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Haji Mubarak

Haji Mubarak, the famed "Ethiopian servant" of the Bab (Sayyid Ali-Muhammad Shirazi, founder of Babism who lived from 1819 to 1850), is celebrated in Baha'i literature for his saintliness and loyalty. Born in 1833, he was a slave sold in Iran at the age of five to the Bab's uncle, Haji Mirza Abul-Qasim, and educated within the uncle's household. In all probability, he had been castrated when taken captive in Africa and was a eunuch.

At the age of 19, the Bab—returning to Shiraz after a six-year absence—purchased Mubarak from his uncle for 14 *tumans* (about \$28). Mubarak served the Bab and his family for the rest of his life. He was deeply involved in the events surrounding the founding of the Babi religion and was present (in an adjoining room) on May 22, 1844, when the Bab first declared his mission, beginning (for Baha'is) a new era in religious history.

Only two early believers were chosen to accompany the Bab on his subsequent pilgrimage to Mecca in 1844 and 1845, Quddus (Mirza Muhammad-Ali Barfarushi, the first in rank of the Bab's disciples) and Mubarak. The Bab is recorded to have sacrificed, in accordance with the customs of Islamic pilgrimage, 19 lambs in Mecca—nine in his own name, seven in the name of Quddus, and three for Mubarak, securing for the latter the full benefits of the hajj to Mecca. When the Bab was arrested and exiled to Isfahan, Mubarak remained in Shiraz to serve and protect the Bab's wife (Khadijih Bagum) and mother. After the Bab's execution in 1850, his mother and grandmother were forced to transfer their residence to Karbala in Iraq. Mubarak accompanied them there and died in their service in around 1873 at about the age of 40.

After 1850, to salvage their respectability, members of the Bab's family maintained that the Bab had not been executed but was still alive on an extended business trip to India. Haji Mubarak helped to uphold this public fiction by vowing to sweep the courtyard around the tomb of Imam Husayn b. Ali in Karbala every day until his master should return. He performed this pious duty faithfully every morning until his death.

Anthony A. Lee

Further Reading

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