

Bahá'u'lláh: The Festival of Ridván  
As told from the perspective  
of Ázíyih Khánum, His Wife,  
and Bahíyyih Khánum, His Daughter

A Dramatic Reading by Marlene Macke \*  
(April 2020)

Part I – First Day of Ridván

Bahíyyih Khánum

In 1863, my dear Uncle Mírzá Músá rented a field on the outskirts of the city beside the Tigris River. Father and several of His companions planned to spend the two week festival of Naw-Rúz in a peaceful interlude by camping in the countryside. We were surprised when the whole party returned just five days later. An official Decree had arrived, we learned, from the Sultanate of the Ottoman Empire, ordering Father to move to Constantinople.

Ázíyih Khánum

When I think back on it, it seemed that the Hand of God was clearly evident. Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Tablet of the Holy Mariner five days into the Naw-Rúz sojourn, a momentous Tablet foretelling the trials to come. After my Husband's secretary chanted the Tablet to the companions, Bahá'u'lláh told everyone they had to return immediately to the city. Then, while the men were taking down the tents, a servant arrived with a message for my Husband: He was invited to meet the Governor on the morrow. The future was set in motion.

Bahíyyih Khánum

The Governor of the city had become a devoted admirer of Father. We learned that, since January, five Decrees for the removal of Father from Baghdad had been delivered to him, but he had bravely ignored the first four. He was that loathe to see Bahá'u'lláh move away. Finally, however, the Governor accepted that he was in no position to ignore an official Decree. However, in his personal grief of my Father's impending departure, the Governor could not bring himself to impart the news directly. He sent his deputy governor to deliver the Sultan's Decree.

---

\* See more about this document at [https://bahai-library.com/macke\\_dramatic\\_readings](https://bahai-library.com/macke_dramatic_readings)

### Ázíyih Khánum

My Husband was to be exiled to Constantinople within the month! Confusion and fear for the future overwhelmed the Bábís in Baghdad. Friends came to our home weeping helplessly, "What shall we do? What is going to happen to our Beloved?" Floods of other townsmen poured into the house to spend what precious minutes or hours they could with Bahá'u'lláh. It was hopeless. We women could not keep up. We were constantly refilling the samovars and baking more trays of sweets. And the men's parlour was simply too small to accommodate all those who wished to pay their respects to my Husband. We ladies were drowning in the seemingly insurmountable circumstances.

### Bahíyyih Khánum

Mother and I invoked eternal blessings and gratitude to the Governor. He sensed the predicament we faced in accommodating all the visitors. He graciously offered his own private Garden, located on a lovely island in the Tigris River, as a temporary abode for the men in the family. Bahá'u'lláh agreed to the arrangement. At Father's departure from our home, the Bábí friends and companions crowded around Him, weeping, grief-stricken, even prostrating themselves on the ground. For some time, Father remained in our courtyard, consoling them with words of love and comfort. He promised to receive them all later in the Garden.

### Ázíyih Khánum

My dear son 'Abbás later told us that even on the short walk between house and river, the peoples of the city, men and women, rich and poor, young and old, men of learning and culture, princes, government officials, tradesmen and workers crammed the streets and rooftops to demonstrate their grief and regret at His departure.

### Bahíyyih Khánum

At the river's edge, Father addressed His disciples who had gathered around Him, saying: "O My companions, I entrust to your keeping this city of Baghdad, in the state ye now behold it, when from the eyes of friends and strangers alike, crowding its housetops, its streets and markets, tears like the rain of spring are flowing down, and I depart. With you it now rests to watch lest your deeds and conduct dim the flame of love that gloweth within the breasts of its inhabitants."

Father was then ferried across the river accompanied by my beloved brothers, 'Abbás, eighteen years old that year, and Mírzá Mihdí, fourteen. A number of

male companions were present, as well.

#### Ázíyih Khánum

On entering the Garden, the call to afternoon prayer rose from the mosque and the words 'Allah'u'Akbar' (God is the Greatest) reverberated through the Garden. They say my beloved Husband appeared in the utmost joy, striding majestically down its flower and tree-lined avenues. I imagine the fragrance of the roses and the singing of the nightingales created an atmosphere of beauty and enchantment that surely delighted His heart.

#### Bahíyyih Khánum

My brother described to us later how, upon His arrival in the Garden, Bahá'u'lláh declared to His companions His station as the Manifestation of God for this Day. 'Abbás recounted how the friends swooned with rapture at this announcement. Although Father was being exiled to far-off lands and knew the sufferings and tribulations in store for Him and His followers, yet through this historic Declaration, He changed all sorrow into blissful joy. Truly, He later told us, He spent the most delightful time of His ministry in the Garden of Ridván. In one of His later Tablets, He referred to that first day in the Ridván Garden as the 'Day of supreme felicity', and called on His followers to 'rejoice, with exceeding gladness' in remembrance of that day.

#### Ázíyih Khánum

Now I knew my intuition about my Husband had been correct. While the manner of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission is not clear, nor is the identity of all who heard Him recorded, one fact is clear. During His ten-year sojourn in 'Iráq, even when Bahá'u'lláh's letters and Tablets had alluded to His station, He had never designated Himself as 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. It was in the Garden of Ridván that He unequivocally did so. He announced Himself as the One Whose advent the Báb had proclaimed, for Whose sake He had sacrificed Himself and for Whom He had established a covenant with His followers. No wonder the companions who were in His presence became ecstatic. They had just witnessed the most spiritual event imaginable, the public announcement of God's Prophet for this new Day, this promised Age.

#### Bahíyyih Khánum

The enemies of Bahá'u'lláh must have thought that they had bested my Father with this exile from Baghdad. But their gloating satisfaction turned to bitter ashes in their mouths. Even they sensed the victory that proceeded from the Garden of

Ridván. With the public declaration of His ministry, Bahá'u'lláh turned the exile into the most joyous event of His life.

Meanwhile, we ladies were given the reprieve we needed. We sang with joy at the news and messages coming back from the Garden as we readied the provisions and packed our few belongings for the journey. I looked back on the past ten years, when as a frail child of six years of age, I had arrived in Baghdad. No longer was I a child, I would leave Baghdad a woman. Yes, we were preparing for our next exile but this time with joy in our hearts. We would still face hardships and heartache, but now we were confident of God's protection. We had just witnessed the renewal of His Covenant with mankind, through the embodiment of His chosen One, my Father, Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God.

## Part II – 9<sup>th</sup> Day of Ridván, 1863

### Ázíyih Khánum

With the departure of the men in our Family for the Garden of Ridván, the crowding of our home by my Husband's guests ceased. We ladies quickly packed our belongings and readied ourselves to move to the Garden. However, the river was in flood, and we were unable to cross safely until nine days had elapsed. This time allowed me to reflect on my dear children, my sons 'Abbás, who chose the name 'Abdu'l-Bahá after His Father died, my precious Mírzá Mihdí, and my incomparable daughter, Bahíyyih Khánum. I did my best to give reading and writing lessons to 'Abbás, but there was never time for Bahíyyih Khánum to learn her letters. Even as a little girl, she was ever my helper in the household tasks.

### Bahíyyih Khánum

I did everything possible to relieve the burdens on my dear Mother. As an example, I took responsibility for keeping the samovar filled so that we were never without tea. One incident resulted in a great family joke. An old lady came to visit and I prepared the samovar. When full of water, it was a heavy burden for me to carry upstairs and with my thin arms, I was not the most robust young girl. The old lady said, "One proof that the Bábí teaching is wonderful is that a very little girl served the samovar!" Father, especially, found this amusing and said to me, "Here is the lady converted by seeing your service at the samovar!" It was good to laugh together.

### Ázíyih Khánum

I did worry about the future of my lovely daughter. Normally she could have been married with a family of her own by this time. However, like 'Abbás who had begged my Husband to be allowed to serve Him, Bahíyyih Khánum wanted

nothing but to serve my Husband and me. She made it clear to us she did not want to marry so that she could devote her life to our Family. She implored her Father that He grant her request to remain unmarried. And my Husband acquiesced in her wish. Suitors in our community would have been honoured to marry into our Family, but Bahá'u'lláh turned them all away. In fact, I learned that He had told one of the friends that no man was worthy to marry such purity as His daughter.

#### Bahíyyih Khánum

At last! We ladies were able to cross the river and join our beloved Family in the beautiful Garden. Truly, this green and verdant island mirrored paradise. We learned that every morning just before dawn, gardeners had cut armfuls of roses from the bushes that lined the four avenues of the garden, and piled them in the centre of the floor of my Father's tent. The heap of roses was so great that His companions, gathered to drink their morning tea, were unable to see each other over the flowers.

Great numbers of friends and admirers from the city came to the island every day to pay their respects to Father. Notables and dignitaries, men of learning and culture, and many ordinary people too, thronged the Garden. The Bábís who accepted my Father's declaration also came to visit Him during the daytime but only those who had no family ties were permitted to stay for the night. Some of them kept vigil around His tent.

#### Ázíyih Khánum

My Husband loved that Garden so much. On the ninth night, while the companions slept, He left His tent at midnight. Bathed in the soft moonlight, He paced up and down the flower-lined avenues. He listened to the enrapturing song of the nightingales and voiced odes of His own. We learned later that one of the friends awoke and overheard Him say, "Consider these nightingales. So great is their love for these roses, that sleepless from dusk till dawn, they warble their melodies and commune with burning passion with the object of their adoration. How then can those who claim to be afire with the rose-like beauty of the Beloved choose to sleep?"

#### Bahíyyih Khánum

When we ladies were still in our home, we cooked food and sent it over to the Garden every day. After we moved to the island, meals were prepared in the home of one of the friends and sent to us. Other preparations were underway. The construction of howdahs was in hand, the covered seat which was set on the back of a mule in which two people usually were accommodated, mostly the women and children. One howdah was especially built for my Father and He would use it quite often on our coming journey to Constantinople.

However, we were truly delighted with another development. We learned that the Governor had a very beautiful horse, a red roan stallion of the finest breed, which he wanted to send to his son in Constantinople; he asked Father to take the horse and use it on the journey. And Father agreed! My Father loved horses and was a very fine rider.

#### Ázíyih Khánum

Once we ladies had arrived in the Garden, the departure was scheduled for three days hence. The authorities appointed a detachment of soldiers to accompany our party on the journey to Constantinople, outwardly a protection from thieves and attacks on the roads. Then the Governor, who loved Bahá'u'lláh, offered to provide funds for the journey but my Husband declined his generous offer, saying we had all we needed. When the Governor insisted on being of some service, my Husband asked him simply to be considerate to the friends left behind in Baghdad and treat them kindly. The Governor agreed and he also wrote a letter to the officials on the route, instructing them to provide the travellers with all necessities and courtesies. My Husband took the letter but en route, He arranged to pay for all provisions instead of taking advantage of the Governor's letter.

### Part III – 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Ridván, 1863

#### Bahíyyih Khánum

The day of departure had arrived. Friends and companions assembled in huge numbers to say farewell, amid their tears. The details and arrangements took most of the day. The mules were loaded and the howdahs were settled upon them. We ladies and the younger children took our seats.

Toward sunset, the red roan stallion was brought out for Father. Seeing Him in the saddle and truly ready to depart Baghdad aroused the crowds to heart-rending, unbearable cries of distress. I had no doubt that the splendid beast had a lot of do with setting the scene. There had always been horses available to my Father, but until then, He had chosen to ride donkeys. My Father's majesty was truly unveiled to the people when they witnessed Him on that majestic stallion. They threw themselves into the path of the horse's hooves in feeble attempts to delay His departure. Later one of the friends said, "it seemed as if that heavenly steed was passing over sanctified bodies and pure hearts".

#### Ázíyih Khánum

Another symbol of His new Station of divine authority was now evident. When He left our home twelve days earlier, He wore a táj, a tall felt hat usually worn by the leaders of the Súfí religious order. He wore the táj for the rest of His life. We used our most exquisite embroidery to adorn them.

But the táj and splendid stallion were merely outward symbols of His newly

revealed Station.

The ten years in Baghdad had drawn to a close. For the past seven of those years, Bahá'u'lláh had rebuilt the Bábí community into one with its foundations reinforced, its spirit exalted and its outlook transformed. He had won conspicuous victories over those who would have harmed, even destroyed, Him.

The time had come to further advance God's Plan for this Age, to reveal the Divine Mission entrusted to Bahá'u'lláh. It is a plan which the future great grandson of Bahá'u'lláh would define as "one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

–o0o–

In celebrating this most holy and joyous period, Bahá'ís and their friends recite a prayer known as the Tablet of Ridván. Here are excerpts:

"The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching. Bestir thyself, and magnify, before the entire creation, the name of God, and celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be regenerated and made new. Speak, and hold not thy peace. The daystar of blissfulness shineth above the horizon of Our name, the Blissful, inasmuch as the kingdom of the name of God hath been adorned with the ornament of the name of thy Lord, the Creator of the heavens. Arise before the nations of the earth, and arm thyself with the power of this Most Great Name, and be not of those who tarry. ...

Say: He it is Who is the Manifestation of Him Who is the Unknowable, the Invisible of the Invisibles, could ye but perceive it. He it is Who hath laid bare before you the hidden and treasured Gem, were ye to seek it. He it is Who is the one Beloved of all things, whether of the past or of the future. Would that ye might set your hearts and hopes upon Him! ...

Arise, and proclaim unto the entire creation the tidings that He Who is the All-Merciful hath directed His steps towards the Ridván and entered it. Guide, then, the people unto the garden of delight which God hath made the Throne of His Paradise. We have chosen thee to be our most mighty Trumpet, whose blast is to signalize the resurrection of all mankind.

Say: This is the Paradise on whose foliage the wine of utterance hath imprinted the testimony: "He that was hidden from the eyes of men is revealed, girded with sovereignty and power!" This is the Paradise, the rustling of whose leaves proclaims: "O ye that inhabit the heavens and the earth! There hath appeared what hath never previously appeared. He Who, from everlasting, had concealed His Face from the sight of creation is now come." From the whispering breeze that wafteth amidst its branches there cometh the cry: "He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is made manifest. The

Kingdom is God's," while from its streaming waters can be heard the murmur: "All eyes are gladdened, for He Whom none hath beheld, Whose secret no one hath discovered, hath lifted the veil of glory, and uncovered the countenance of Beauty."

Within this Paradise, and from the heights of its loftiest chambers, the Maids of Heaven have cried out and shouted: "Rejoice, ye dwellers of the realms above, for the fingers of Him Who is the Ancient of Days are ringing, in the name of the All-Glorious, the Most Great Bell, in the midmost heart of the heavens. The hands of bounty have borne round the cup of everlasting life. Approach, and quaff your fill. Drink with healthy relish, O ye that are the very incarnations of longing, ye who are the embodiments of vehement desire!" ...

Attract the hearts of men, through the call of Him, the one alone Beloved. Say: This is the Voice of God, if ye do but hearken. This is the Dayspring of the Revelation of God, did ye but know it. This is the Dawning-Place of the Cause of God, were ye to recognize it. This is the Source of the commandment of God, did ye but judge it fairly. This is the manifest and hidden Secret; would that ye might perceive it. O peoples of the world! Cast away, in My name that transcendeth all other names, the things ye possess, and immerse yourselves in this Ocean in whose depths lay hidden the pearls of wisdom and of utterance, an ocean that surgeth in My name, the All-Merciful. Thus instructeth you He with Whom is the Mother Book.

The Best-Beloved is come. In His right hand is the sealed Wine of His name. Happy is the man that turneth unto Him, and drinketh his fill, and exclaimeth: "Praise be to Thee, O Revealer of the signs of God!" By the righteousness of the Almighty! Every hidden thing hath been manifested through the power of truth. All the favors of God have been sent down, as a token of His grace. The waters of everlasting life have, in their fullness, been proffered unto men. Every single cup hath been borne round by the hand of the Well-Beloved. Draw near, and tarry not, though it be for one short moment. ...

Rejoice with exceeding gladness, O people of Bahá, as ye call to remembrance the Day of supreme felicity, the Day whereon the Tongue of the Ancient of Days hath spoken, as He departed from His House, proceeding to the Spot from which He shed upon the whole of creation the splendors of His name, the All-Merciful. God is Our witness. ...

Such is the inebriating effect of the words of God upon Him Who is the Revealer of His undoubted proofs, that His Pen can move no longer. With these words He concludeth His Tablet: "No God is there but Me, the Most Exalted, the Most Powerful, the Most Excellent, the All-Knowing."