and waking, that haply the Countenance of Glory may be unveiled to their eyes, and tiers of light descend upon them We

* This short prayer by the Báb, often used by the Bahá'is to implore assistance in their difficulties, may have been revealed by Bahá'u'lláh's Herald for His beloved wife the last time He met her before His martyrdom. "In the hour of your perplexity," He reportedly told her, "recite this prayer ere you go to sleep. I Myself will appear to you and will banish your anxiety." (Words of the Báb, quoted in Dawn-Breakers 191)

have, for a while, tarried amongst this people, and failed to discern the slightest response on their part.¹¹

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Page 38. *Historical map depicting the route of Bahá'u'lláh's forced exile from Tehran to 'Akká.*

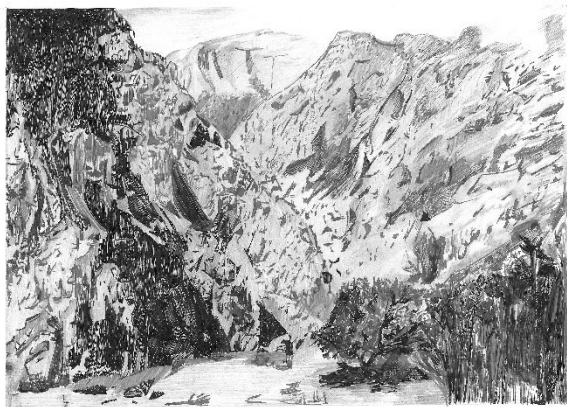
Page 39. *The mountains in western Iran which Bahá'u'lláh and His family had to traverse on their journey to Baghdad.*

Page 40. *The mountain town of Karand, where Bahá'u'lláh stopped on His journey from Teheran to Baghdad.*

Page 42. *Baghdad in the 1930s.*

Realising that His presence in Baghdad was, despite all His efforts to avoid any disunity, a cause of dissension and conflict, Bahá'u'lláh decided to leave, with His only aim "to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto . . . [His] companions, the means of injury to any soul, or the cause of sorrow to any heart."¹ Thus, on 10 April 1854, He left Baghdad, escorted by a Muslim servant, without saying anything to anyone. His servant, after a few weeks, was assailed and killed by robbers, and Bahá'u'lláh remained utterly alone. He had not told anyone where He was going. Later, He wrote about that departure:

We betook Ourselves to the wilderness, and there, separated and alone, led for two years a life of complete solitude. From Our eyes there rained tears of anguish, and in Our bleeding heart there surged an ocean of agonising pain. Many a night We had no food for sustenance, and many a day Our body found no rest . . . notwithstanding these showers of afflictions and unceasing calamities, Our soul was wrapt in blissful joy, and Our whole being evinced an ineffable gladness. For in Our solitude We were unaware of the harm or benefit, the health or ailment, of any soul. Alone, We communed with Our spirit, oblivious of the world and all that is therein. We knew not, however, that the mesh of divine destiny exceedeth the vastest of mortal conceptions, and the dart of His decree transcendeth the boldest of human designs. None can escape the snares He setteth, and no soul can find release except through submission to His will. By the righteousness of God!



James Robertson 11/13

Our withdrawal contemplated no return, and Our separation hoped for no reunion.²

Thus, two years began, during which Bahá'u'lláh lived in loneliness, wholly segregated from His family and the Bábí community. This biennial seclusion has been compared to similar events in the lives of His illustrious Predecessors, Who also spent time in retirement of various durations before They embarked on Their divine missions. Moses remained for some years in the desolated territories of Sinai, working as a shepherd at the service of Jethro, a priest of Midian. Buddha spent several years living the life of an ascetic before He achieved His enlightenment in the vicinities of Bodh Gaya. Jesus retired for forty days and nights to the desert, where He faced and won out against the temptations of Satan. Muhammad took repeated refuge in a cave of Mount Hira, close to Mecca, where He meditated in solitude. Likewise, Bahá'u'lláh lived utterly alone, in a cave in Sar-Galú on the mountains of Kurdistan and lived the life of a dervish. He adopted the name of Darvish Muhammad. He wrote about those days:

I roamed the wilderness of resignation . . . travelling in such wise that in My exile every eye wept sore over Me, and all created things shed tears of blood because of My anguish. The birds of the air were My companions and the beasts of the field My associates.³

For two years or rather less, I shunned all else but God, and closed Mine eyes to all except Him, that haply the fire of hatred may die down and the heat of jealousy abate.⁴

Although He relegated Himself to absolute isolation, Bahá'u'lláh penned many Writings, some which have come into our hands. The odes “He revealed, whilst wrapped in His devotions during those days of utter seclusion,” and the prayers “which, in verse and prose, both in Arabic and Persian, poured from His sorrow-laden soul, many of which He was wont to chant aloud to Himself, at dawn and during the watches of the night,” are the “initial and impassioned outpourings of a Soul struggling to unburden itself, in the solitude of a self-imposed exile . . . the first fruits of His Divine Pen.”⁵ They say that Bahá'u'lláh had a melodious voice, therefore when He sang, especially in the silence of the nights, “the people near his cave would awake, and rise, and congregate at the mouth of the cave to listen to the wonderful singing.”⁶

In the Writings, He penned in those days

He lauded the names and attributes of His Creator, extolled the glories and mysteries of His own Revelation, sang the praises of that Maiden* that personified the Spirit of God within Him, dwelt on His loneliness and His past and future tribulations, expatiated upon the blindness of His generation, the perfidy of His friends and the perversity of His enemies,

* See the “Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord” mentioned at p.21.*

affirmed His determination to arise and, if needs be, offer up His life for the vindication of His Cause, stressed those essential pre-requisites which every seeker after Truth must possess, and recalled, in anticipation of the lot that was to be His, the tragedy of the Imám Ḥusayn in Karbila,* the plight of Muḥammad in Mecca, the sufferings of Jesus at the hands of the Jews, the trials of Moses inflicted by Pharaoh and his people and the ordeal of Joseph as He languished in a pit by reason of the treachery of His brothers.⁷

Among the prayers composed in that period, we will mention one which echoes verse 10 of Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me:”†

Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my Hope! Through the spirit of power confirm Thou me in Thy Cause, O my Best-Beloved, and by the light of Thy glory reveal unto me Thy path, O Thou the Goal of my desire! Through the power of Thy transcendent might lift me up unto the heaven of Thy holiness, O Source of my being, and by the breezes of Thine eternity gladden me, O Thou Who art my God! Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquillity on me, O my Companion, and let the riches of Thine ancient countenance deliver me from all except Thee, O my Master, and let the tidings of the revelation of Thine incorruptible Essence bring me joy, O Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!⁸

* Imám Ḥusayn is the grandson of Muḥammad, barbarously killed in Karbilá in 680 CE for dynastic reasons.

† Psalm 51 begins: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness (*Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam*).” This Psalm is said to have been composed by David repenting for having ordered Uriah to be killed, so that he could marry his wife Bathsheba.

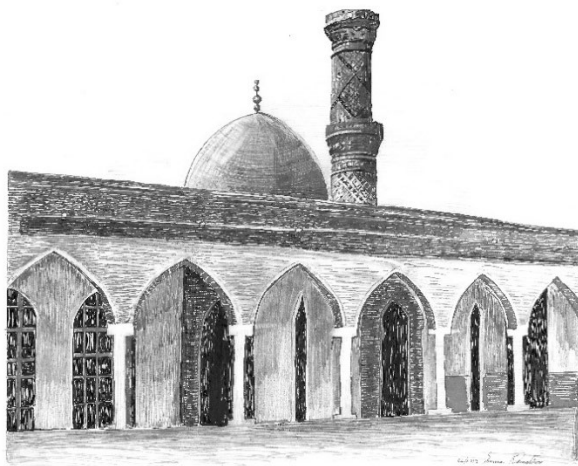


Engraving by Robert 1863

In those years, He also composed a dozen poems. In those poems, and in a few others that He wrote before His final departure from Baghdad in 1863, of which we still do not have either a canonical text or an authorised English translation, He seems willing to shed some light on the intimate motions of His heart and on the effects of the mystical experiences He recently had in the *Síyáh-Chál*. He is aware that openly announcing His divine mission would have been premature. However, it seems that such was the power of the Voice He heard that He wished to convey at least a faint echo, using the veiled and mysterious language of Sufi poetry. These poems could be read as a dialogue between Him and the Most Great Spirit Who, in the guise of a Maiden, had just brought to Him the annunciation of His divine mission. In them, that beauteous Spirit is described in various ways. In one poem, the Invisible appears to usher in a new springtime. In another poem, the divine Cup-bearer offers the Wine of Eternal Life, a wine vivifying water and a purifying fire. Now, it is Love itself that proffers the cup of affliction. Now, it is the Beloved One Who draws the lover to Himself through the effluvia of His scent and enraptures Him through His intoxicating song. Finally,

the Friend goes to the lover's bedside—pale and haggard because of the love consuming him—consoles him with His sweet words and reanimates him with His wise advice. In those poems, we also perceive the echoes of episodes of His life, sad due to the betrayals, the tortures, and the imprisonment He has had to face, or happy, from the days when, as an adolescent, He rode about the villages of Afchih and Tákur, where His family had two residences, or of Yalrud, the native town of His beloved wife Ásíyih, on the mountain ranges of Elburz, or beheld their magnificent nocturnal skies spangled with stars or the bright colours of their dawns and sunsets.

In the long term, the news of the presence of that wise Dervish spread throughout the region. A peculiar episode happened in those days. Once, while Bahá'u'lláh was walking in the mountains, He met a child crying in despair. Bahá'u'lláh stopped and asked him the reason for his crying. The child answered that he could not execute an exercise in calligraphy, and thus, he feared the rebuke of his teacher. Bahá'u'lláh helped him. When the teacher, a well-known personality in that region, saw the page his pupil had brought, he was astonished and immediately asked who had helped him. The child was sincere, and thus, that respected teacher came to know about the presence of that mysterious Personage.⁹ But it was the dream of a Shaykh of that district, who owned a property close to the cave where Bahá'u'lláh had taken refuge and whom the Prophet Muhammad had asked in a dream to find that Dervish, that drew Bahá'u'lláh out of His total seclusion. The Shaykh put Him in touch with a celebrated Sufi master, the head of a theological school in Sulaymaniyah, a town in Iraqi Kurdistan. This man invited Bahá'u'lláh to move into a cell of his seminar. He was so persevering that Bahá'u'lláh finally complied with his wish. That place was just fit for Him, an incomparable knower of the spiritual truths those Sufis passionately pursued. He entranced all of them through His wisdom, confidence, and love of human beings. They held such admiration towards Him that they asked Him, as a definitive proof of His greatness,



to compose a poem similar to the far-famed ode *Qaṣīdiy-i-Tá'iyiyih* by the poet Ibn al-Fared,* which no one had ever been able to imitate. Bahá'u'lláh accepted their challenge and wrote about two thousand verses similar to the Egyptian poet's. He asked them to preserve only 127 verses because He considered the others untimely. These verses form the *Qaṣīdiy-i-Varqá'íyyih*, which could be translated as "The Ode of the Dove," a well-known poem among His followers familiar with the Arabic language.¹⁰ This ode is a hymn which "praises and glorifies "the Most Great Spirit which had descended upon Him in the symbolic form of the 'Maid of Heaven'."¹¹ It was an absolute triumph.

The fame of Dervish Muhammad spread through the country and came to the ears of Bahá'u'lláh's family in Baghdad. Thus, the persistence of the young 'Abbas, His eleven-year son who had suffered from the absence of His Father, Whom He loved so much, convinced the family to send a messenger to Sulaymaniyah to find Him and implore Him to come back. Yáhyá himself, who

* 'Umar ibn 'Alí ibn al-Fárid (1181-1235), a famous Egyptian poet, sometimes considered the greatest mystical poet of the Islamic world.

in the absence of His Brother had felt bewildered and lost, consigned a letter for Bahá'u'lláh to the messenger, in which he implored his Brother to come back. However, Bahá'u'lláh was not convinced to come out of His seclusion by those invitations. He made that decision, as He wrote shortly after those days, only when “from the Mystic Source, there came the summons bidding Us return whence We came. Surrendering Our will to His, We submitted to His injunction.”¹² He also explained:

But for My recognition of the fact that the blessed Cause of the Primal Point [the Báb] was on the verge of being completely obliterated, and all the sacred blood poured out in the path of God would have been shed in vain, I would in no wise have consented to return to the people of the Bayan, and would have abandoned them to the worship of the idols their imaginations had fashioned.¹³

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Photo 48. *Sar-Galú, Kurdistan. View of the mountains where Bahá'u'lláh stayed in 1854.*

Photo 51. *The kashkul (alms bowl) Bahá'u'lláh used as He travelled through the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih from 1854 to 1856.*

Page 53. *Sulaymáníyyih. The Takyih (Sufi monastery) of Mawaláná Khalid frequented by Bahá'u'lláh.*

His Stay in Baghdad After His Retirement to Kurdistan

On 19 March 1856, when Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Baghdad, the small Bábí community was in a condition of grievous decay and complete abandonment. Things were even worse in Iran, where the Bábís split into four contending factions. However, for most of them, it was now clear that Yahyá did not have the required qualities to guide them and that his ambitions to be their leader after the Báb were wholly unequal to his actual capacities. Bahá'u'lláh's return signalled a happy time for all of them. His family was no longer obliged to be subjected to the whims of the scared Yahyá, who, in his fear of being persecuted, had ordered that all of them should remain segregated at home. Yahyá stooped so low that, when the baby born of Ásíyih upon their arrival in Baghdad passed away, he forbade the family to make a befitting funeral for the child, allowing no one to leave their house.

Now, at last, the family had a Person ready to take care of all of them with love and wisdom and face the great difficulties of their exile with courage. The community, wholly forsaken by its inactive figurehead, ceased its vacillation, as it once again had Someone from Whom it could draw inspiration and receive a noble example for their daily behaviour. All of them rallied around Him. Their prestige, which had sunk to its lowest ebb in those two years, began to rise again. Bahá'u'lláh wrote of those days:



After Our arrival, We revealed, as a copious rain, by the aid of God and His Divine Grace and mercy, Our verses . . . We exhorted all men, and particularly this people, through Our wise counsels and loving admonitions, and forbade them to engage in sedition, quarrels, disputes and conflict. As a result of this, and by the grace of God, waywardness and folly were changed into piety and understanding, and weapons converted into instruments of peace.¹

As soon as Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Baghdad, His many friends from Kurdistan began to come and visit Him, people in the rough dress of Kurd shepherds, as well as eminent representatives of the Sufi fraternities of the region. Impressed by this constant stream of visitors, many Iraqis and a number of their secular and religious leaders began to look with admiration at Bahá'u'lláh, Who was steadily emerging as the true leader of the Bábís. Bábís and Muslims, anxious to improve their understanding of issues of faith and the spiritual life, turned to Him and received clear and inspiring answers and tangible signs of respect, solidarity, friendship and love from Him. He met all those people either in His modest house or in one of the town's many cafes, where He went daily to talk about the Bábí Faith since those places were always much frequented. Initially, Bahá'u'lláh used to go to the cafe of

the *kad-khuddá** of the old town, a place frequented by the most eminent personalities in the country in those days. Later, He also went to other coffee shops. One of His chroniclers writes that “whichever coffee-house the Blessed Beauty frequented would be crowded with customers, bringing good fortune to its owner.”² Another chronicler of the Iraqi days writes that “all the great of Baghdad, and the ulamas,[†] and the magistrates, would present themselves here at this coffee-house with extreme deference. Bahá’u’lláh, however, would never go to their homes.”³ His home also became a pilgrimage goal, where the country’s most eminent personages flocked. That house was humble, but the majestic and loving presence of Bahá’u’lláh transfigured it in the eyes of its visitors. An eye-witness of those events relates:

The room of the Most Great House . . . set apart for the reception of Bahá’u’lláh’s visitors, though dilapidated, and having long since outgrown its usefulness, vied, through having been trodden by the blessed footsteps of the Well Beloved, with the Most Exalted Paradise. Low-roofed, it yet seemed to reach to the stars, and though it boasted but a single couch, fashioned from the branches of palms, whereon He Who is the King of Names was wont to sit, it drew to itself, even as a loadstone, the hearts of the princes.⁴

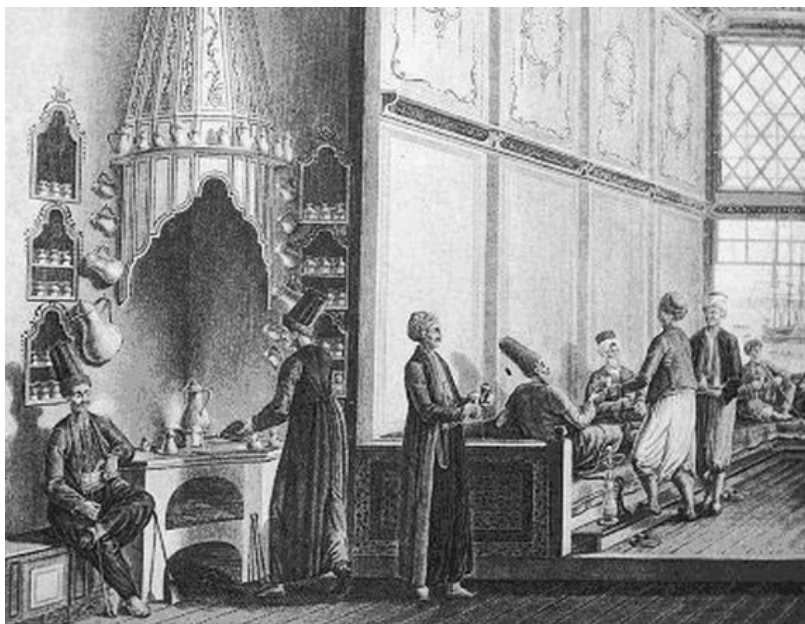
Among those fascinated by this house was a well-known Persian prince, a high-ranking officer,[‡] who expressed his intention to build a duplicate in the nearby town of Kazimayn. Another prince[§] said of the simple room where Bahá’u’lláh received His

* The chief officer of a district.

† The Muslim high priests.

‡ This prince was known as *Shujá’u’d-Dawlih*, the hero of the land.

§ *Zaynu’l-Ábidín Khán*, known as *Fakhru’d-Dawlih*, the honor of the government.



guests: "I know not how to explain it . . . were all the sorrows of the world to be crowded into my heart they would, I feel, all vanish, when in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. It is as if I had entered Paradise itself."⁵ As to the Bábís, they were increasingly won over by His subduing majesty. Of that period His chroniclers remember the "joyous feasts" offered by Bahá'u'lláh's companions in His house "despite their extremely modest earnings;" "the gatherings, lasting far into the night, in which they loudly celebrated, with prayers, poetry and song, the praises of the Báb, of Quddús** and of Bahá'u'lláh;" "the fasts they observed; the vigils they kept; the dreams and visions which fired their souls, and which they recounted to each other with feelings of unbounded enthusiasm;" the zeal whereby they served Him and did whatever He asked; "the acts of imprudence which, in moments of rapture, they occasionally committed;" and, finally, "the expressions of

** Mullá Muḥammad 'Alí-i-Bárfurúshí, named Quddús (1820-1849), the most eminent and loved among the disciples of the Báb.

wonder and admiration which their words and acts evoked in a populace that had seldom witnessed such demonstrations of religious transport and personal devotion.”⁶

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Page 56. *Historical view of Baghdad and the Tigris River.*

Page 58. *Baghdad. A 19th-century Ottoman coffeehouse.*

Bahá'u'lláh Lays the Foundations of His New Faith

In those days, an uninterrupted flood of Writings began to flow from Bahá'u'lláh's pen, a source of inspiration for His contemporaries and future generations. Through those Writings, the form of a new religion began to take shape, a religion that was the heir not only of the Bábí Faith that had come immediately before it but also of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and all the other great religions, whose majestic and still flowing rivers now returned together through it into that great Ocean of truth and knowledge wherefrom they had sprung.

The oneness and unity of God's religion is one of the central themes of the most important book written by Bahá'u'lláh in those days, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the Book of Certitude. Written around 1862, in two days and nights, to answer the questions about the Báb put by a well-known personage, this book establishes the doctrinal basis of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. The foundations of ethics are laid out in the *Hidden Words*, a collection of poetical aphorisms in Arabic and Persian that Bahá'u'lláh penned in those same days "as He paced, wrapped in His meditations, the banks of the Tigris."¹

The Book of Certitude explains first that

the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute . . . He is and hath ever been veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men No tie of direct intercourse can possibly bind Him to His creatures. He standeth exalted beyond and above all

separation and union, all proximity and remoteness. No sign can indicate His presence or His absence; inasmuch as by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible.²

However, the Hidden Words, written as though God Himself were addressing His creatures, state that this God, Who in His unfathomable Essence appears so distant, is the creator of “all that are in heaven and on earth” and has created all of them out of His love:

Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.³

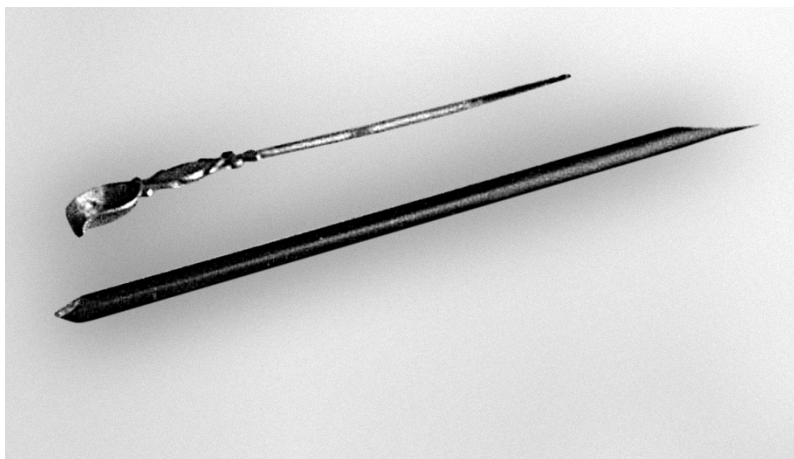
The Hidden Words also explain that this loving God, although He is unknown, engraves His image on every human heart. In the Hidden Words, God Himself says to His human creatures: “Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee;”⁴ “I created thee rich . . . Noble I made thee;”⁵ “I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit;”⁶ “Upon the tree of effulgent glory I have hung for thee the choicest fruits;”⁷ “To the eternal I call thee;”⁸ “I have wafted unto thee all the fragrances of holiness, have fully revealed to thee My word, have perfected through thee My bounty and have desired for thee that which I have desired for My Self;”⁹ “in you I have treasured the pearls of My mysteries and the gems of My knowledge.”¹⁰ A potentially noble human creature emerges from these words, luminous because of the divine virtues, which the hand of God has set as precious gems in her or his heart. The Hidden Words also describe this same potentially noble creature in its weakness. “Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself;”¹¹ “To the eternal I call thee, yet thou dost seek that which perisheth;”¹² “Upon the tree of effulgent glory I have hung for thee

the choicest fruits, wherefore hast thou turned away and contented thyself with that which is less good?,"¹³ "Many a day hath passed over thee whilst thou hast busied thyself with thy fancies and idle imaginings. How long art thou to slumber on thy bed?,"¹⁴ "For a fleeting sovereignty ye have abandoned My imperishable dominion, and have adorned yourselves with the gay livery of the world and made of it your boast."¹⁵

The divine generosity does not stop its munificence due to human weakness and ingratitude. God reveals His Beauty to this potentially noble creature, manifesting it in the form of a Perfect Man. How this happens is described in the Book of Certitude.

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace . . . hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the light that can never fade.¹⁶

This paragraph of the Book of Certitude conveys a fundamental explanation. It expounds the concept of "Manifestation of God," which was clarified in Bahá'u'lláh's later Writings. God is unknowable. He has created out of His love and engraved His image on every human being. He also chose a Few among the myriad human beings



and perfectly engraved His image on Them. These Personages are “sanctified Mirrors” that reflect the full glory of His image. Whoever knows Them also comes to know the perfect image of God They reflect. As Bahá’u’lláh writes:

From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. So potent and universal is this revelation, that it hath encompassed all things, visible and invisible Man, the noblest and most perfect of all created things, excelleth them all in the intensity of this revelation, and is a fuller expression of its glory. And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of their grace Nay, all in their holy presence fade into utter nothingness, and are a thing forgotten. Human tongue can never befittingly sing their praise, and human speech can never unfold their mystery. These Tabernacles of holiness, these primal Mirrors

which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are made manifest.¹⁷

Later, Bahá'u'lláh clarified that God has assigned to His Manifestations “a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself” and

a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself The second station is the human station, exemplified by the following verses: “I am but a man like you.” “Say, praise be to my Lord! Am I more than a man, an apostle?”¹⁸

The Manifestations of God outwardly appear like any other human being. This is their human nature. However, their Soul is unique; it “is the voice of God Himself.” Whenever these perfect Souls, sent by God to show His Beauty to human beings, come to the world, most people only see their human nature and thus consider them as any other human being. Furthermore, since they bring innovative teachings, quite different in certain respects from those of the ancient traditions that their followers revere, the Manifestations of God draw to themselves the anger of the religious and political establishment, which feels endangered by their revolutionary, iconoclastic power. Many paragraphs of the Book of Certitude are devoted to the description of the persecutions that the Manifestations of God had to face: “Not one single Manifestation of Holiness hath appeared but He was afflicted by the denials, the repudiation, and the vehement opposition of the people around Him.”¹⁹ Bahá'u'lláh describes the sufferings of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and

Muhammad, four of the few Manifestations of God that history remembers. There have been many more Manifestations of God than those recorded by history. Bahá'u'lláh confirms the following words by the Báb:²⁰ “Unto every people We have sent down the Book in their own language.”* The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh also were persecuted. The Book of Certitude explains the spiritual reason for those persecutions:

from time immemorial even unto eternity the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns. Even as He hath revealed: “Do men think when they say ‘We believe’ they shall be let alone and not be put to proof?”²¹

Thus, God loves His creatures and periodically sends His Manifestations to them so that they may reveal His Will. However, He does not send them in the form human beings expect: personages willing to use their Omnipotence to demonstrate the validity of their mission as teachers of humankind accompanied by miraculous events that prove their divine power. He sends them in the form of simple human creatures: an iconoclast, as Abraham, who destroyed the idols of Ur; a stammering man accused of homicide, as Moses; an unlettered carpenter, the son of an unknown father in the eyes of men, born in a humble manger, as Jesus; a poor and unlettered cameleer, as Muhammad. And He does this because He wants human beings to learn how to sharpen their spiritual perception, their capacity to appreciate that which matters in human beings, the spiritual reality.

Bahá'u'lláh also explains the close relations between the Manifestations of God. He says that they have a twofold station.

* These words of the Báb in their turn reecho a Koranic verse: “we have not sent any Apostle, save with the speech of his own people” (14:4).

The former is a “station of pure abstraction and essential unity.”²² In this respect, they are “one soul and the same person. For they all drink from the one Cup of the love of God, and all partake of the fruit of the same Tree of Oneness . . . they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God.”²³ Bahá'u'lláh adds:

If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendour.²⁴

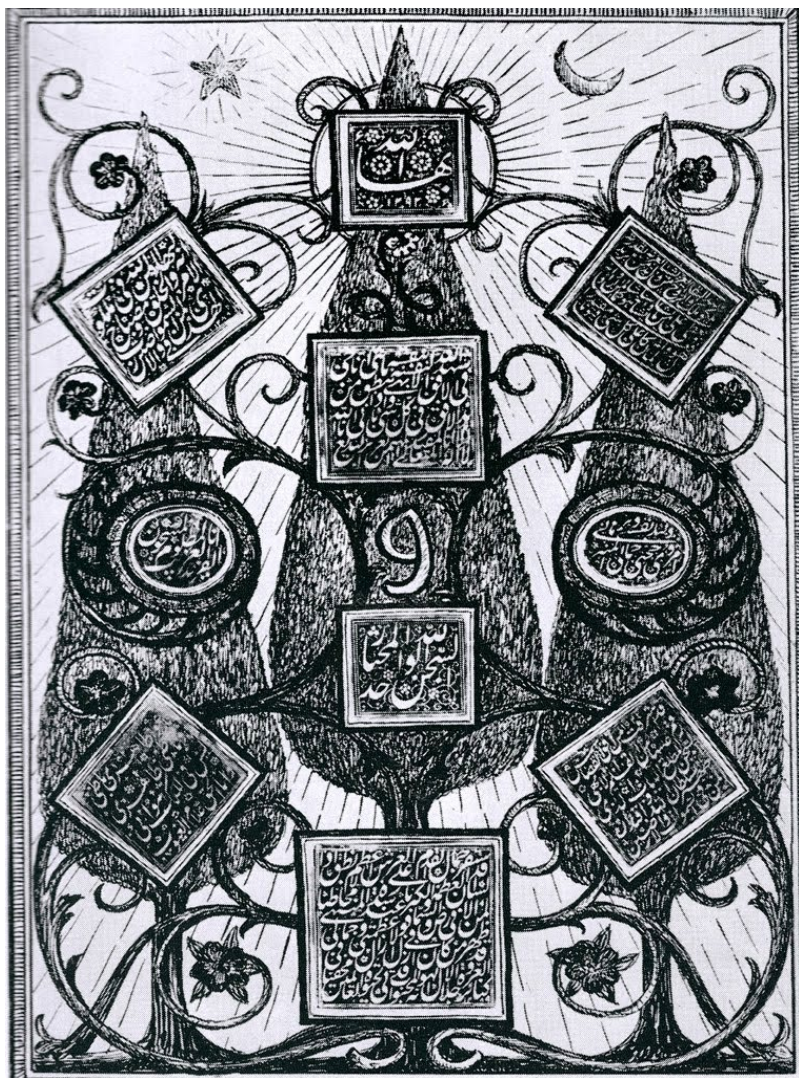
The second station is that of distinction:

in this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterised by a special attribute, fulfills a definite Mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation.²⁵

This concept occupies a central position in the Bahá'í Faith: the oneness of religions. Bahá'u'lláh also explains it as follows:

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed.²⁶

In the light of these words, the Manifestations of God, the founders of the great revealed religions still professed in the various



parts of the world, are different in their human aspect, which is related to the historical context. They are different persons, born in different times and places. Their teachings are identical in their essence but different in their details because of the different historical conditions of the peoples to whom each Manifestation spoke. However, all of them are expressions of one universal Reality, the Holy Spirit, which they equally convey to human beings. Whoever recognises that Spirit in Them recognises all of Them as divine Messengers, as lights of the same Sun, which Bahá'u'lláh calls Sun of Truth or of Reality.

The Manifestation of God, the mirror of divine Beauty, is the true Friend of each human being, the only one Who, with His divine Omnipotence, can help those who respond to His love to discover and manifest the divine beauty engraved in the heart of each human being. The Hidden Words explain this concept in the following poetical aphorism:

Worldly friends, seeking their own good, appear to love one the other, whereas the true Friend hath loved and doth love you for your own sakes; indeed He hath suffered for your guidance countless afflictions.²⁷

The Manifestation of God, the only true Friend, accepts persecution to be faithful to His mission as the Teacher of humankind, giving thus the highest lesson of submission to the Will of God in surrendering to His tests. For this reason, Abraham accepted the torment of the furnace; Moses the tyranny of the Egyptian Pharaoh; Jesus the cross on Calvary; Muhammad the persecutions of His fellow-citizens; the Báb the firing squad in Tabriz; and Bahá'u'lláh a whole life of exile and imprisonment. However, due to their limited spiritual perception, human beings choose to follow different ways from those promulgated by the Manifestation of God. Thus, they lose themselves chasing after ephemeral worldly glories or earthly pleasures and ignoring “the eternal”: the virtues taught by the Manifestations of God.

Therefore, human beings need to know what they are supposed to do to acquire the capacity to recognise the Manifestation of God in His outward human form. This issue is exhaustively illustrated in the Book of Certitude.* Bahá'u'lláh writes:

But, O my brother, when a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy. He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay, from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth. Even as thou dost witness in this day how most of the people, because of such love and hate, are bereft of the immortal Face, have strayed far from the Embodiments of the divine mysteries, and, shepherdless, are roaming through the wilderness of oblivion and error. That seeker must at all times put his trust in God, must renounce the peoples of the earth, detach himself from the world of dust, and cleave unto Him Who is the Lord of Lords. He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of

* Bahá'u'lláh also explains this issue in the following Writings: *Seven Valleys* 5-8 (Valley of Search), *Gems* 27-9 (Garden of Search) and *Gleanings* 322-9, sect. CLII and L , *Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bih Fársí*.

the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century.

That seeker should also regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul. He should be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire. He should treasure the companionship of those that have renounced the world, and regard avoidance of boastful and worldly people a precious benefit. At the dawn of every day he should commune with God, and with all his soul persevere in the quest of his Beloved. He should consume every wayward thought with the flame of His loving mention, and, with the swiftness of lightning, pass by all else save Him. He should succour the dispossessed, and never withhold his favour from the destitute. He should show kindness to animals, how much more unto his fellow-man, to him who is endowed with the power of utterance. He should not hesitate to offer up his life for his Beloved, nor allow the censure of the people to turn him away from the Truth. He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfil. With all his heart should the seeker avoid fellowship with evil doers, and pray for the remission of their sins. He should forgive the sinful, and never despise his low estate, for none knoweth what his own end shall be. How often hath a sinner, at the hour of death, attained to the essence of faith, and, quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the celestial Concourse. And how often hath a devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire. Our purpose in revealing these convincing and weighty utterances is to impress upon the seeker that he should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness.

These are among the attributes of the exalted, and constitute the hall-mark of the spiritually-minded When the detached wayfarer and sincere seeker hath fulfilled these essential conditions, then and only then can he be called a true seeker.²⁸

These are the central issues of the Hidden Words and the Book of Certitude. In Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh also penned other Writings, which increased His fame and the confidence that most people put in Him. Among these stand out the Seven Valleys, His mystical masterpiece. In this epistle, He describes the stages each human being crosses in his spiritual progress. In this work, He lays the foundations of the Bahá'í mystical path, which recognises the Manifestation of God as the only Master. It is not an esoteric path, opened just to a few initiates, but an exoteric path, accessible to all human beings, if only they are willing to enter it in the broad daylight. This path does not envisage initiatory rites and ascetical exercises, but the daily practice of virtues, so that one's heart may be purified and changed into a unsullied mirror reflecting the light of the spiritual Sun. It especially implies a prompt obedience to the laws revealed by the Manifestations of God, only dictated by one's pure love of God. The goal of this mystical way is not the development of special charisma or particular paranormal or thaumaturgic powers but the acquisition of the capacity to live a good life through embracing spiritual law, an authentically virtuous life that may be an example and inspiration for all. As Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the Prologue of the Hidden Words, that life is the practical manifestation of the essence of the spiritual and moral teachings of all the ancient religions, that He has offered "in the garment of brevity."²⁹

The Hidden Words illustrate the main qualities of a sanctified human being: loving God³⁰ and obeying His laws,³¹ seeking after his good-pleasure³² and being satisfied with His will,³³ "a pure, kindly and radiant heart,"³⁴ "justice," which enables human beings to see through their own eyes, and not through those of their neighbour and to learn through their knowledge and not through that their neighbour,³⁵ high-mindedness,³⁶ modesty,³⁷ loving

kindness,³⁸ generosity,³⁹ patience under His tests,⁴⁰ detachment from this world,⁴¹ oneness with one's neighbour⁴² and industriousness.⁴³

In Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh offered many other teachings about excellence in personal behaviour. They have been summarised as follows:

The dissociation of the . . . Faith from every form of political activity and from all secret associations and factions; the emphasis placed on the principle of non-violence; the necessity of strict obedience to established authority; the ban imposed on all forms of sedition, on back-biting, retaliation, and dispute; the stress laid on godliness, kindness, humility and piety, on honesty and truthfulness, chastity and fidelity, on justice, toleration, sociability, amity and concord, on the acquisition of arts and sciences, on self-sacrifice and detachment, on patience, steadfastness and resignation to the will of God . . .⁴⁴

As has been said, in those years, the personal prestige of Bahá'u'lláh was greatly enhanced. His home was the goal of a steady flow of seekers anxious to advance in their spiritual path. They included simple people, learned and aristocratic persons, some relatives of the Shah and the governor of Iraq, all fascinated by His wisdom and loving-kindness. In those days, the British consul general suggested He move to India or any other country of His choice, offering Him the protection of British citizenship and the possibility of coming directly in touch with Queen Victoria, an offer that Bahá'u'lláh gently declined.

The echoes of this prestige soon gave rise to the concern and envy of several local politicians, who began to think how they could get rid of a person they considered an embarrassing presence. An account of their ambiguous schemes would prove too long for this short biography. The malice of the Persian ambassador came to the point that he hired a mercenary to kill Bahá'u'lláh, promising him immunity from that crime. One day,

this hired killer eluded the surveillance of the friends who always escorted Bahá'u'lláh and arrived at His presence in a public bath. However, when he was in front of Bahá'u'lláh with his pistol in his hands, he could not shoot; instead, he became so frightened that his gun fell out of his hands. Bahá'u'lláh invited His brother Músá to pick up the gun, to give it back to him and to accompany him out of the bath.⁴⁵

Nor less malicious were the high priests of the town. They repeatedly met to pronounce a collective verdict condemning the Bábís and Bahá'u'lláh, that it might stir up the mobs against them, but they never reached unanimity in this regard. Therefore, they sent a messenger to present various theological intricacies to His attention. Bahá'u'lláh gave exhausting and wholly convincing answers. Then the messenger asked Him, in confirmation of the validity of His divine mission, if He would perform a miracle which could satisfy the priests. Although Bahá'u'lláh had more than once dismissed the value of miracles as proof of the validity of the mission of a Prophet, which is validated by His spiritual power to change human hearts and the course of civilisation, He answered:

Although you have no right to ask this . . . for God should test His creatures, and they should not test God, still I allow and accept this request The 'ulamás* must assemble, and, with one accord, choose one miracle, and write that, after the performance of this miracle they will no longer entertain doubts about Me, and that all will acknowledge and confess the truth of My Cause. Let them seal this paper, and bring it to Me. This must be the accepted criterion: if the miracle is performed, no doubt will remain for them; and if not, We shall be convicted of imposture.⁴⁶

* The Muslim high priests.

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Frightened by His brave answer, the ‘ulamás hung back. About this refusal, Bahá’u’lláh reportedly observed:

We have . . . through this all-satisfying, all-embracing message which We sent, revealed and vindicated the miracles of all the Prophets, inasmuch as We left the choice to the ‘ulamás themselves, undertaking to reveal whatever they would decide upon.⁴⁷

A few years later, while He was in Adrianople, He further challenged the ‘ulamás in His letter to the Shah of Persia:

Would that the world-adorning wish of His Majesty might decree that this Servant be brought face to face with the divines of the age, and produce proofs and testimonies in the presence of His Majesty the Sháh! This Servant is ready, and taketh hope in God, that such a gathering may be convened in order that the truth of the matter may be made clear and manifest before His Majesty the Sháh. It is then for thee to command, and I stand ready before the throne of thy sovereignty. Decide, then, for Me or against Me.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the theologians of Teheran said to the Shah that His proposal was a “great presumption and amazing audacity.”⁴⁹ Frightened by the possibility that the Shah would accept His challenge, they advised him to kill the bearer of the letter. This person, a youth in his late adolescence who had insistently begged Bahá’u’lláh to accomplish such a dangerous task, was immediately tortured and then brutally slayed.

Despite this defeat, the Iraqi priests did not give up their schemes and finally, in cahoots with the Persian ambassador, they managed to win over the minds of His old enemies in Iran, frightened by His reconfirmed ascendancy, and to convince the Persian government to ask for Bahá’u’lláh’s removal from Baghdad, claiming that His presence was a danger for the security of

the State and the Muslim religion. On 27 March 1863, the vice governor delivered to Bahá'u'lláh a letter from the Turkish Grand Vizier and an edict of the Sultan “inviting” Him to move to Constantinople as a guest of the Ottoman government. Bahá'u'lláh immediately addressed the Sultan with a long letter—which, unfortunately, had been lost—and handed it to the Turkish prime minister. The news of His imminent departure threw His many friends and admirers into consternation.

The sun was setting on 22 April 1863 when Bahá'u'lláh left His home in Baghdad near the western bank of the Tigris, where He had lived since 1857, hailed by a crowd of friends and acquaintances, heart-broken because of His departure. He halted in a garden on the opposite bank of the river, where He had decided to stay for a few days before He departed from the city to allow everyone to take leave from Him. He left on 3 May 1863 mounted on a steed, “a red roan stallion of the finest breed, the best His lovers could purchase for Him, and leaving behind Him a bowing multitude of fervent admirers.”⁵⁰ He was accompanied by His family that had joined Him in the garden after nine days and by 26 faithful companions. Another one joined Him along the way. In the twelve days He spent in that place, He announced to a few trusted friends that He was the Promised One of all religions and the “One Whom God will make manifest” announced by the Báb. The precise circumstances of this announcement, which the Bahá'ís call the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, are unknown. Unknown are also the exact words with which He made this announcement. In His later Writings, * He described His advent with these poetical images:

The Flower, thus far hidden from the sight of men, is unveiled
to your eyes. In the open radiance of His glory He standeth

* This Tablet, known in Persian as Lawḥ-i-‘Áshiq va Ma‘shuq and in the West as the Tablet of the Lover and the Beloved or the Story of the Nightingale and the Crow, was written in Adrianople (1863-1868).

before you. His voice summoneth all the holy and sanctified beings to come and be united with Him. Happy is he that turneth thereunto; well is it with him that hath attained, and gazed on the light of so wondrous a countenance.⁵¹

We do have some eye-witness descriptions of the condition of the spiritual exaltation of those who heard Bahá'u'lláh announce His station during those twelve blessed days. They speak of a luxuriant springtime, a great blooming of roses, sleepless nights spent in His presence, the scent of the roses permeating the air, and the songs of the nightingales—that in Persian poetry are the faithful lovers of the rose—delighting their ears, the nightingales symbolising human beings and the rose being a symbol of the divine Beauty. Those testimonies also speak of their ecstatic bliss because the promise of the Báb martyred just a decade before had been fulfilled. Their spiritual Leader was physically in their midst and oriented them towards high spiritual goals, whose achievement would benefit all humanity. Through their spiritual practice and commitment, future generations will be blessed and usher in the advent of a new civilisation characterised by justice, unity and peace. An eye-witness of those events remembers:

Many a night . . . would Mírzá Áqá Ján* gather them together in his room, close the door, light numerous camphorated candles, and chant aloud to them the newly revealed odes and Tablets in his possession. Wholly oblivious of this contingent world, completely immersed in the realms of the spirit, forgetful of the necessity for food, sleep or drink, they would suddenly discover that night had become day, and that the sun was approaching its zenith.⁵²

Bahá'u'lláh subsequently wrote about those days:

* Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis.

This is the Day whereon the unseen world crieth out: "Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the footstool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne." . . . This is the Day whereon every sweet smelling thing hath derived its fragrance from the smell of My garment—a garment that hath shed its perfume upon the whole of creation. This is the Day whereon the rushing waters of everlasting life have gushed out of the Will of the All-Merciful. Haste ye, with your hearts and souls, and quaff your fill, O Concourse of the realms above!⁵³

Those twelve days are celebrated each year in the Bahá'í world under the name of the Festival of Ridván (from the Arabic, Paradise). Yahyá was so frightened that he did not take part in these events. He continued to live incognito. Before leaving, Bahá'u'lláh once more suggested he return to Persia, where he could assist the Bábí community, now totally abandoned to its fate. Yahyá did not heed His advice and decided to follow His Brother to Constantinople. He left the town in secrecy and followed the caravan from afar because he feared being recognised as a Bábí and thus persecuted. He joined the caravan only when they were so far from Baghdad that he felt less apprehensive as to his destiny, in the town of Mosul, located about 400 kilometres to the north of Baghdad, on the Tigris on the opposite bank of the place where the ancient Nineveh was.

List of Illustrations

Photo 64. *Cut-reed pen and ink spoon used by Bahá'u'lláh.*

Photo 68. *Impressions of the seals of Bahá'u'lláh, displayed in an ornamental Persian design.*

Photo 75. *Copy of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, rendered in the calligraphy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*

The journey was long but not as tiresome and uncomfortable as the previous travel from Teheran to Baghdad. The earlier one had been characterised by a severe winter freeze, aggravated by the necessity of crossing impervious mountain passes; the latter was accompanied by the full summer heat, which obliged the caravan to move at night and stop in the warmest hours of the day. Able-bodied men rode horses or mules or walked; the women travelled in the howdahs, the Eastern palanquins. Sometimes, Bahá'u'lláh Himself travelled in a howdah. Two companions always marched beside Him. His nineteen-year-old son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was charged with taking care of the logistic details of the journey. It was a real job to coordinate all the necessary tasks to take care of the needs of that caravan consisting of about forty people, "fifty mules, a mounted guard of ten soldiers with their officer, and seven pairs of howdahs, each pair surmounted by four parasols."¹ One companion was in charge of setting up the tents and of de-camping, another of protecting the exiles and the animals; one was in charge of looking after the horses, another of stocking up the fodder for them; one was in charge of buying the provisions, another of cooking and distributing the meals; one was in charge of preparing the coffee and the narghiles,* another of preparing the tea and of keeping in good order the samovars; one was in charge of the social relations with the people they met along the way, others of taking care of the women (two male adolescents, according to the tradition); and finally one had the honor of being in charge of personally serving Bahá'u'lláh. Almost everyone was busy. The friend who prepared the tea, with his brazier lit up

* Turkish water pipe, widely diffused in the Muslim world.



during the night, was providential for an exile who had fallen asleep on his horse and, when he woke up, realised that he was all alone in the dark of unknown places while the caravan advanced during the night to avoid the daytime heat of that summer journey. It was the fire of that brazier that guided him. According to a commentator, its “flickering light,” that the lost companion discerned on that night and was for him a guiding lamp, “is associated with the caravan halting for dawn prayers,” is reminiscent of “the guidance of prayer, of spiritual nourishment as well as the physical comfort of tea, and rest, and fellowship.” It reminds us “that faith and spirituality, like tea and prayers, are both indispensable to anyone wishing to ‘travel’ in the dark. Subjective insights can enable us to move forward if we are guided by all that the tea-maker’s flickering brazier symbolises: faith and servitude and prayer.”²

When He was free from His burdensome duties, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked beside the howdah of His Father, often together with a dear friend, Muníb, who, known for his fine voice, sang verses by the great Iranian poets. * Whenever the caravan approached a town or a

* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specifically mentions these two couplets by Hafez, which the two young men sang for their “King,” that is Bahá’u’lláh:



village, a delegation of the local authorities came out to welcome them. A similar delegation escorted them for a few miles whenever they left as a sign of deference. The governor of Iraq himself, a fervent admirer of Bahá'u'lláh, had given orders to the village authorities to treat Him this way. One of the many admirers who paid their homage to Bahá'u'lláh during that journey was the son of the Shaykh, to whom He had addressed the epistle mentioned above known as the Seven Valleys.

The caravan left Baghdad on 3 May, arriving in Constantinople on 16 August 1863. Contrary to what people arriving at the Ottoman capital from Persia and Iraq customarily did, which is immediately going and paying homage to the most eminent political and religious personages in the capital, hunting for alliances and favours, Bahá'u'lláh, Who had been summoned to the city as a guest of the Ottoman government, waited instead for an invitation by the Sultan, which never arrived. This noble attitude

To our King though we bow the knee,
 We are kings of the morning star.
 No changeable colors have we—
 Red lions, black dragons we are! (Haféẓ, quoted in *Memorials* 146)

was not appreciated as a sign of His honesty and detachment from the ephemeral glories of the world; it was seemingly misunderstood as arrogance and rekindled the enmity of the Persian government, especially its insidious ambassador. This personage convinced the Ottoman government to further exile Bahá'u'lláh to Adrianople on the outskirts of the Turkish Empire.

When Bahá'u'lláh was informed of the edict which exiled Him to Adrianople, without any reason or explanation, He expressed His wish not to accept that banishment. He reportedly told His companions:

What would you say? Do you wish Me to cause your deaths? Do you wish to drain the cup of martyrdom? No better time can there be than now to offer your lives in the path of your Lord. Our innocence is manifestly evident, and they have no alternative but to declare their injustice.³

One of His companions wrote: "Truly, at that time, all of us, with the utmost joy, fidelity, unity and detachment, were eager to attain to that high station; and God is my witness that we were blissfully expecting martyrdom."⁴ However Yahyá, who as has been said was not a courageous person, begged Him, together with a small group of his supporters, to accept this new banishment. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh left the capital because He did not want to create a rift among His companions. They say that He remarked: "If we, few as we are, had stood our ground to fall martyrs in the midmost heart of the world, the effect of that martyrdom would have been felt in all the worlds of God. And possibly nothing would have happened to us."⁵ However, He answered the edict of the Sultan with a very stern letter of condemnation. The person to whom the letter was delivered said to Bahá'u'lláh's brother, Músá: "I know not what that letter contained . . . for no sooner had the Grand Vizir perused it than he turned the colour of a corpse, and remarked: 'It is as if the King of Kings were issuing his behest to his humblest vassal king and regulating his



conduct.' So grievous was his condition that I backed out of his presence."⁶ They say that Bahá'u'lláh remarked in this regard: "Whatever action . . . the ministers of the Sultan took against Us, after having become acquainted with its contents, cannot be regarded as unjustifiable. The acts they committed before its perusal, however, can have no justification."⁷

Bahá'u'lláh left Constantinople on 1 December 1863 and arrived in Adrianople on the 12th of the same month. The travel was short but quite uncomfortable because of the inclemency of an early and unusually frigid winter, which was difficult for people accustomed to the Iraqi heat and equipped with clothing fit for that climate. Bahá'u'lláh's troubles were aggravated by the perfidious behaviour of Yahyá, who would not resign himself to the fact that with the advent of the Promised One of the Báb, his function as figurehead of the Bábí community had lost its meaning and that he was spiritually bound to make a clear stand on Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of being "Him Whom God shall make manifest," promised by the Báb. Yahyá came to the point of attempting to take the life of his Brother. He invited Him to his home and offered Him a poisoned tea. After having drank that poison, Bahá'u'lláh became very sick. For a whole month, He had pains and a high fever. He



recovered, but for the rest of His life, He had a tremor in His hands. After this failure, Yaḥyá made a second attempt. He poisoned the well from which Bahá'u'lláh's family drew its water. This second attempt also failed, but the whole family manifested strange symptoms of illness for several days.

Yaḥyá was not yet satisfied. He subtly suggested to one of the exiles that he should murder the Person Whom he viewed as a competing usurper. This exile was so filled with indignation that, if it were not for his fear of displeasing Bahá'u'lláh, he would have killed Yaḥyá. The news filtered out, despite Bahá'u'lláh's efforts to conceal these two regrettable events. Yaḥyá pretended to be dismayed at what he denounced as calumnies against him and threw the accusations back at Bahá'u'lláh's followers. Then Bahá'u'lláh sent him a Tablet reconfirming that He was the Promised One of the Báb and asking His half-brother to recognise His station. After a few days, Yaḥyá produced "a counter-declaration, specifying the hour and the minute in which he had been made the recipient of an independent Revelation, necessitating the unqualified submission to him of the peoples of the earth in both the East and the West."⁸ At this point, it was impossible for the two families to live in the same



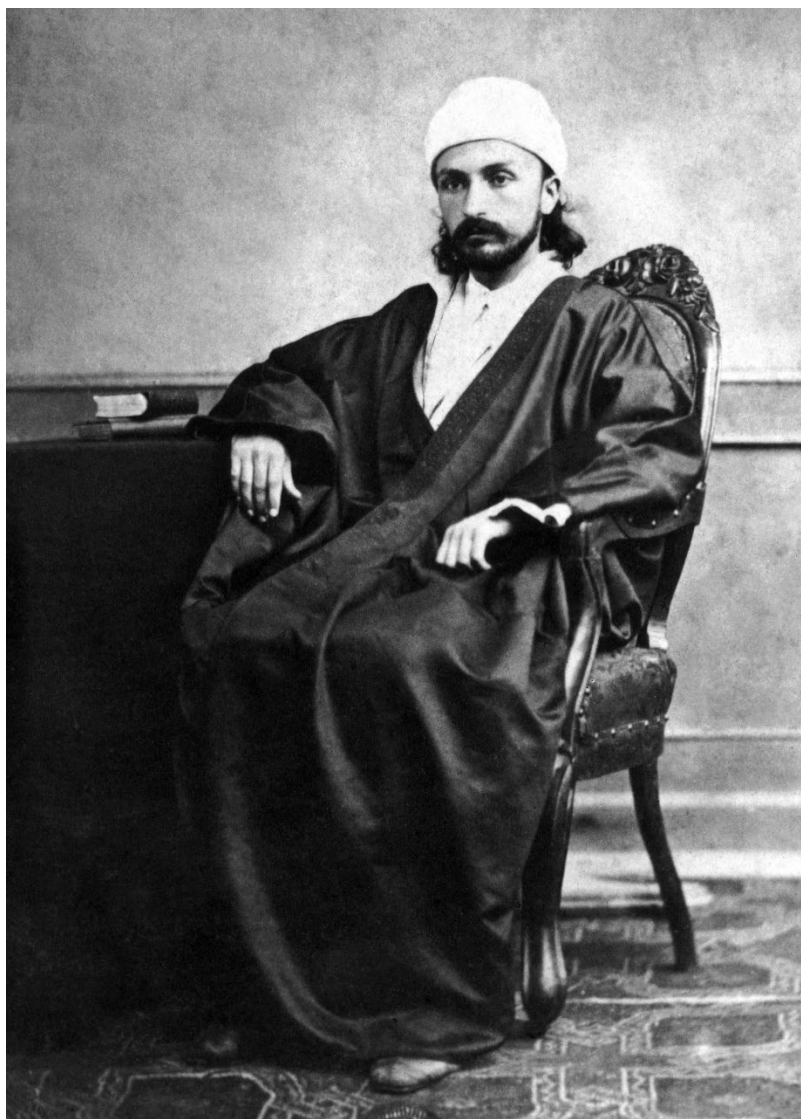
Emine Rahnistan 02/13

home. A separation followed that was painful for all of them, and especially for Bahá'u'lláh. He wrote about it:

My Pen, verily, lamenteth over Mine own Self, and My Tablet weepeth sore over what hath befallen Me at the hands of one [Yahyá] over whom We watched for successive years.⁹ The cruelties inflicted by My oppressors . . . have bowed Me down, and turned My hair white. Shouldst thou present thyself before My throne, thou wouldst fail to recognise the Ancient Beauty, for the freshness of His countenance is altered, and its brightness hath faded, by reason of the oppression of the infidels.¹⁰

In this separation, Bahá'u'lláh bent all His efforts to assure that Yahyá, of whom He had taken care since his early infancy, and his large family might have whatever they needed. Nevertheless, Yahyá held undaunted his position of hostility while always remaining in hiding, fearing possible retaliations by the Turkish government against him. Exasperated by this ambiguous attitude, a Bábí from Shiraz convinced Yahyá to ask for a face-to-face meeting with Bahá'u'lláh so that the two might have the opportunity to confront each other and everyone might decide which of the two could rightly claim to be the Promised One of the Báb.

Yahyá suggested the meeting date and place, but when the time came, he did not show up in the agreed-upon place. He then asked for a postponement of two days. Bahá'u'lláh accepted. However, once again, the wavering Yahyá failed to attend the meeting. Then Bahá'u'lláh divulged a specific Tablet in which He repeated the proclamation of His mission. The breach between the two was now definitive. For a few months, Bahá'u'lláh remained in silence. Then, a period of intense activity followed, during which He penned many Tablets on various issues. Bahá'u'lláh Himself wrote about the Works He penned in that period: "In those days the equivalent of all that hath been



sent down aforetime unto the Prophets hath been revealed.”¹¹ An eye-witness narrated: “Day and night . . . the Divine verses were raining down in such number that it was impossible to record them.”¹² Another witness confirms:

A number of secretaries . . . were busy day and night and yet they were unable to cope with the task. Among them was Mírzá Báqir-i-Shírází . . . He alone transcribed no less than two thousand verses every day. He labored during six or seven months. Every month the equivalent of several volumes would be transcribed by him and sent to Persia . . .¹³

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9 The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission

In the Writings He penned in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh continued His proclamation of His divine mission to the political, religious and cultural leaders of the world, which He had begun with the above-mentioned letter to Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz and which He completed in later years. In these Writings, Bahá'u'lláh asks the leaders of the world to join their forces to uphold true religion, establish just governments, and promulgate universal peace and begins to outline the features of the new World Order that He intended to establish in the world, according to the Will of God. This model was completed in the Writings He penned in the 1880s. The leaders of the world to whom Bahá'u'lláh addressed His letters, Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz II,^{*} Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh of Persia,[†] Napoleon III,[‡] Queen Victoria[§] and Pope Pius IX,^{**} were devoted to their respective religions, in whose name they wielded their political or religious power. Theirs was an absolute power. Given this fact, theoretically, if they had given heed to Bahá'u'lláh's words, the course of history would have been quite different. The world's peoples could have much more easily achieved the goals of unity, justice, and peace, which will undoubtedly be achieved in the future, but after a long time, at the price of great toil and pain.

^{*} 1830-1876.

[†] 1831-1896.

[‡] 1808-1873.

[§] 1819-1901.

^{**} 1792-1878.



CZAR ALEXANDER II.



Bahá'u'lláh announced to those heads of state that the “Kingdom of God,” which they were waiting for according to the promises of their respective Scriptures, had come and that He had the mission of inaugurating the advent of this long-awaited event. The advent of the Kingdom of God was tantamount to the beginning of an era of justice, oneness of humankind and universal peace. Achieving these desirable goals was in their hands and their subjects’ hands. They would have been achieved if they had adopted the actions Bahá'u'lláh proposed. First of all, He explained to those political and religious leaders that their glory did not consist in their sovereignty, but “in . . . [their] nearness unto God and . . . [their] observance of His command”¹ Therefore their first duty was to comply with the Law of God. The establishment of justice, unity and peace depended on this compliance.

As to justice, He issued several precise prescriptions. First, He enjoined them to settle their conflicts peacefully and to reduce their expenses for armaments:

Compose your differences and reduce your armaments, that the burden of your expenditures may be lightened, and that your minds and hearts may be tranquillized. Heal the dissensions that divide you, and ye will no longer be in need of any armaments except what the protection of your cities and



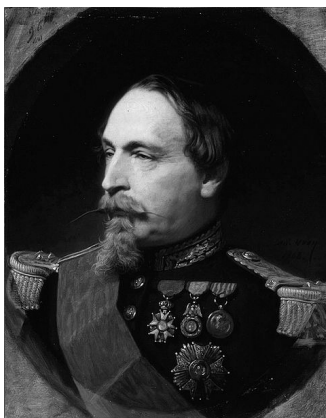
territories demandeth. Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation and be numbered among the extravagant.²

The enjoinder to reduce armament expenses also achieves another more general goal. It is not fair for the leaders to live in luxury while their subjects suffer the deprivations of poverty:

We have learned that ye are increasing your outlay every year, and are laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is more than they can bear, and is a grievous injustice. Decide ye justly between men, O kings, and be ye the emblems of justice amongst them. This, if ye judge fairly, is the thing that behoveth you, and beseemeth your station.³

Analogous words were written in the letter He addressed to Queen Victoria:

O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust . . . lay not excessive burdens on your peoples. Do not rob them to rear palaces



for yourselves; nay rather choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber. By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer. Yet, how disdainfully ye look upon them! How strange, how very strange!⁴

He wrote moreover on this issue:

Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on the day when the Balance of Justice shall be set, the day when unto everyone shall be rendered his due, when the doings of all men, be they rich or poor, shall be weighed.⁵

The poor deserve the special attention of their leaders. From these and later Writings, one deduces that Bahá'u'lláh upholds a fundamental principle: the abolition of the extremes of riches and want. In this regard, He wrote in those days to the Sultan:



Overstep not the bounds of moderation, and deal justly with them that serve thee. Bestow upon them according to their needs, and not to the extent that will enable them to lay up riches for themselves, to deck their persons, to embellish their homes, to acquire the things that are of no benefit unto them, and to be numbered with the extravagant. Deal with them with undeviating justice, so that none among them may either suffer want, or be pampered with luxuries. This is but manifest justice.⁶

Any leader who is willing to pursue justice is bound to care for the oppressed primarily and to be stern towards the un-just:

God hath committed into your hands the reins of the government of the people, that ye may rule with justice over them, safeguard the rights of the downtrodden, and punish the wrongdoers.⁷

This caring for the oppressed has much to do with respect for human rights:

If ye stay not the hand of the oppressor, if ye fail to safeguard the rights of the downtrodden, what right have ye then to vaunt yourselves among men?⁸

Therefore, the rulers are expected to choose with great prudence their ministers and to check their behaviour:

Allow not the abject to rule over and dominate them who are noble and worthy of honour, and suffer not the high-minded to be at the mercy of the contemptible and worthless, for this is what We observed upon Our arrival in the City, and to it We bear witness. We found among its inhabitants some who were possessed of an affluent fortune and lived in the midst of excessive riches, while others were in dire want and abject poverty. This ill beseemeth thy sovereignty, and is unworthy of thy rank.⁹

Let My counsel be acceptable to thee, and strive thou to rule with equity among men, that God may exalt thy name and spread abroad the fame of thy justice in all the world. Beware lest thou aggrandize thy ministers at the expense of thy subjects. Fear the sighs of the poor and of the upright in heart who, at every break of day, bewail their plight, and be unto them a benignant sovereign. They, verily, are thy treasures on earth. It behoveth thee, therefore, to safeguard thy treasures from the assaults of them who wish to rob thee. Inquire into their affairs, and ascertain, every year, nay every month, their condition, and be not of them that are careless of their duty.¹⁰

The achievement of justice is conducive to unity, which is conducive to peace. This theme is preeminent in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings:

O ye rulers of the earth! . . . Hearken unto the counsel given you by the Pen of the Most High, that haply both ye and the

poor may attain unto tranquillity and peace. We beseech God to assist the kings of the earth to establish peace on earth. He, verily, doth what He willeth.¹¹

O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful.¹²

Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend.¹³

These letters to the political and religious sovereigns of the world are completed by passages addressed to all the kings of the world collectively, to the kings of Christendom, to the Grand Vizier of the Sultan, to the French and Persian Ambassadors accredited to the Sublime Porte,* to the Muslim ecclesiastical leaders in Constantinople, to the philosophers of the world and the inhabitants of Constantinople and Persia. One of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings revealed in Adrianople, in which He proclaims His mission, is particularly well-known and well-loved among the Bahá'ís, the so-called Tablet of Aḥmad, which they use as a prayer. In this Tablet, He writes:

He is the King, the All-Knowing, the Wise! Lo, the Nightingale of Paradise singeth upon the twigs of the Tree of Eternity, with holy and sweet melodies, proclaiming to the sincere ones the glad tidings of the nearness of God, calling the believers in the Divine Unity to the court of the Presence of the Generous One, informing the severed ones of the message which hath been revealed by God, the King, the Glorious, the

* The Sublime Porte was the High Gate of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, the residence of the Ottoman Sultan. Western diplomats used this term to denote the central government of the Ottoman Empire.

Peerless, guiding the lovers to the seat of sanctity and to this resplendent Beauty.

Verily this is that Most Great Beauty, foretold in the Books of the Messengers, through Whom truth shall be distinguished from error and the wisdom of every command shall be tested. Verily He is the Tree of Life that bringeth forth the fruits of God, the Exalted, the Powerful, the Great.¹⁴

Thus, Bahá'u'lláh openly proclaimed to everyone His mission as a Teacher and a Leader of humankind towards a spiritual renewal of the personal and collective lives of all the peoples of the world and towards the establishment of a new World Order that would have fulfilled the visions of the golden age announced by the ancient prophets and seers of all religions. In the same years, He also penned a stream of Writings dealing with many other issues, through which He gave a more precise form to the teachings of His new Faith.

This stream of Writings contributed to enhancing, as always happened, the consideration, respect, and admiration towards Bahá'u'lláh, not only of the Bábís, most of whom swore their allegiance to Him, but also of most of them who attained His presence, including the local Ottoman authorities and some consuls of foreign powers based in Adrianople. The "people of Bahá," as the old Bábí community was now being increasingly called, was greatly strengthened. However, the schemes of their numerous internal and external opponents were also reinforced. Yahyá openly and anonymously protested to the authorities, accusing Bahá'u'lláh of cruelty against him and his family and conspiracy with the Bulgarian separatists and some European ministers against the Ottoman government. Some of his followers went so far as to falsify Bahá'u'lláh's Writings to confirm these accusations. The high Ottoman authorities in Constantinople, who were disturbed by the growing ascendancy of their Prisoner and by the continuous coming and going of pilgrims, mainly from Persia, who were eager to meet Bahá'u'lláh, were

further bothered by Yahyá's protests. Therefore, they decided to remove both of them from Adrianople and exile them to a place that was not immediately disclosed. The inhabitants of the quarter where Bahá'u'lláh had lived and His immediate neighbours crowded in front of His home, expressing their regret for that wrongful condemnation and their grief at His imminent departure. An eye-witness relates:

On that day . . . there was a wonderful concourse of Muslims and Christians at the door of our Master's house. The hour of departure was a memorable one. Most of those present were weeping and wailing, especially the Christians.¹⁵

The foreign authorities of the town immediately visited Him. Bahá'u'lláh Himself relates that "the consuls of that city (Adrianople) gathered in the presence of this Youth at the hour of His departure . . . and expressed their desire to aid Him. They, verily, evinced towards Us manifest affection."¹⁶ He kindly rejected their offers.¹⁷ They say that He answered them: "You wish me to give you the word to bring Me relief, but My relief lies in the hands of God. My focus is God, and to Him alone do I turn."¹⁸ When the list was published of the persons who were allowed to follow Bahá'u'lláh in His exile, one of His followers discovered that his name was not on the list. Grief-stricken, he cut his throat with a razor to kill himself but was immediately helped and saved.¹⁹ Later, Bahá'u'lláh commented upon this event: "One of My companions offered up his life, cutting his throat with his own hands for the love of God, an act unheard of in bygone centuries and which God hath set apart for this Revelation as an evidence of the power of His might."²⁰

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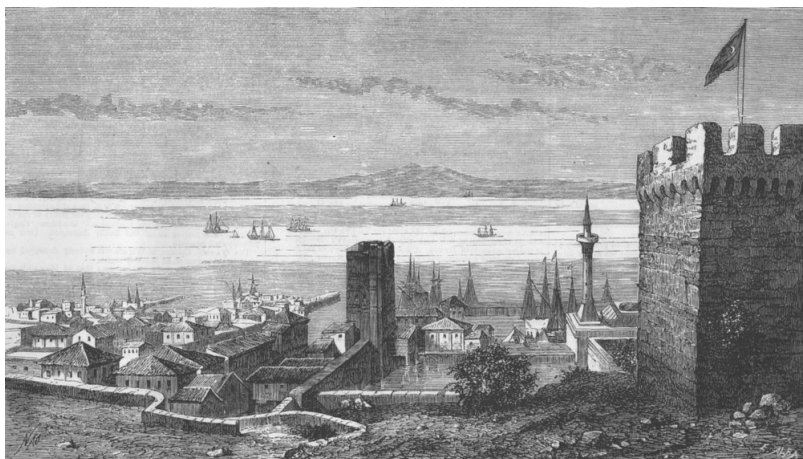
Page 95. *Queen Victoria.*

10 His Exile to the Holy Land: Akka

On 12 August 1868, the exiles left Adrianople bound for Gallipoli, where they docked after five days of navigation. Their stop lasted three days. Those days were filled with uncertainty because, in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "a discussion arose among the government officials in Constantinople as to whether We and Our companions should not be thrown into the sea."¹ Deeply touched by the sufferings of the children and the "women so far removed from their friends and countries,"² Bahá'u'lláh did something He had never done and would never do again. He asked the Sultan's assistance. He wrote about this event:

Upon our arrival in Gallipoli, a major by the name of 'Umar* came into Our presence After some exchanges . . . We declared: "From the outset, a gathering should have been convened at which the learned men of this age could have met with this Youth in order to determine what offence these servants have committed. But now the matter hath gone beyond such considerations, and, according to thine own assertion, thou art charged with incarcerating Us in the most desolate of cities. There is a matter, which, if thou findest it possible, I request thee to submit to His Majesty the Sultan, that for ten minutes this Youth be enabled to meet him, so that he may demand whatsoever he deemeth as a sufficient testimony and regardeth as proof of the veracity of Him Who is the Truth. Should God enable Him to produce it, let him, then, release these wronged ones, and leave them to themselves."³

* An officer sent from Constantinople to accompany the exiles.



His request remained unanswered. On 21 August, they all embarked on an Austrian Lloyd company ship bound for Alexandria. Well aware of the dangers looming up around Him and His companions in those days, as they were leaving the port, Bahá'u'lláh informed His companions that “‘this journey will be unlike any of the previous journeys,’ and that whoever did not feel himself ‘man enough to face the future’ had best ‘depart to whatever place he pleaseth, and be preserved from tests, for hereafter he will find himself unable to leave’.”⁴ But no one abandoned Him. On the contrary, a group of friends, whose names were not included in the list of the exiles, bought with joy their tickets for the ship, which would take Bahá'u'lláh away to follow Him in His exile, a fact that left speechless the Turkish officers. During the journey towards Alexandria, one of His companions, Muníb, who has been previously mentioned as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s brotherly friend during the trip from Baghdad to Constantinople, fell sick and had to be disembarked in Smyrna. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described the painful moment of His separation from that faithful youth:



We carried Jináb-i-Muníb* to the hospital, but the functionaries allowed us not more than one hour's time. We laid him down on the bed; we laid his fair head on the pillow; we held him and kissed him many times. Then they forced us away. It is clear how we felt. Whenever I think of that moment, the tears come; my heart is heavy and I summon up the remembrance of what he was. A great man; infinitely wise, he was, steadfast, modest and grave; and there was no one like him for faith and certitude. In him the inner and outer perfections, the spiritual and physical, were joined together. That is why he could receive endless bounty and grace.⁵

Muníb died a few days later. In Alexandria, the exiles moved to another vessel bound for Haifa. There, they were divided into two different groups. The large group was sent to Akka with

* Jináb, honorific title that means "your honor," "excellency," "majesty," commonly used by the Persians to show respect towards a person, even though this person may not occupy any official position.



Bahá'u'lláh and His family; the small one was sent to Famagusta on the island of Cyprus with Yaḥyá and his family. The exiles were not divided according to their preferences but peremptorily. Thus, it happened that four faithful followers of Bahá'u'lláh were sent to Cyprus, and a few of Yaḥyá's upholders, including his foremost instigator, Siyyid Muḥammad, were sent to Akka. 'Abdu'l-Bahá relates⁶ that one of the faithful of Bahá'u'lláh, who had been condemned to go to Cyprus, vehemently did not want to be separated from His Leader. The guards seized him to force him away, but in his despair, he wriggled out of their hands and threw himself into the sea. He was fished out, resuscitated with difficulty and obliged to embark on the ship bound for Cyprus.* Bahá'u'lláh's group, comprising about 70 persons,⁷ arrived in Akka on 31 August 1868, on a day of intense summer heat.

Thus, the last stage of Bahá'u'lláh's exile began, which lasted 24 years. This exile, the result of the persecution by two kings, the Shah and the Sultan, brought Him to the Holy Land:

* This believer loved Bahá'u'lláh so much that later on he managed to flee from Cyprus and go to Akka where he lived in disguise until Bahá'u'lláh passed away.

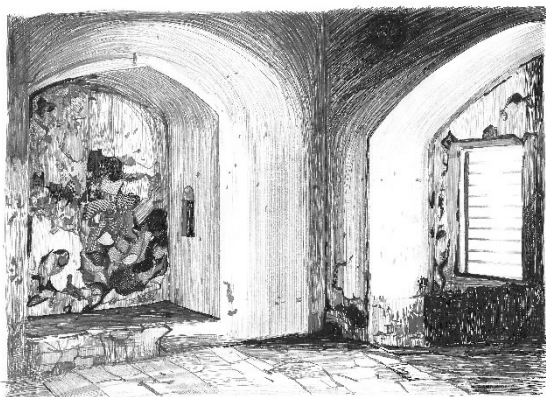


the Land promised by God to Abraham, sanctified by the Revelation of Moses, honored by the lives and labors of the Hebrew patriarchs, judges, kings and prophets, revered as the cradle of Christianity, and as the place where Zoroaster, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s testimony, had “held converse with some of the Prophets of Israel,” and associated by Islam with the Apostle’s [Muhammad] night-journey, through the seven heavens, to the throne of the Almighty.⁸

A number of prophecies in the Bible refer to this event:

Get thee up into the high mountain, O Zion that bringest good tidings; lift up thy voice with strength, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings. Lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah: “Behold your God! Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him.”⁹

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.¹⁰



According to what they say, it is the most desolate of the cities of the world, the most unsightly of them in appearance, the most detestable in climate, and the foulest in water. It is as though it were the metropolis of the owl, within whose precincts naught can be heard save the echo of its cry.¹⁴

Once they arrived at their destination, the exiles did not receive either food or water, despite the heat, till the following day. The food that was given to them in the morning was inedible. All but two of them fell sick. Of those who had fallen ill, three passed away during the night. In the morning, the exiles intended to give them a befitting burial. However, the guards forbade them from going out of the fortress. The guards told them to give them the corpses. According to custom, they should have washed, enveloped, and buried them in a shroud. Therefore, they wanted to be paid first. Bahá'u'lláh permitted the companions to sell a carpet that He had always used for Himself and to give the money to the guards. The guards took the money, put the corpses in a carriage, and went away. Later, the exiles learnt that they had kept that sum for themselves and had buried the dead companions with the clothes they had on and in a mass grave. 'Abdu'l-Bahá commented in later years: "even now, their . . . graves

are one, and just as their souls are joined in the Abhá Realm,* their bodies are together here, under the earth, each holding the other in his close embrace.”¹⁵

For two years, none of them was allowed to leave the fortress. Only four companions responsible for shopping went out daily, escorted by a platoon of guards. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the troubles of a certain ‘Alí ‘Askar who, together with his family, had accompanied Bahá’u’lláh in His exile to the Holy Land. He relates that one day, He found him laid low with fever in a corner of his squalid cell:

He was lying there, running a high fever, out of his head. On his right side lay his wife, shaking and trembling with chills. To his left was his daughter . . . burning up with typhus. Beyond them his son . . . was down with scarlet fever; he had forgotten how to speak Persian, and he kept crying out in Turkish, “My insides are on fire!” At the father’s feet lay the other daughter, deep in her sickness, and along the side of the wall was his brother . . . raving and delirious. In this condition, ‘Alí-‘Askar’s lips were moving: he was returning thanks to God, and expressing joy.¹⁶

In the meantime, Bahá’u’lláh’s many friends in Iran and Iraq were in the dark about His whereabouts. The news of His exile to the Holy Land reached those countries by a happy coincidence. Before Bahá’u’lláh’s arrival in Akka, one of His followers had decided to move there and open a shop. He did not know anything about Bahá’u’lláh’s exile in the town. Therefore, when one day he met two friends who were shopping on his way, he was astonished. He pretended not to recognize them because he was afraid of the guards that accompanied them. Nevertheless, in some way, he managed to talk with them. Thus, they informed him that Bahá’u’lláh had been exiled to Akka, and he immediately sent news to Iran and Iraq.

* The world beyond.



Soon, a few brave friends decided to come to the Holy Land to see Him.¹⁷ The first pilgrims who made their way to Akka to meet Bahá'u'lláh were not allowed to cross the moat surrounding the fortress and had to be satisfied with seeing Him from afar, leaning out of the window of His cell. One of them remained for hours on the banks of the moat to see His Lord. However, he was shortsighted and thus failed to see Him. Bahá'u'lláh and His family were heartbroken. Very few friends could enter the town, and none were allowed to meet Him. One of them went to a public bath where sometimes Bahá'u'lláh went and thus could approach Him. However, Bahá'u'lláh was always escorted by a guard, and thus, that friend had to pretend not to recognize Him and could not have the joy of talking to Him. Another believer was identified by the guards and obliged to go away without seeing His Leader. Nevertheless, he did not surrender. He remained in the Holy Land and could join the exiles in Akka after a few years.¹⁸ Another one was not permitted to remain in Akka. Therefore, he moved to Haifa, where, in Abdu'l-Bahá's words,

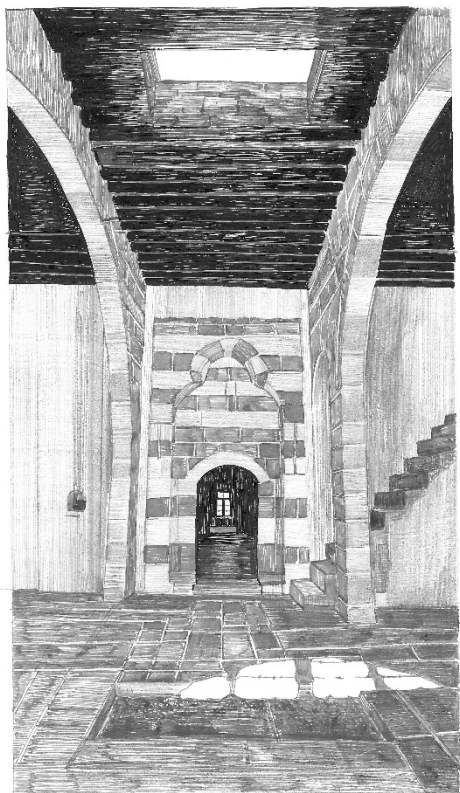
he found no haven . . . no nest or hole, no water, no grain of corn. Finally he made his home in a cave outside the town. He acquired a little tray and on this he set out rings of earthenware, and some thimbles, pins and other trinkets. Every day, from morning till noon, he peddled these, wandering about. Some days his earnings would amount to twenty paras, some days thirty; and forty on his best days. Then he would go home to the cave and content himself with a piece of bread. He was always voicing his thanks, always saying, "Praise be to God that I have attained such favor and grace . . ."¹⁹

Nonetheless, he was happy because he was closer to Bahá'u'lláh. Not even Shaykh Salmán, the devoted Iranian believer who from 1853 to Bahá'u'lláh's death regularly delivered every year the letters which Bahá'u'lláh addressed to His followers in Persia, was allowed to enter His presence. Only one person could enter

the fortress in those dark days and meet Bahá'u'lláh. His name was 'Abdu'r-Raḥím from Buṣhrú'íyyih, and he had become a Bahá'í after having been a fierce enemy of Bahá'u'lláh's followers. When he arrived in Akka, after having walked for six months, he first washed his soiled clothes in the sea, which were very dirty after that long journey. Then, he wore his clean but wrinkled clothes and approached the fortress. From afar, he saw a hand beckoning him to come. It was Bahá'u'lláh. Then 'Abdu'r-Raḥím went to the gate of the fortress. It was opened, but there were two guards. 'Abdu'r-Raḥím looked at them enquiringly, but they seemed not to see him. Then he crossed the gate and entered, and the guards again ignored him. He attained Bahá'u'lláh's presence and remained with Him for a while. He came out of the fortress with a package of letters, which Bahá'u'lláh had asked him to carry to Persia, and he managed to deliver them to their addressees after great ordeals. Later, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in a Tablet addressed to this believer that He had closed the eyes of the guards to satisfy his eagerness to attain His presence and see His face.²⁰

In those difficult days, Bahá'u'lláh shared the suffering of His relatives and companions. He lived among them, as a man among men, despite the divine nature that God had bestowed upon Him. They say He "used sometimes to cook food and perform other lowly offices for His followers. He was a Servant of the servants, and gloried only in servitude, content to sleep on a bare floor if need be, to live on bread and water, or even, at times, on what He called 'the divine nourishment, that is to say, hunger!'"²¹ He also was close to His companions in their aspirations to excellence and beauty. 'Abdu'l-Bahá relates the story of Darvish Šidq-'Alí, a refined poet and mystic, whom Bahá'u'lláh lovingly helped to follow the path of the purest mysticism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

While in the barracks, Bahá'u'lláh set apart a special night and He dedicated it to Darvish Šidq-'Alí. He wrote that every year on that night the dervishes should bedeck a meeting



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place, which should be in a flower garden, and gather there to make mention of God. He went on to say that “dervish” does not denote those persons who wander about, spending their nights and days in fighting and folly; rather, He said, the term designates those who are completely severed from all but God, who cleave to His laws, are firm in His Faith, loyal to His Covenant, and constant in worship. It is not a name for those who, as the Persians say, tramp about like vagrants, are confused, unsettled in mind, a burden to others, and of all mankind the most coarse and rude.²²

As was typical of Bahá'u'lláh's many imprisonments, His charisma would win over the wardens and guards. Bahá'u'lláh's charm, and the charm of His now adult son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, along with the beautiful behaviour of Their companions, found its way into the hearts of His jailers and the unbearable severity of the first months gradually was assuaged.

On 22 June 1870, Bahá'u'lláh and His family were hit with a grievous loss. Bahá'u'lláh's and Asíyyih's younger son, Mihdí, the child who, when they were exiled from Teheran to Baghdad, was left behind in Teheran with his maternal great grandmother because he was too frail to bear that arduous journey, used to go

at sunset up to the great terrace which covered the fortress, to walk and pray. That evening, Mihdí was so absorbed in his meditations that he forgot the presence of an open skylight. He fell to the floor below onto a wooden casket which pierced his ribs. It was immediately apparent that his wounds were mortal. He passed away the next day under the eyes of His Father. Before dying, he said that he willingly offered his young life in the hope that the harshness of the imprisonment of the exiles would be mitigated and the pilgrims could at last meet Bahá'u'lláh. It was a severe test for all of them, especially for his mother, Asíyih, who could hardly resign herself to the loss of her beautiful son. Bahá'u'lláh wrote two Tablets in which He commemorates him:

At this very moment . . . My son is being washed before My face, after Our having sacrificed him in the Most Great Prison. Thereat have the dwellers of the Abhá Tabernacle wept with a great weeping, and such as have suffered imprisonment with this Youth in the path of God, the Lord of the promised Day, lamented. Under such conditions My Pen hath not been prevented from remembering its Lord, the Lord of all nations. It summoneth the people unto God, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful. This is the day whereon he that was created by the light of Bahá has suffered martyrdom, at a time when he lay imprisoned at the hands of his enemies.²³

I testify that thou didst return in meekness unto thine abode. Great is thy blessedness. . . Thou art, verily, the trust of God and His treasure in this land When thou wast laid to rest in the earth, the earth itself trembled in its longing to meet thee.²⁴

About four months after that fatal event, a contingent of Turkish troops arrived in Akka, and the fortress was assigned to them as their quarters. Therefore, the exiled were relocated. They were lodged in a tiny house, where they lived in cramped conditions. They

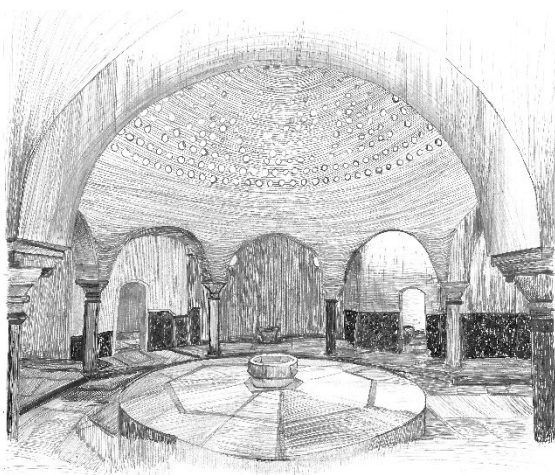


repeatedly moved from one residence to another, and finally, they were accommodated in the house of Údí Khammar, a wealthy Christian merchant. In that house, thirteen people of both sexes had to share a single room. At least at their door, no more guards had kept watch at their previous residences. The town was crumbling and dirty. Bahá'u'lláh's companions did whatever they could to clean up at least the surroundings of the places where He was living. One of them swept and moistened the

square in front of His habitation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá relates that "Bahá'u'lláh would often glance at that plot of ground, and then He would smile and say: 'Muhammad-Hádí has turned the square in front of this prison into the bridal bower of a palace. He has brought pleasure to all the neighbours and earned their thanks.'"²⁵

Nevertheless, whereas their living conditions were a little better, that handful of exiles was hit in those days by a grievous internal crisis. A thoughtless action perpetrated, in flagrant disobedience to Bahá'u'lláh's orders, by seven of His followers aroused the indignation of the local authorities, who put the offenders in prison, immediately summoned Bahá'u'lláh and kept Him under arrest in a caravanserai of the town for one day and one night. When, as police officers typically do in the course of their interrogations, they asked Him to give His personal details, He answered: "My name is Bahá'u'lláh (Light of God) and my country is Núr (Light)."^{*} The governor of the town told Him: "Is it proper . . . that

^{*} Laurence Oliphant (1829-1888) a Victorian author, traveler and diplomat who lived in the Holy Land from 1882 to 1888, states that Bahá'u'lláh



some of your followers should act in such a manner?" Bahá'u'lláh answered: "If one of your soldiers . . . were to commit a reprehensible act, would you be held responsible, and be punished in his place?" Then, He addressed all the bystanders with such noble and dignified words that no one dared to reply. Immediately after, the governor told Him He was free to return home and begged forgiveness for disturbing Him.²⁶ The offenders were placed in prison for some years. Bahá'u'lláh wrote about them:

My imprisonment doeth Me no harm, neither the tribulations I suffer, nor the things that have befallen Me at the hands of My oppressors. That which harmeth Me is the conduct of those who, though they bear My name, yet commit that which maketh My heart and My pen to lament. They that spread disorder in the land, and lay hands on the property of others, and enter a house without leave of its owner, We, verily, are clear

answered: "I am not a camel driver . . . nor am I the Son of a carpenter" (*Haifa* 103-7). These words are in sharp contrast with both the noble, but not arrogant, character of Bahá'u'lláh, and the great respect, love indeed, that Bahá'u'lláh always manifested towards both Jesus and Muhammad. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that this story is not true.

of them, unless they repent and return unto God, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.²⁷

This event produced great tension among the populace about Bahá'u'lláh, His family, and His companions. His neighbour, who had always been friendly with the exiles, barred his house to prevent any of the Bahá'ís from entering it. The children of the exiles could not go out without being vexed, abused and pelted with stones by others of their age.²⁸ In those days, Bahá'u'lláh wrote a Tablet, known to the Bahá'ís as the Fire Tablet, in which He hints with passionate words at the severity of the trials besetting Him and His companions of exile:

Indeed the hearts of the sincere are consumed in the fire of separation: Where is the gleaming of the light of Thy Countenance, O Beloved of the worlds?

Those who are near unto Thee have been abandoned in the darkness of desolation: Where is the shining of the morn of Thy reunion, O Desire of the worlds?

The bodies of Thy chosen ones lie quivering on distant sands: Where is the ocean of Thy presence, O Enchanter of the worlds?

Longing hands are uplifted to the heaven of Thy grace and generosity: Where are the rains of Thy bestowal, O Answerer of the worlds?

The infidels have arisen in tyranny on every hand: Where is the compelling power of Thine ordaining pen, O Conqueror of the worlds?²⁹

This situation continued for some time, but none of the exiles was discouraged. In those days, Bahá'u'lláh wrote to some of His followers: "Fear not. These doors shall be opened. My tent shall be pitched on Mount Carmel, and the utmost joy shall be realized."³⁰ And His words came true. Over time, the charm of His person, the beauty and depth of His teachings, the good behaviour

of most of the members of His family and His followers, and, last but not least, the replacement of the former governor, whose mind had been irreparably poisoned against the Faith by Bahá'u'lláh's enemies, with a sagacious and humane new governor, prevailed. The former tensions gave way to a harmonious coexistence. Gradually, Bahá'u'lláh became, in the eyes of the people, a respected and revered religious head, whom everyone called "august leader" and "his highness," and to whom a good influence was ascribed not only on people but also on the climate and the water of the town.

The flow of the pilgrims who, despite the difficulties and the dangers of that journey, came primarily from Iran to meet Him was no longer blocked as it had been under the previous governor. Many persons became attracted by the new Faith. 'Abdu'lláh Túzih was in Akka the day when the exiles arrived. He remembered it very clearly because a daughter was born to him that day. He was immediately drawn by the majesty emanating from their Leader. As soon as he could, he managed to get in touch with them and finally embraced the Bahá'í Faith and his daughter, the one who was born on the day when the exiles had arrived in Akka, married one of Bahá'u'lláh's cooks.³¹ That day Khalil Ahmad 'Abdú also was in Akka. He was an older man, respected for his trustworthiness and piety. He also was immediately fascinated by the regal and loving figure of Bahá'u'lláh. He often said that the people of Akka should feel proud of His presence.³²

Persons who once had been His enemies also fell under His spell, as a certain Shaykh Maḥmúd, a local religious leader. Influenced by the rumours spread before Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, he was so indignant that he considered killing the man who claimed, as he thought, to be the "God of the Persians." Therefore, one day, he took a knife, concealed it under his clothes, went to the fortress in which Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned, and asked to be admitted to His presence. To the friends that announced the arrival of that guest who wanted to meet Him, Bahá'u'lláh answered: "Tell him . . . to cast away the weapon and then he may come in."

Shaykh Maḥmūd was speechless. He was sure that he had hidden his knife. Who could have told Bahá'u'lláh that he had a weapon? Such was his consternation that he did not want to enter and went away. However, the idea of killing Bahá'u'lláh did not abandon him. One day, he returned to the fortress without any weapon. I do not need a weapon, he said to himself. I am so strong that I can kill him with my bare hands. However, when the friends told Bahá'u'lláh that Shaykh Maḥmūd wanted to meet Him, Bahá'u'lláh said to them: "Tell him to purify his heart first, and then he may come in." Once again, Shaykh Maḥmūd, astonished by Bahá'u'lláh's perceptiveness, left without meeting Him. He brooded over what had happened for several days, then finally, after a dream in which his father had urged him to meet Bahá'u'lláh, he returned to the fortress, where he was welcomed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Little by little, Bahá'u'lláh's Son's wisdom and loving-kindness won him over, and he renounced his bloody intentions. At last, he was introduced to Bahá'u'lláh's presence and became His faithful follower.³³

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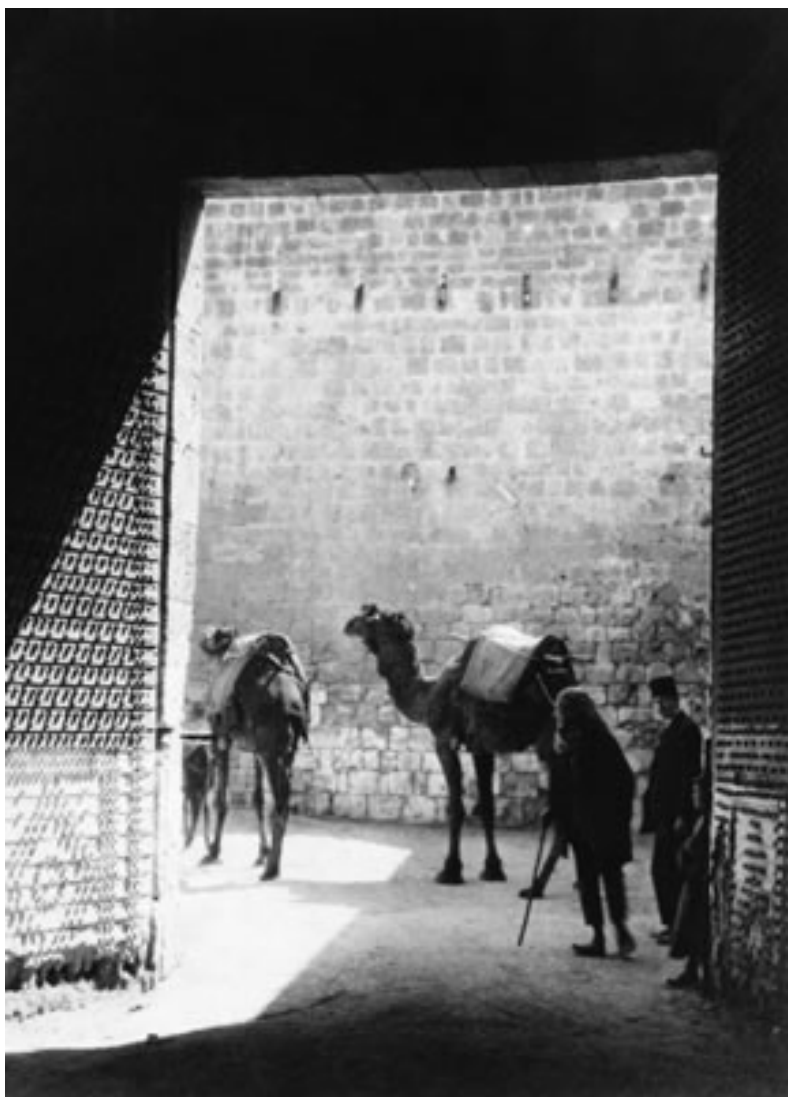
Page 116. *Akka. The public bath where Bahá'u'lláh sometimes went.*

In 1877, a companion told ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that Bahá’u’lláh had said: “I have not gazed on verdure for nine years. The country is the world of the soul; the city is the world of bodies.”¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá thought it was time to prepare a more comfortable residence for Him, wherein He could enjoy the beauties of nature. Therefore, He rented a house in the country in the locality of Mazrá’ih, a few kilometres north of Akka, not far from the Mediterranean Sea and with a magnificent sight of the Galilean hills. With the assistance of the mufti* of the town, a great admirer of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá convinced His Father to move there. Although nominally He was still a prisoner of the Turkish Sultan, Bahá’u’lláh could live in greater freedom, and especially, after seven years of imprisonment in a town devoid of greenery, He could return to being in touch with nature, which He loved so much. Bahá’u’lláh remained in that house for two years.[†] In 1879, He moved to another residence in Bahjí, closer to Akka: The owner of that noble mansion had built it, regardless of cost, and following the canons of the modern Turkish architecture of the day, as a summer resort for his family. Shortly after the mansion was completed, he hastily abandoned it because of an epidemic disease that had swept through the region. In the final years of His life in Bahjí, Bahá’u’lláh

having in His earlier years of hardship shown how to glorify God in a state of poverty and ignominy . . . showed how to glorify God in a state of honour and affluence. The offering

* A Muslim religious authority.

† This Mansion is today a pilgrimage site for the Bahá’ís.





of hundreds of thousands of devoted followers placed at His disposal large funds which He was called upon to administer. Although His life at Bahjí has been described as truly regal, in the highest sense of the word, yet it must not be imagined that it was characterized by material splendour or extravagance. The Blessed Perfection and His family lived in very simple and modest fashion, and expenditure on selfish luxury was a thing unknown in that household.²

Bahá'u'lláh remained in Bahjí to the end of His days in 1892. The decree of the Sultan condemning Bahá'u'lláh and His family to perpetual exile had not been formally abrogated but was virtually insignificant. Theoretically, Bahá'u'lláh was still a prisoner, but “the doors of majesty and true sovereignty were . . . flung wide open.”³ In those years, “the rulers of Palestine . . . envied His influence and power. Governors and mutiṣarrifs,* generals and local officials, would humbly request the honour of attaining

* The governor of a district.



His presence—a request to which He seldom acceded.”⁴ Most people, even those of a high rank, had to content themselves with seeing Him from afar. Amir Amin Arslan,* a well-known Druse writer and journalist, a member of a princely family, describes his fleet-ing meeting with him as follows:[†]

I thought then that I was going to be able to converse with him who was the reflection on earth of the rays of Divinity, but my illusions were quickly dispersed. I had to content myself with catching a glimpse of the illustrious Bahá'u'lláh at the moment when he came out to take his daily walk in the immense park surrounding his residence. In fact, “the Word” never left the inside of his house except to take a walk in his park in the evening, a time when he could better elude the prying attentions of outsiders.

* D. 1943.

† This description was published in 1896 by the French political and literary weekly magazine *Revue Bleue*, published under various titles between 1863 and 1939.



But ‘Abbás Effendi* had carefully positioned me behind a part of the wall, along his path, in such a manner that I could easily contemplate him for a short while. I even believe that

“the Word of God” had realized the presence of a stranger and had understood that it was a question of granting a favour to a friend. His appearance struck my imagination in such a way that I cannot better represent it than by evoking the image of the Father, commanding, in his majesty the elements of nature, in the middle of clouds.⁵

‘Abdu’l-Bahá relates that one day, the governor of the town told him that he had received from Constantinople the order to pay a visit to Bahá’u’lláh, and therefore, he asked permission to meet Him with a general.

The request being granted, the general, who was a very corpulent individual, a European, was so impressed by the majestic presence of Bahá’u’lláh that he remained kneeling on the ground near the door. Such was the diffidence of both

* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

visitors that it was only after repeated invitations from Bahá'u'lláh that they were induced to smoke the narguileh (hubble-bubble pipe) offered to them. Even then they only touched it with their lips, and then, putting it aside, folded their arms and sat in an attitude of such humility and respect as to astonish all those who were present.⁶

Taking care of their external relations had been given to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had achieved great prestige among the population. These are words written for Him by His Father, Who held Him in high esteem:

O Thou Who art the apple of Mine eye! . . . My glory, the ocean of My loving-kindness, the sun of My bounty, the heaven of My mercy rest upon Thee. We pray God to illumine the world through Thy knowledge and wisdom, to ordain for Thee that which will gladden Thine heart and impart consolation to Thine eyes.

Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favor unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you; and through Him every mouldering bone is quickened. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favored servants . . .⁷

His daughter Bahíyyih also played an important role in brightening Bahá'u'lláh's life. She renounced everything so that she might serve her Father and her Brother, Whom she fondly loved, a love fully reciprocated by both of Them. Bahá'u'lláh wrote to her:



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Verily, We have elevated thee to the rank of one of the most distinguished among thy sex, and granted thee, in My court, a station such as none other woman hath surpassed. Thus have We preferred thee and raised thee above the rest, as a sign of grace from Him Who is the Lord of the throne on high and earth below.⁸

Although the local customs kept her relegated to the household and forbade her free access to the male world, her “exquisite balance between the practical and spiritual teachings perfectly exemplified”⁹ won her great admiration. An unknown pilgrim said that to be in her presence and “to feel that spiritual power which she is consciously pouring into the world today, is a bounty beyond words, and will assist a soul throughout all the worlds. If you go there with a spiritual hunger, and even a little freed from self, your heart will be filled to overflowing and you shall have tasted that water after which one will thirst no more.”¹⁰

Bahá'u'lláh occasionally left his voluntary seclusion to visit places of His liking. He often went, for example, to the Na'mayn garden, a small island amid a river at the east of the town, that was soon called the Ridván (paradise) and that He referred to as the “New Jerusalem” and “Our Green Island.” He

also travelled four times to Haifa and sojourned on Mount Carmel, where He chose the place where His followers would bury the remains of His Herald, the Báb.* Later, that place and its immediate surroundings became the seat of the spiritual and administrative centre of His Faith. In the meantime, His community also had grown. It was strengthened in Persia and other territories, such as Caucasia, Iraq, Turkestan, Lebanon, India and Burma, despite the ongoing persecutions to which it was exposed with alternating intensity, particularly in Iran.

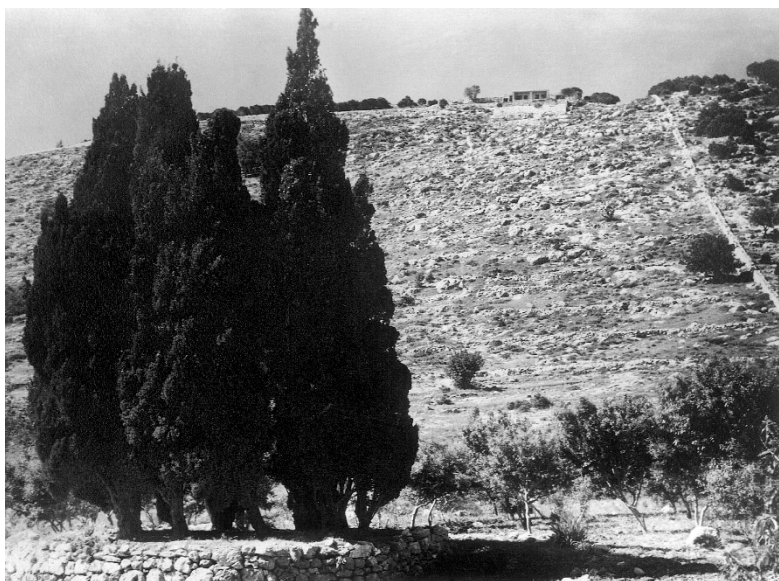
Bahá'u'lláh especially met His followers, both His companions of exile and the pilgrims coming in increasing numbers from nearby countries, reciprocating their love with His spiritual bounties: His great personal love, His precious Writings and His wise counsel. It has been reported that He used to tell them:

There are four qualities which I love to see manifested in people: first, enthusiasm and courage; second, a face wreathed in smiles and a radiant countenance; third, that they see all things with their own eyes and not through the eyes of others; fourth, the ability to carry a task, once begun, through to its end.¹¹

Most of those who met Him said He read their hearts since He often satisfied unexpressed spiritual aspirations or answered questions conceived in their thoughts. One of those visitors related that in those years the journey from the nearby countries to the Holy Land, “using the rudimentary means of transportation of those days (at times mounted, at times on foot) gave rise to great hardships, but the staggering ordeals of the journey were entirely effaced from . . . (one’s) mind when . . . (one) entered the presence of the Blessed Beauty.”¹² All pilgrims came out of His presence

* They say that He chose that place in 1891, while He was together with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, beside a group of seven tall cypresses which still are thriving in that spot behind the Shrine of the Báb (see Ruhe, *Door of Hope* 134-5).

with the feeling of having been loved and understood. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeatedly mentioned the attitude of “perfect bliss” of His



companions, conquered by the charisma of His person. One of those companions was Muḥammad-‘Alí. He lived by a modest commercial activity which kept him busy the whole morning:

In the afternoons he would take his samovar, wrap it in a dark-coloured pouch made from a saddlebag, and go off somewhere to a garden or meadow, or out in a field, and have his tea. Sometimes he would be found at the farm of Mazrá‘ih, or a ain in the Riḍván Garden; or, at the Mansion [Bahjí], he would have the honour of attending upon Bahá’u’lláh.

Muḥammad-‘Alí would carefully consider every blessing that came his way. “How delicious my tea is today,” he would comment. “What perfume, what colour! How lovely this meadow is, and the flowers so bright!” He used to say that everything, even air and water, had its own special fragrance. For him the days passed in indescribable delight. Even kings

were not so happy as this old man, the people said. "He is completely free of the world," they would declare. "He lives in joy." It also happened that his food was of the very best, and that his home was situated in the very best part of 'Akká. Gracious God! Here he was, a prisoner, and yet experiencing comfort, peace and joy.¹³

'Abdu'l-Bahá also relates many moving stories, such as that of two brothers born in Azerbaijan who, although living in Adrianople in Bahá'u'lláh's train, had been out-of-town when He was exiled. Broken-hearted to not be with their Beloved on His journey to Akka, they joined Him in the Holy Land as soon as they could:

They lived outside 'Akká in Bagh-i-Firdaws, worked as farmers, and spent their days returning thanks to God because once again they had won their way to the neighbourhood of grace and love. But they were natives of Ádhirbáyján, accustomed to the cold, and they could not endure the local heat. Furthermore, this was during our early days in 'Akká, when the air was noxious, and the water unwholesome in the extreme. They both fell ill of a chronic, high fever. They bore it cheerfully, with amazing patience. During their days of illness, despite the assault of the fever, the violence of their ailment, the raging thirst, the restlessness, they remained inwardly at peace, rejoicing at the Divine glad tidings. And at a time when they were offering thanks with all their heart, they hurried away from this world and entered the other; they escaped from this cage and were released into the garden of immortality.¹⁴

The loyalty and devotion of all these companions of exile are summarized in the following words uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a memorial talk for one of them:

He was a good companion to all the friends, a consolation to their hearts; he brought happiness to all of them, the present

and the absent as well He always maintained the same inner condition; he was constant, never subject to change. He was always happy-looking. He did not know the meaning of fatigue. He was never despondent. When anyone asked a service of him, he performed it at once. He was staunch and firm in his faith, a tree that grew in the scented garden of God's tenderness.¹⁵

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Bahá'u'lláh's stay in the Holy Land is characterised by a flood of Writings He penned there, Writings which are so important that those years have been defined as "the vernal years of His Mission."¹ These Works have been divided into "three distinct categories:"

The first comprises those writings which constitute the sequel to the proclamation of His Mission in Adrianople. The second includes the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, which, for the most part, have been recorded in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, His Most Holy Book. To the third must be assigned those Tablets which partly enunciate and partly reaffirm the fundamental tenets and principles underlying that Dispensation.²

As to the proclamation of His Mission from the Holy Land, He sent Tablets to famous heads of state: to Queen Victoria (although that letter was written in Adrianople); a second Tablet to Napoleon III, who had ignored a former letter sent to Him from Adrianople;^{*} to Alexander II Nicolaevic, Czar of Russia,[†] whom He thanks for the assistance offered to Him by his ambassador in Teheran and urges now to give heed to His call; and to the Grand Vizier of the Turkish Sultan. He also addressed the ecclesiastical leaders of the world's religions, including Pope Pius IX. Besides

^{*} They say that, when Napoleon III received this Tablet, he contemptuously flung it down saying: "If this man is God, I am two gods!" (words of Napoleon quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 51).

[†] 1818-1881.

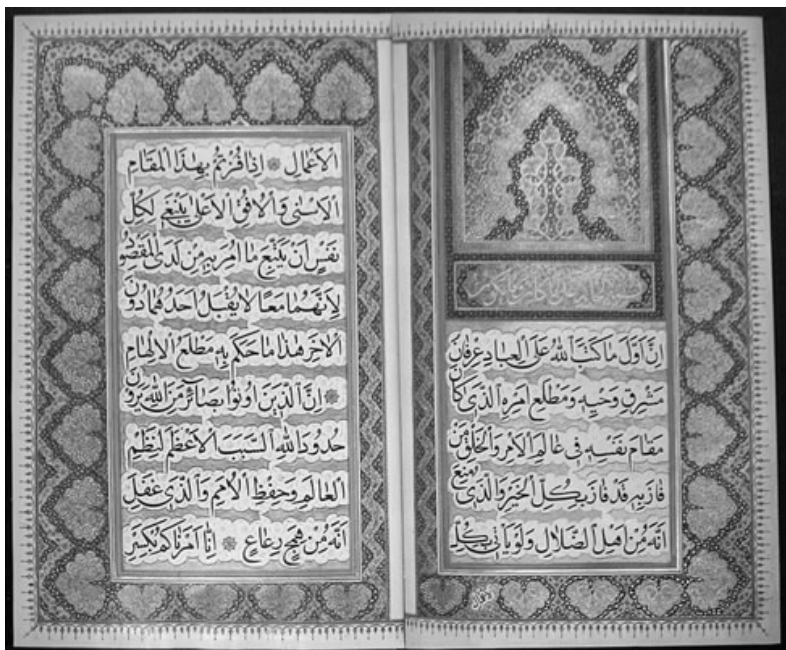


writing these Tablets addressing specific eminent personages, He also referred to some of them in the context of other Writings, for example, His most important Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which will be discussed later. In these passages, He apostrophises the kings of the earth in the East and the West, Christian and Muslim; the rulers of America and the Presidents of its Republics; Wilhelm I, the emperor of Germany; * Francis Joseph, the emperor of

Austria;† the members of the British Legislature, “the Mother of Parliaments,”³ and the elected representatives throughout the world; the ecclesiastical leaders of all the confessions of the world, the patriarchs, the archbishops and all the priests and the monks of the Christian Church, the whole body of the Muslim ecclesiastics, and the high priests of the Zoroastrian Faith. He also addressed all the followers of Christ, all the Muslims, and all the Jews collectively. These messages stand “unparalleled in the annals of any previous religion . . . the messages directed by the Prophet of Islam to some of the rulers among His contemporaries alone offer a faint resemblance.”⁴

* 1797-1888.

† 1830-1916.



As to the exposition of the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, the most important book of this category is the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, the mother book of the Bahá'í Faith. It was written in about 1873, when great tensions and a heavy atmosphere of suspicion still surrounded Bahá'u'lláh and His companions of exile. In this Book, Bahá'u'lláh expounds the fundamental precepts of His Faith, imparts clear guidance as to the administration of the affairs of His Faith, enunciates the fundamental laws and ordinances upon which His future World Order will be established, and decrees Who will succeed Him in the interpretation of His Writings and as the head of His community, as well as naming the institutions vested with the responsibility of protecting the integrity and the unity of His Faith. A commentary upon the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, published by the Bahá'í World Centre in 1993, soon after the publication of its first authorised English translation, by the Universal House of Justice, the Institution

which now directs the Bahá'í Faith, states that the book contains the “foundations of a global ethos” and explains:

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas makes its appearance in a world which, since the Enlightenment's rejection of religion as the ultimate moral authority, has engaged in an increasingly urgent search for an alternative place to stand. Today, it is apparent that this effort has failed. Neither Marxist determinism nor popular faith in situational or consensus ethics offers a basis upon which the system of values required by an emerging global society can be erected.

Bahá'u'lláh reasserts the sovereignty of God as the sole authority governing moral life. God exists; He is the Source of all that is; He reveals through His Messengers those laws and principles that are primarily responsible for the civilising of human nature. The autonomy of the individual is conditioned, therefore, not only by the limitations of the natural world he or she inhabits, but also by a spiritual universe that transcends and pervades it. “Hold ye fast unto His statutes and commandments,” is the counsel of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, “and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings, have clung to the standards fixed by their own selves, and cast behind their backs the standards laid down by God.”⁵

The commentary upon the Kitáb-i-Aqdas published by the Bahá'í World Centre in 1993 goes on to state:

Fundamental values around which all past societies have organised themselves are reformulated in the Aqdas to meet the needs of a planet contracted into a single homeland and a human race awakening to greatly enhanced powers of reason and perception. New laws and concepts are enunciated whose aim is to free human consciousness from culturally conditioned patterns of response and to nurture the emergence of global civilisation.



The Aqdas is not a systematic code of law. Guidance that relates to details of individual life or social practice is set in passages which summon the reader to a challenging new conception of human nature and purpose. Evgenii Eduardovich Bertels,* the nineteenth-century Russian scholar who first attempted a translation of the book, compared Bahá'u'lláh's pen writing the Aqdas to a bird, now soaring on the summits of heaven, now descending to touch the homeliest questions of everyday need.

The book's prescriptions range across subjects as varied as aesthetics, weapons control, sanitation, penal law, and the need for an auxiliary, international language. The inextinguishable human proclivity toward ritual is directed into a few areas of personal life. Various prohibitions inherited from earlier religious traditions are annulled and the door is firmly shut on the emergence of a professional clergy. The principal themes addressed in the Aqdas, however, are those

* 1890-1957.

great issues that are the dominant concerns of all Bahá'u'lláh's writings and of contemporary society: justice, government, law, liberty, belief, education, family, and the promotion of civilisation.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh presents these laws and ordinances as

“the breath of life unto all created things,” as “the mightiest stronghold,” as the “fruits” of His “Tree,” as “the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples,” as “the lamps of His wisdom and loving-providence,” as “the sweet smelling savour of His garment,” as the “keys” of His “mercy” to His creatures.⁷

He recommends that people obey His laws out of their pure love for God's beauty. He writes:

Say: From My laws the sweet-smelling savour of My garment can be smelled . . . “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.” . . . He who hath drunk the choice wine of fairness from the hands of My bountiful favour will circle around My commandments that shine above the Dayspring of My creation.

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.⁸

As to individuals, their daily efforts to comply with those prescriptions, little by little, day by day, will replace the self-love which “is kneaded into the very clay of man” with a willingness to “freely consecrate . . . [their hearts and souls] to the common good.”⁹ As to collectivity, the implementation of those laws will change material civilisation, which “through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts,” into a divine civilisation, which “so traineth every member

of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime.”¹⁰

The treatment of the issues expounded in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas continues in the many Tablets Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the Holy Land after 1873. The most important among these are *Ishráqát* (Splendors), *Bishárát* (Glad Tidings), *Ṭarázát* (Ornaments), *Tajalliyát* (Effulgences), *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* (Words of Paradise), *Lawḥ-i-Aqdas* (Most Holy Tablet), *Lawḥ-i-Dunyá* (Tablet of the World), *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd* (Tablet of Maqṣúd). All these Tablets have been collected in a volume published in English in 1978 under the title *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. They enunciate “certain precepts and principles which lie at the very core of His Faith,” reassert “truths He had previously proclaimed,” elaborate and elucidate “some of the laws He had already laid down,” reveal “further prophecies and warnings,” and establish “subsidiary ordinances designed to supplement the provisions of His Most Holy Book.”¹¹ These important late works that He penned “rank among the choicest fruits which His mind has yielded . . . the consummation of His forty-year-long ministry.”¹²

The volume *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* also comprises other weighty Tablets written in that period: *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat* (Tablet of Wisdom) in which He defines the “fundamentals of philosophy,”¹³ *Lawḥ-i-Burhán* (Tablet of the Proof) in which He sternly condemns the acts perpetrated by two cruel religious leaders of Esfahan, respectively stigmatised as *Dhi'b*, the Wolf, and *Raqshá*, the She-Serpent, who instigated the martyrdom of two honest brothers of the town so that the She-Serpent could get rid of a heavy debt he had contracted with the two brothers in the course of commercial transactions; *Lawḥ-i-Karmil* (Tablet of the Carmel), in which He mentions “the City of God that hath descended from heaven,” and prophesies: “Ere long will God sail His Ark” upon that mountain and “will manifest the people of Baha;”¹⁴ and *Words of Wisdom*, a collection of twenty-two aphorisms, which concisely illustrates such aspects

of the spiritual life as wisdom, love, courage, faith, etc. The last significant work written by Bahá'u'lláh is the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, a long letter addressed in 1891 to an eminent religious leader of Esfahan, named *Ibn-i-Dhi'b*, son of the wolf, after the title given to His father, the above mentioned "wolf." In this book, He "quotes some of the most characteristic and celebrated passages of His own writings, and adduces proofs establishing the validity of His Cause."¹⁵

List of Illustrations

Page 134. *Akka. Bahá'u'lláh's room in the house of 'Údí Khammár, where He revealed the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.*

Page 135. *An illuminated copy of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, commissioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1902.*

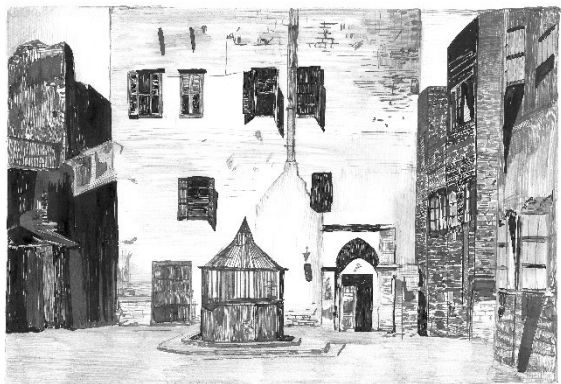
Page 137. *Bahjí. Eagle monument in front of the northwest side of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.*

Some doctrines and principles of the Bahá'í Faith that Bahá'u'lláh enunciated or reasserted in the final years of His life deserve special mention. Some of the most significant of them will be mentioned.

The “hall-mark of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the pivot of His teachings” is “the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the human race.”¹ Children of one God, a loving Creator, all human beings are brothers and sisters. The variety of personalities, ethnic groups, races, religions, and cultures does not deny this oneness. Variety enriches oneness, as the diversity of the vegetable and animal species enriches the ecosystem of our beautiful world. Bahá'u'lláh poetically describes this oneness in the following words:

The path to freedom hath been outstretched; hasten ye thereunto. The wellspring of wisdom is overflowing; quaff ye therefrom O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Verily I say, whatsoever leadeth to the decline of ignorance and the increase of knowledge hath been, and will ever remain, approved in the sight of the Lord of creation O people! Walk ye neath the shadow of justice and truthfulness and seek ye shelter within the tabernacle of unity.²

This principle has been repeatedly illustrated by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Who wrote that the Bahá'í Faith exists



only that all may become the waves of one sea, and bright stars of the same endless sky, and pearls within the shell of singleness, and gleaming jewels quarried from the mines of unity; that they may become servants one to another, adore one another, bless one another, praise one another; that each one may loose his tongue and extol the rest without exception, each one voice his gratitude to all the rest; that all should lift up their eyes to the horizon of glory, and remember that they are linked to the Holy Threshold; that they should see nothing but good in one another, hear nothing but praise of one another, and speak no word of one another save only to praise.³

A corollary of the principle of the oneness of humankind is the common citizenship that unites human beings to one another:

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.⁴

The importance of oneness is illustrated by Bahá'u'lláh in other terms in other Writings. There is an illustrative passage on this issue which explains that the oneness among human beings is impossible in the absence of justice:

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship Exert yourselves that ye may attain this transcendent and most sublime station, the station that can insure the protection and security of all mankind. This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations. So long, however, as the thick clouds of oppression, which obscure the daystar of justice, remain undispeled, it would be difficult for the glory of this station to be unveiled to men's eyes.⁵

Another issue elaborated on in detail in the Writings of this period is religion. Bahá'u'lláh states very clearly concerning the oneness of religion: "There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God."⁶ He explains that "the essence of religion is to testify unto that which the Lord hath revealed, and follow that which He hath ordained in His mighty Book."⁷ Religion expresses itself in this world in the Revelation of God, which in turn finds its direct expression in the Holy Writings. In response to the Holy Writings, human beings can do but one thing: make an effort to understand them and faithfully follow them because they convey what God requires from individuals and humankind. This issue is extensively dealt with in the Book of Certitude, in which Scriptures are defined as "the City of Certitude,"⁸ "the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation."⁹ Bahá'u'lláh clearly explains what He means by "the City of Certitude" when He writes:

in the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án; in this day the Bayan; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book—the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme.¹⁰

Then Bahá'u'lláh explains that Scripture bountifully provides “spiritual sustenance” and “incorruptible delights” and that “the food they bestow is the bread of heaven, and the Spirit they impart is God’s imperishable blessing.” He adds:

Upon detached souls they bestow the gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them who wander in the wilderness of ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities.¹¹

Finally He recommends deep study of them, because whoever understands them

will discern [therein] the wonders of His ancient wisdom, and will perceive all the hidden teachings from the rustling leaves of the Tree—which flourisheth in that City. With both his inner and his outer ear he will hear from its dust the hymns of glory and praise ascending unto the Lord of Lords, and with his inner eye will he discover the mysteries of “return” and “revival.” How unspeakably glorious are the signs, the tokens, the revelations, and splendours which He Who is the King of names and attributes hath destined for that City! The attainment of this City quencheth thirst without water, and kindleth the love of God without fire. Within every blade of grass are enshrined the mysteries of an inscrutable wisdom,

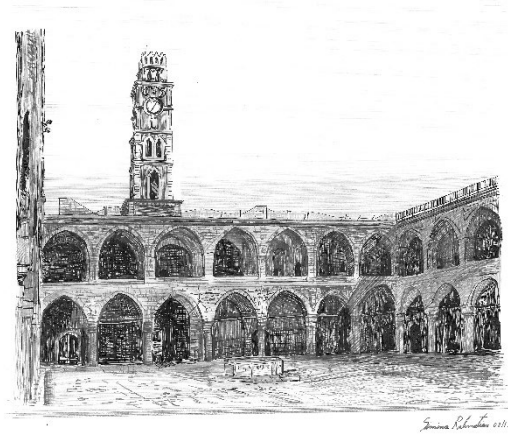
and upon every rose-bush a myriad nightingales pour out, in blissful rapture, their melody. Its wondrous tulips unfold the mystery of the undying Fire in the Burning Bush, and its sweet savours of holiness breathe the perfume of the Messianic Spirit. It bestoweth wealth without gold, and conferreth immortality without death. In every leaf ineffable delights are treasured, and within every chamber unnumbered mysteries lie hidden.¹²

And thus, when Bahá'u'lláh talks about religion, He does not mean those aspects of the historical religions which have driven a good number of thinkers to state that all religions are conducive to ignorance and decay. He means their essence, which is communicated in the Holy Writings. He says in this vein:

In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine.¹³

Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples. The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the foolish and emboldened them and made them more arrogant. Verily I say: The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.¹⁴

He explains that religion is made for the good of humankind. Therefore, it is vital for human beings not to make it a means of conflict:



O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure. Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age and the rehabilitation of its fortunes. Let them, after meditating on its needs, take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely-afflicted world the remedy it requireth.¹⁵

He writes moreover:

Consort with all religions with amity and concord, that they may inhale from you the sweet fragrance of God. Beware lest amidst men the flame of foolish ignorance overpower you. All things proceed from God and unto Him they return. He is the source of all things and in Him all things are ended.¹⁶

As His son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained:

Doctors of religion were instituted to bring spiritual healing to the peoples and to be the cause of unity among the nations. If they become the cause of division they had better not exist! A remedy is given to cure a disease, but if it only succeeds in aggravating the complaint, it is better to leave it alone. If religion is only to be a cause of disunion it had better not exist.¹⁷

A sincere soul receives the Holy Writings with a pure heart, understands their meaning, and, especially, puts their advice into practice. Thus, this soul becomes a cause of progress for itself and the society in which it lives.

The interaction between the followers of the various religions has always been problematic. So far, the prevailing idea has been that Truth is one; therefore, if one’s religion is true, any other religion is false. Bahá’u’lláh teaches that Truth is one, but in the created world in which we live, during the earthly stage of our lives, this one Truth becomes manifest in different aspects; sometimes these aspects seem to conflict. In the above-mentioned epistle written in Baghdad, known today as the Seven Valleys, He wrote that Truth is like unto the light of the Sun which enlightens the world. Although the light of the sun is one, it finds different expressions in the world because the Sun

in a mirror it reflecteth its own disk and shape, and this is due to the sensitivity of the mirror; in a crystal it maketh fire to appear, and in other things it showeth only the effect of its shining, but not its full disk.¹⁸

Moreover, when the rays of the sun are mirrored in the objects of the world, they appear in many different colours:

For instance, in a yellow globe, the rays shine yellow; in a white the rays are white; and in a red, the red rays are

manifest. Then these variations are from the object, not from the shining light. And if a place be shut away from the light, as by walls or a roof, it will be entirely bereft of the splendour of the light, nor will the sun shine thereon.¹⁹

Truth is like the light of the sun. It is one, but we see it in its different manifestations. A spiritual human must learn how to discover the signs of oneness concealed behind the veils of the multiplicity of this world's phenomena. Bahá'u'lláh invites us to see, in the essence of religion, the oneness hidden behind the different expressions these religions have assumed in our world. In one of His Tablets, He writes:

Say: O friend! Sleep with your face turned to the Friend, and rest in bed in the thought of the loved One. From flowers inhale the fragrance of the beloved One, and in every fire see the light of the desired One. I swear by the life of the Friend, that if thou smellest the garment of Joseph and enterest the Egypt of the love of God,* thou wilt become the mother of all the chosen ones! Then exert thyself in love with thy soul and enter the abode of the beloved One with thy heart. Abandon grief for the world to its people and give no heed to the limited days of this world; be seated on the immortal, everlasting throne, be clad in a divine raiment, drink the wine of love from the cup of the beloved One, become ablaze with the light of love, and sew the robe of love! This is that matter which shall never change! Know thou, therefore, that in every age and dispensation all Divine Ordinances are changed and transformed according to the requirements of the time, except the law of love, which, like unto a fountain, flows always and is never overtaken by change. This is of the wonderful

* A reference to the Biblical and Koranic story of the love of Jacob for his favorite son Joseph, sold by his jealous brothers and brought by his masters to Egypt.

mysteries which God has mentioned for His servants! Verily, He is the merciful, the compassionate!²⁰

The following words from the venerable Holy Writings of several religions illustrate this theme: *

One and the same be your resolve, and be your minds of one accord.

United be the thoughts of all that all may happily agree.²¹

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.²²

. . . Love all; that should be wisdom for thee. Hold them for kindred; that should be conscience for thee. Unto them do good; that should be spirit for thee . . .²³

As a mother at the risk of her life watches over her own child, her only child, so also let every one cultivate a boundless (friendly) mind towards all beings.

And let him cultivate goodwill towards all the world, a boundless (friendly) mind, above and below and across, unobstructed, without hatred, without enmity.

Standing, walking or sitting or lying, as long as he be awake, let him devote himself to this mind; this (way of) living they say is the best in this world.²⁴

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like

* The quotations have been listed in an approximately chronological order of the birth of their respective religions: Vedic Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.²⁵

That is (the Bounty) whereof Allah gives Glad Tidings to His Servants who believe and do righteous deeds. Say: "No reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin." And if anyone earns any good, We shall give Him an increase of good in respect thereof: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate (service).²⁶

All religions urge human beings to love God and their neighbours. Everything else is a corollary of this supreme law. In the present stage of human history, the law of love should be universally implemented beyond any barrier:

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.²⁷

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained these concepts expounded by Bahá’u’lláh as follows:

It is appropriate and befitting that in this illumined age—the age of the progress of the world of humanity—we should be self-sacrificing and should serve the human race. Every universal cause is divine and every particular one is temporal. The principles of the divine Manifestations of God were, therefore, all-universal and all-inclusive.

Every imperfect soul is self-centred and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas

still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race. But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the weal and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection.

Thus, the divine Manifestations of God had a universal and all-inclusive conception. They endeavoured for the sake of everyone's life and engaged in the service of universal education. The area of their aims was not limited—nay, rather, it was wide and all-inclusive.

Therefore, ye must also be thinking of everyone, so that mankind may be educated, character moderated and this world may turn into a Garden of Eden.

Love ye all religions and all races with a love that is true and sincere and show that love through deeds and not through the tongue; for the latter hath no importance, as the majority of men are, in speech, well-wishers, while action is the best.²⁸

Another fundamental spiritual and ethical principle, explained in the Writings of this period, is justice. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.²⁹

Some aspects of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh about justice are summarized in a passage written in 1995, on the wake of the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, by the Bahá'í International Community, a non-governmental organization

(NGO), which both encompasses and represents all the members of the worldwide Bahá'í community,* :

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. With ever greater frequency, proposals aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, justice is "the best beloved of all things" since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbor or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life.

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice

* In its relations with the United Nations the Bahá'í International Community is an international non-governmental organization that represents over 180 democratically elected national governing bodies known as National Spiritual Assemblies (see *Bahá'í International Community Description*).

becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process.³⁰

Justice and oneness, the foundations of peace, are inextricably connected. It seems appropriate to quote again the following passage by Bahá'u'lláh, highlighting the fact that the oneness of humankind is unachievable in the absence of justice:

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Daystar of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth Exert yourselves that ye may attain this transcendent and most sublime station, the station that can insure the protection and security of all mankind. This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations. So long, however, as the thick clouds of oppression, which obscure the daystar of justice, remain undispeled, it would be difficult for the glory of this station to be unveiled to men's eyes.³¹

Bahá'u'lláh envisages that leaders of goodwill would lay the foundations of peace through a treaty whereby all of them will pledge to preserve peace and to jointly punish whoever will violate it:

The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the

world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. We fain would hope that the kings and rulers of the earth, the mirrors of the gracious and almighty name of God, may attain unto this station, and shield mankind from the onslaught of tyranny.³²

From these Writings, another important concept emerges: liberty. Today the yearning for freedom, always urgently felt by all noble souls, has assumed the sombre colours of intemperance, which has induced many persons "to believe that violence, indecency, and selfishness are triumphs of personal liberty,"³³ thus tarnishing the beauty of true liberty. Bahá'u'lláh writes in this regard:

It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favourably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men.³⁴

Bahá'u'lláh explains what true freedom is and how it can be achieved:

Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that which injureth them, and cast away the thing that profiteth them. They are, indeed, of those that are far astray. We find

some men desiring liberty, and priding themselves therein. Such men are in the depths of ignorance.

Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench. Thus warneth you He Who is the Reckoner, the All-Knowing. Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.

Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection. This, verily, is the truth, the certain truth. We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others. We, verily, are the All-Knowing.

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty. Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will that pervadeth all created things. Say: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven.³⁵

As to how freedom can be achieved, Bahá'u'lláh confirms that personal and collective freedom can be attained only by surrendering to the will of God as expressed in His Revelation:

Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty.³⁶

Today, the will of God is that humans shall achieve their oneness, the high road towards not only peace but also freedom for everyone:

If the learned and worldly-wise men of this age were to allow mankind to inhale the fragrance of fellowship and love, every understanding heart would apprehend the meaning of true liberty, and discover the secret of undisturbed peace and absolute composure. Were the earth to attain this station and be illumined with its light it could then be truly said of it: "Thou shall see in it no hollows or rising hills."³⁷

The path to freedom hath been outstretched; hasten ye thereunto. The wellspring of wisdom is overflowing; quaff ye therefrom. Say: O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.³⁸

Bahá'u'lláh has written:

The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness.³⁹

He "came to set humanity free. His Revelation is, indeed, an invitation to freedom—freedom from want, freedom from war, freedom to unite, freedom to progress, freedom in peace and joy."⁴⁰

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Page 146. *Akka. Khán-i-Avámíd, a caravanserai which hosted the earliest Bahá'í pilgrims in the Holy Land.*

Writings Penned in the Holy Land: The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

The last important Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh is the above-mentioned Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. This book contains many quotations from previous Tablets. It can be considered “an anthology of His Writings, chosen by Himself,”¹ perhaps as if He intended to reassert the cornerstones of His teachings. For example He reconfirms the divine origin of His mission as a Manifestation of God. He presents Himself to the Shaykh and the ecclesiastic leaders of Persia, quoting a passage from His Tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh:

O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow. The learning current amongst men I studied not; their schools I entered not. Ask of the city wherein I dwelt, that thou mayest be well assured that I am not of them who speak falsely. This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, have stirred. Can it be still when the tempestuous winds are blowing? Nay, by Him Who is the Lord of all Names and Attributes! They move it as they list. The evanescent is as nothing before Him Who is the Ever-Abiding. His all-compelling summons hath reached Me, and caused Me to speak His praise amidst all people. I was indeed as one dead when His behest was uttered. The hand of the will of thy Lord,

the Compassionate, the Merciful, transformed Me. Can anyone speak forth of his own accord that for which all men, both high and low, will protest against him? Nay, by Him Who taught the Pen the eternal mysteries, save him whom the grace of the Almighty, the All-Powerful, hath strengthened.²

During all His life, Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly proclaimed this theme and said that He is the One Who reveals the Most Great Spirit, according to the promises of the ancient Prophets. His statement is so great that a number of people have misunderstood His words and supposed Him to claim to be the Essence of the Divinity. Bahá'u'lláh refutes this idea in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.³ He writes:

This Servant, this Wronged One, is abashed to claim for Himself any existence whatever, how much more those exalted grades of being! Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory.⁴

He writes moreover that the station of Divinity “is the station in which one dieth to himself and liveth in God” and that it “indicateth . . . [His] complete and absolute self-effacement. This is the station in which . . . [He has] no control over . . . [His] own weal or woe nor over . . . [His] life nor over . . . [His] resurrection.”⁵

Besides clarifying the meaning of the divine origin of His mission, Bahá'u'lláh reasserts some of His most important teachings, such as unity and concord among religions, love and harmony among the peoples of the word, honesty, purity, fear of

God, good character, courtesy, sincerity, trustworthiness, piety, etc. These are the bedrock of His faith. He writes, for example:

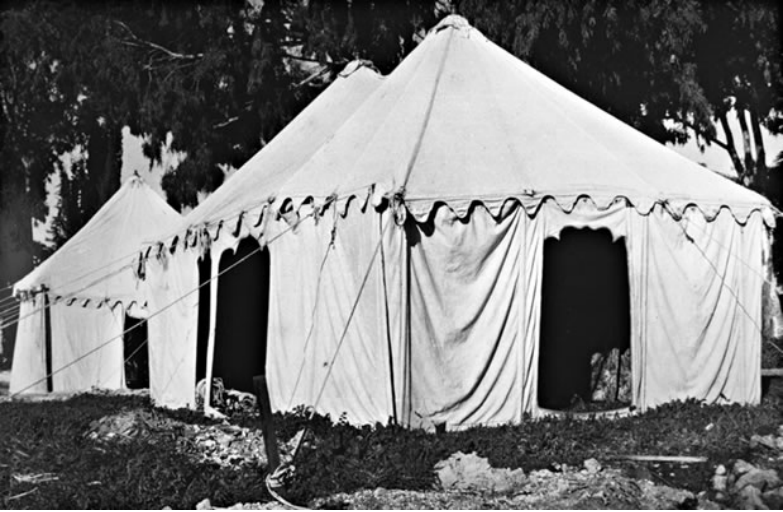
The Divine Messengers have been sent down, and their Books were revealed, for the purpose of promoting the knowledge of God, and of furthering unity and fellowship amongst men.⁶ That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion.⁷

Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding.⁸

O ye friends of God in His cities and His loved ones in His lands! This Wronged One enjoineeth on you honesty and piety. Blessed the city that shineth by their light. Through them man is exalted, and the door of security is unlocked before the face of all creation.⁹

We enjoin the servants of God and His handmaidens to be pure and to fear God, that they may shake off the slumber of their corrupt desires, and turn toward God, the Maker of the heavens and of the earth.¹⁰

In this Revelation the hosts which can render it victorious are the hosts of praiseworthy deeds and upright character. The leader and commander of these hosts hath ever been the fear of God, a fear that encompasseth all things, and reigneth over all things.¹¹



The fear of God hath ever been a sure defence and a safe stronghold for all the peoples of the world. It is the chief cause of the protection of mankind, and the supreme instrument for its preservation. Indeed, there existeth in man a faculty which deterreth him from, and guardeth him against, whatever is unworthy and unseemly, and which is known as his sense of shame. This, however, is confined to but a few; all have not possessed, and do not possess, it. It is incumbent upon the kings and the spiritual leaders of the world to lay fast hold on religion, inasmuch as through it the fear of God is instilled in all else but Him.¹²

We, verily, have chosen courtesy, and made it the true mark of such as are nigh unto Him. Courtesy is, in truth, a raiment which fitteth all men, whether young or old. Well is it with him that adorneth his temple therewith, and woe unto him who is deprived of this great bounty.¹³

Purge your hearts from love of the world, and your tongues from calumny, and your limbs from whatsoever may withhold you from drawing nigh unto God, the Mighty, the All-Praised.

Say: By the world is meant that which turneth you aside from Him Who is the Dawning-Place of Revelation, and inclineth you unto that which is unprofitable unto you.¹⁴

Adorn your temples with the adornment of trustworthiness and piety. Help, then, your Lord with the hosts of goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character. We have forbidden you dissension and conflict in My Books, and My Scriptures, and My Scrolls, and My Tablets, and have wished thereby naught else save your exaltation and advancement.¹⁵

This Wronged One hath, at all times, summoned the peoples of the world unto that which will exalt them, and draw them nigh unto God. . . .¹⁶

The essence of His spiritual teachings, illustrated in the previous passages, are summarized in a Tablet which He addressed in those years to one of His sons:

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer to the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a

dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy 94 generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility. We pray God to protect thee from the heat of jealousy and the cold of hatred. He verily is nigh, ready to answer.¹⁷

A final category of teachings to which He gives voice in this Epistle is the abolition of all kinds of disputes, struggle, hostility, and war among human beings. He writes in this regard:

In the Book of God . . . ye have been forbidden to engage in contention and conflict.¹⁸

Reville ye not one another. We, verily, have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth If anyone revile you, or trouble touch you, in the path of God, be patient, and put your trust in Him Who heareth, Who seeth¹⁹

Beware lest ye shed the blood of any one. Unsheathe the sword of your tongue from the scabbard of utterance, for therewith ye can conquer the citadels of men's hearts. We have abolished the law to wage holy war against each other. God's mercy hath, verily, encompassed all created things, if ye do but understand!²⁰

O people! Spread not disorder in the land, and shed not the blood of any one, and consume not the substance of others wrongfully, neither follow every accursed prattler.²¹

The sword of a virtuous character and upright conduct is sharper than blades of steel.²²

To confirm the great importance of this teaching, He penned the following words in His Testament, that has been preserved in its original handwritten version:



The aim of this Wronged One in sustaining woes and tribulations, in revealing the Holy Verses and in demonstrating proofs hath been naught but to quench the flame of hate and enmity, that the horizon of the hearts of men may be illumined with the light of concord and attain real peace and tranquillity.²³

And His son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá incisively wrote:

. . . in our illumined age, God teacheth that conflicts and disputes are not allowable, not even with Satan* himself.²⁴

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* According to the Bahá’í teachings the devil or Satan is a symbol of “the natural inclinations of the lower nature” of human beings, of “the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside” (*Promulgation* 287).

The final years of Bahá'u'lláh's earthly life were spent in relative tranquillity. Formally, He was still a prisoner of the Turkish Sultan. In that respect, nothing had changed. However, the calumnies that had preceded Him in the Holy Land, the sermons through which the Muslim clergy had sought to instigate the hate of the local population, presenting Him as a self-styled "God of the Persians," an enemy of the public order and a divulger of blasphemous and immoral ideas, all this had been wiped away by the spiritual light emanating from Him, from His teachings, from His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá and most of His relatives and followers. The magnetic power of His person, His upright and generous behaviour, and the peacemaking work of His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá had changed most enemies into friends. As has been said, people called Him "august leader" and "his highness."¹ Ancient Beauty, Blessed Beauty and Blessed Perfection were other titles ascribed to Him by His many admirers when they talked about Him. His life passed relatively untroubled, except that His peace was broken by the continuous news of the ongoing persecutions that His followers had to face in Iran and other Muslim countries and the schemes untiringly hatched by Yaḥyá and his allies, anxious to bring discredit on Him and His community.

Six days before His passing, He summoned to His presence all the believers who lived in the Holy Land and all the pilgrims who were there in those days and told them: "I am well pleased with you all Ye have rendered many services, and been very assiduous in your labours. Ye have come here every morning and every evening. May God assist you to remain united. May He aid you to exalt the Cause of the Lord of being."²



He peacefully closed His eyes on 29 May 1892, at dawn, more or less at the same time He was born. The news was instantly communicated to the Sultan in a telegram beginning with the words: “The sun of Bahá has set.”³ His remains were buried in one of the rooms of a small house beside the Mansion where He had passed away. Soon, a devoted believer, a skilled carpenter and craftsman, built a glass roof to cover the small inner courtyard in front of that room so that His resting place might have a befitting entrance. The exact place where He expired is today marked by a mattress covered by a snow-white sheet and a cushion. Not very far from it is one of His tajes, the tall, felt headdress that He always wore after His departure from Baghdad in 1863. Thousands of pilgrims visit it each year in an attitude of deep respect and silent devotion. Protected by His handwritten Testament, in which He appoints His son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as His successor as the Head of the Bahá’í community and the authorized Interpreter of His words, a unique document in the history of religion, the Bahá’í Faith has become the second most geographically widespread independent world religion, following Christianity. His tomb is surrounded by beautifully immaculate gardens inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List on 8 July 2008, together with other Bahá’í sites in the Holy Land,



for their “outstanding universal value . . . [and for their] exceptional testimony to the strong traditions of Bahá’í pilgrimage. . . [and their] profound meaning and value for followers of the Bahá’í faith.”⁴ Many of the principles that He proclaimed, such as the equality between men and women, universal education, the abolition of all prejudices of race, and the harmony between science and religion, which were in His years viewed at best as utopic, and often condemned as contrary to a well-balanced social order, have now become a part of the supranational cultural heritage of any mature mind.

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- ¹ Browne, "Introduction" xxxix-xl.
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- ⁴³ See Bahá'u'lláh, *Persian Hidden Words*, nos. 81-2.
- ⁴⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 132-3, chap.8, para.12.
- ⁴⁵ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes* 142, chap.8 para.31.
- ⁴⁶ Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 143, chap.8, para.33.
- ⁴⁷ Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 143, chap.8, para.33.
- ⁴⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 114, para.221, Súriy-i-Haykal: Násiri'd-Dín Sháh.
- ⁴⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 84.
- ⁵⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 155, chap.9, para.9.
- ⁵¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 321, sez. CLI, para.5, Lawh-i-'Áshiq va Ma'shuq.
- ⁵² Nabil, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 152-3, chap.9, para.5.
- ⁵³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 27, sec. XIV, para.6, Tablet of Riqdán.

Chapter 8 Constantinople and Adrianople

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- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 155, chap.9, para.10.
- ² Nakhjavani, *Four on an Island* 35.

- ³ Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 201-2.
- ⁴ Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 202.
- ⁵ Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 203.
- ⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 159, chap.9, para.19.
- ⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 159, chap.9, para.19.
- ⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 166, chap.10, par 7.
- ⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 70.
- ¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 169, chap.6, para.13.
- ¹¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 171, chap.6, para.17.
- ¹² Qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 170, chap.6, para.17.
- ¹³ Qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 170, chap.6, para.17.

Chapter 9 The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission

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- ¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 187, para.4, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ² Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 188, para.8, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 189, para.9, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 93, para.179, Súriy-i-Haykal: Queen Victoria.
- ⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 191, para.11, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 212, para.66, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 193, para.21, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 179, para.13, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 212-3, para.67, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 208, para.68, Súriy-i-Mulúk.
- ¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 93, para.178, Súriy-i-Haykal: Queen Victoria.
- ¹² Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 94, para.181, Súriy-i-Haykal: Queen Victoria.
- ¹³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 94, para.182, Súriy-i-Haykal: Queen Victoria.
- ¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in *Bahá'í Prayers* 208-9.
- ¹⁵ Qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 180, chap.10, para.41.
- ¹⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 180, sec. X, para.39.
- ¹⁷ See Jinab-i-Fadil, "The Life of Baha'u'llah. Part II" 327.
- ¹⁸ Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 256.
- ¹⁹ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 180, chap.10, para.40.
- ²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 146, para.13, Súriy-i-Ra'is.

Chapter 10 His Exile to the Holy Land: Akka

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- ¹ Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers* 585.
- ² Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 177, para.26, Lawḥ-i-Ra'is.
- ³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 177, para.25, Lawḥ-i-Ra'is.

- ⁴ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 181, chap.10, para.44.
- ⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 147.
- ⁶ See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 60.
- ⁷ See Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 277-9..
- ⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 183, chap.11, para.1.
- ⁹ Isaiah 40:9.
- ¹⁰ Psalms 24:7-8.
- ¹¹ Psalms 50:2-3.
- ¹² Amos 1:2.
- ¹³ Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 184, chap.11, para.4.
- ¹⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *Summons* 133, para.267, Lawh-i-Haykal: Násiri’ d-Dín
- ¹⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 169.
- ¹⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 163.
- ¹⁷ Jinab-i-Fadil, “The Life of Baha’u’llah. Part II” 328.
- ¹⁸ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 187-8, chap.11, para.11.
- ¹⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 31
- ²⁰ Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 3:59.
- ²¹ Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* 46.
- ²² ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials* 37
- ²³ Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 33.
- ²⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 34
- ²⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 67.
- ²⁶ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 190, chap.11, para.19
- ²⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle* 23.
- ²⁸ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 191, chap.11, para.20.
- ²⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Bahá’u’lláh, *Bahá’i Prayers* 212.
- ³⁰ Citato in Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* 34.
- ³¹ See Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 3:13.
- ³² See Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 3:12-3.
- ³³ See Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 3:65-6.

Chapter 11 His Exile to the Holy Land: Akka, Mazrá ‘ih and Bahjí

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- ¹ Words of Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* 35.
- ² Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* 38.
- ³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 193, chap.11, para.26.

- ⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 193, chap.11, para.26.
- ⁵ Amir Amin Arslan, qtd. in Momen, *The Bábí and the Bahá’í Religions* 224-5.
- ⁶ Words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* 37.
- ⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *World Orde* 134-5.
- ⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in *Bahíyyih Khánun* 3.
- ⁹ Goodall Cooper, “Bahíyyih Khanum” 204.
- ¹⁰ Citato in Rideout, “The School of Adversity” 122.
- ¹¹ Words of Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Furútan, *Stories of Bahá’u’lláh* 51.
- ¹² Citato in Furútan, *Stories of Bahá’u’lláh* 65-6.
- ¹³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 25.
- ¹⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 63.
- ¹⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 155.

Chapter 12 Writings Penned in the Holy Land: Proclamation, 133 Laws, and Ordinances

- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 205, chap.12, para.17.
- ² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 205-6, chap.12, para.18.
- ³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 211, chap.12, para.37.
- ⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 212, chap.12, para.39.
- ⁵ “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas” 107. The quotation is from Kitáb-Aqdas 25, para.17.
- ⁶ “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas” 107-8.
- ⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 215-6, chap.12, para.51. The quotations are from Kitáb-i-Aqads 20, para.2; *Tablets* 50, Tajalliyát; *Tablets* 189, Súriy-i-Vafá; Kitáb-i-Aqads 19, para.2; Kitáb-i-Aqads 29, para.29; Kitáb-i-Aqads 20, para.4; Kitáb-i-Aqads 20, para.3.
- ⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas 20-1, paras. 4-5.
- ⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret* 96.
- ¹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 132, sec. 105.
- ¹¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 216, chap.12, para.48.
- ¹² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 216, chap.12, para.48.
- ¹³ Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets* 145, Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat.
- ¹⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablet* 4, Lawḥ-i-Karmil.
- ¹⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 219, chap.12, para.57.

Chapter 13 Writings Penned in the Holy Land: 141 Doctrines and Principles

- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 216, chap.12, para.49.
- ² Bahá'u'lláh, *Tabernacle* 9, para.15, Lawḥ-i-Mánikchí Šáhib.
- ³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 229-30, sec. 193.
- ⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 167, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd.
- ⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 14-5.
- ⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 217, sec. CXI, para.1.
- ⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 155, Words of Wisdom.
- ⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán 197, para.218.
- ⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán 199, para.220.
- ¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán 197, para.220.
- ¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán 199-200, para.220.
- ¹² Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán 197-198, para.218.
- ¹³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 125, *Ishráqát*.
- ¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 63-4, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih.
- ¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 168, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd.
- ¹⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas 71, para.144.
- ¹⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 121, chap.39, para.17.
- ¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys* 19.
- ¹⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys* 19.
- ²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in *Bahá'í Scriptures* 248-9, sec. 524.
- ²¹ *Hindusim: The Rig Veda* 651, Book X, Hymn CXCI, verse 4.
- ²² Leviticus 19:18.
- ²³ Denkart 65:1-3.
- ²⁴ Sutta-Nipâta 148-50, vv. 7-9.
- ²⁵ Matthew 22:37-40.
- ²⁶ Koran 42:23, Yusuf Ali.
- ²⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 167, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd.
- ²⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 68-9, sec. 34.
- ²⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 66-7, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih.
- ³⁰ Bahá'í International Community, *Prosperity* *13.
- ³¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 14-5.
- ³² Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablet* 165, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd
- ³³ Bahá'í International Community, *Who is Writing the Future* *13.
- ³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 169, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd.
- ³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqads 63-4, paras. 122-5.

- ³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 89, Lawḥ-i-Dunyá.
³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 162, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd. The quotation is from Koran 20:106.
³⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tabernacle* 9, para.15, Lawḥ-i-Mánikchí Sáhib
³⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 99, sec. XLV, para.1
⁴⁰ The Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1986-2001* 120, sec. 60, para.55.

Chapter 14 Writings Penned in the Holy Land: 157

The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- ¹ Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 4:371.
² Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 11-2, see Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 98-9, para.192, Súriy-i-Haykal: Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh.
³ See Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 4:406-7.
⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 44.
⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 41.
⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 12.
⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 13.
⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 15.
⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 22.
¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 23.
¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 26, see *Tablets* 126, Ishráqát.
¹² Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 27-8, see *Tablets* 63, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih..
¹³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 50, see *Summons* 71, para.137, Súriy-i-Haykal: Napoleon III.
¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 54, see *Summons* 77, para.146, Súriy-i-Haykal: Napoleon III.
¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 135, see *Tablets* 120, Ishráqát.
¹⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 135.
¹⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 93.
¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 24.
¹⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 23.
²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 24.
²¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 25.
²² Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 29.
²³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablet* 219, Kitáb-i-‘Ahd.
²⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selection* 222, sec. 220.

Chapter 15 His Last Years and Passing 165

- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 192, chap.11, para.24.
- ² Words of Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 224, chap.13, para.3.
- ³ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 222, chap.13, para.4.
- ⁴ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Bahá’í Holy Places in Haifa and the Western Galilee». <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1220/>. Retrieved on 30 Octobre 2012.

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