

WINDOWS TO THE PAST

BAHÁ'Í HOLY DAYS

To complete the series of Windows to the Past, this one will bring you selected sacred writings on each of the Bahá'í Holy Days, as well as related stories. By no means is this Window meant to replace direct referral to the Bahá'í Writings in preparing to commemorate a Holy Day; however, it might prove useful to those believers who have limited access to books. Also having in mind the new believers and seekers, it is prepared in simple language.

The Holy Days will be presented in their sequence on the Bahá'í calendar which are Naw-Rúz, Festival of Ridván, the Declaration of the Báb, the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the Martyrdom of the Báb, the Birth of the Báb, the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, the Day of the Covenant, and the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Holy Days on which work and school should be suspended are the Birth and Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the first, ninth and twelfth days of Ridván; the Birth, Declaration and Martyrdom of the Báb, and Naw-Rúz.

According to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian, "...the anniversaries of the birth and the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha are not to be regarded as days on which work is prohibited. The celebration of these two days is, however, obligatory." (Shoghi Effendi: Bahá'í World, Vol 9, p.750)

For your information we share the following quotations from Shoghi Effendi which are printed on the back of the wall calendar produced by the United States Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

"The Bahá'í day starts and ends at sunset, and consequently the date of the celebrations of Bahá'í feasts should be adjusted to conform to the Bahá'í calendar time."

"The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the friends should commemorate certain of the feasts and anniversaries at the following time: The anniversary of the declaration of the Báb on May 22nd, at about two hours after sunset; the first day of Ridván, at about 3 p.m. on the 21st of April; the anniversary

of the martyrdom of the Báb on July 9th, at about noon; the anniversary of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, on May 29th, at 3 a.m.; the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on November 28th, at 1 a.m. On other anniversaries the believers are free to gather at any time during the day which they find convenient."

"Regarding your question of the proper time to celebrate or hold our meetings of commemoration: the time should be fixed by counting after sunset; the Master passed away one hour after midnight, which falls a certain number of hours after sunset; so His passing should be commemorated according to the sun and regardless of daylight saving time. The same applies to the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh Who passed away about eight hours after sunset."

Regarding suspension of work on the nine holy days, a few categories need to be addressed. These are independent businesses, physicians, schoolchildren, and administrative meetings. In a letter, the Guardian wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States the following: "Believers who have independent businesses or shops should refrain from working on these days. Those who are in government employ should, on religious grounds, make an effort to be excused from work; all believers, whoever their employers, should do likewise. If the government, or their employers, refuse to grant them these days off, they are not required to forfeit their employment...." (Lights of Guidance, 1983, parag. 620)

For doctors, Shoghi Effendi states that "It is better for Bahá'í doctors not to work on our nine holy days - but, of course, that does not mean they should not attend to very sick people and emergencies on these days." (Lights of Guidance, 1983, parag. 617)

In another letter from the Guardian, he stated: "Regarding children: at fifteen a Bahá'í is of age as far as keeping the laws of the Aqdas is concerned - prayer, fasting, etc. But children under fifteen should certainly observe the Bahá'í holy days, and not go to school, if that can be arranged on these nine days." (Lights of Guidance, 1983, parag. 329)

In a letter from the Universal House of Justice it is stated "Concerning the suspension of Bahá'í administrative activities on Bahá'í Holy Days, we

have found the texts of the Guardian's instructions in which he says that the work of Local Assemblies, committees and other institutions of the Faith preferably should be suspended, but that the final decision rests with the Universal House of Justice. We feel that the time is not yet ripe to add anything further, and therefore we leave the application of the above instructions of the Guardian to your National Assembly." (Lights of Guidance, 1983, parag. 623)

As for observing holidays of other religions, such as Christmas, Shoghi Effendi states: "As regards the celebration of the Christian holidays by the believers, it is surely preferable and highly advisable that the friends should, in their relation to each other, discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Year, and to have the festival gatherings of this nature instead during Intercalary Days and Naw-Rúz." (Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 57)

The celebration of the festive anniversaries is different from the observances of the Ascensions and Martyrdom. Good discretion in arrangements for these occasions is essential. For instance, an event where children and adults engage in noisy games or sports is not conducive to an atmosphere of reverence on the Martyrdom of the Báb.

On reciting the Tablet or Prayer of Visitation, one may stand or sit. When standing, one may face any direction. What may be practiced in this regard in certain localities or country should not become a tradition elsewhere.

For your convenience, the timing of each presentation is mentioned at the beginning. However, in the 3 presentations which are for the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Martyrdom of the Báb and the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the time given for each presentation does not include the Tablet of Visitation. The purpose of this is to enable you to begin the Tablet at the designated time.

NAW-RÚZ

The following are a few facts and stories about the Bahá'í New Year Day called Naw-Rúz. It is correctly pronounced No-rooz, and means new day.

The Báb originated the Bahá'í calendar, also known as the Badí' calendar. The year is identified by the initials B.E. for Bahá'í Era. The Báb named the first month Bahá, and also named the first day of each month Bahá. Bahá'u'lláh reaffirmed the Báb's new calendar with one alteration. He placed the 4 or 5 days of intercalary days, called Ayyám-i-Há, between the eighteenth and nineteenth months. The beginning of the Bahá'í calendar is the Naw-Rúz of 1844 A.D., about two months before the Báb's Declaration. In other words, March 21, 1844 A.D. begins year 1 of the Bahá'í Era.

Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated that when the vernal equinox takes place, even if it is 1 minute before sunset, then that day is considered Naw-Rúz and the fasting period has ended. The vernal equinox over time ranges from March 20th to March 22nd. Bahá'u'lláh has authorized the Universal House of Justice to work out the details of the calendar. The Universal House of Justice has stated that until it establishes a universal reference point for the calculation of the vernal equinox the Bahá'í Naw-Rúz is to be celebrated from sunset of March 20th to sunset of March 21st. (Letter from the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated July 17, 1994, quoted in Tabernacle of Unity, Vol. 5, Number 4)

The traditional Persian custom of celebrating this ancient festival for 12 days and having a table decorated with symbolic items does not enter the Bahá'í celebration. The Persian national Naw-Rúz is a time for gift exchange, but Bahá'u'lláh designated Ayyam-i-Há as the time for gift-giving and charity.

The following words of Bahá'u'lláh in The Most Holy Book will open our celebration of Naw-Rúz.

"Happy the one who entereth upon the first day of the month of Bahá, the day which God hath consecrated to this Great Name. And blessed be he who evidenceth on this day the bounties that God hath bestowed upon him; he, verily, is of those who show forth thanks to God through action betokening

the Lord's munificence which hath encompassed all the worlds. Say: This day, verily, is the crown of all the months and the source thereof, the day on which the breath of life is wafted over all created things. Great is the blessedness of him who greeteth it with radiance and joy. We testify that he is, in truth, among those who are blissful."

(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 111)

In another passage, Bahá'u'lláh reveals: "O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Rúz as a feast. Thus hath the Daystar of Utterance shone forth above the horizon of the Book as decreed by Him Who is the Lord of the beginning and the end."

(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 16.)

Now a few stories from the lives of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu-l-Bahá about some very special Naw-Rúz celebrations.

Mullá Ḥusayn, the first to believe in the Báb, accompanied by his servant, had walked nearly 900 miles, a good share of it in winter, to see his Lord, the Báb, who was incarcerated in the fortress of Máh-kú. Each chilly dawn signalled the beginning of a long day's march. But this day, close to the end of the journey, was different. It was the 20th of March, 1848.

While Mullá Ḥusayn's heart was flooded with the hope of celebrating Naw-Rúz with the Blessed Báb, the pounding of his heart commanded a faster march.

Soon it was light enough that at a distance he saw the grim castle in the heart of the heartless mountain with a village at its foot. The sun was rising when they saw the silhouette of a person standing near a bridge. As they got closer their surprise ever increased because no one knew about their arrival, and besides, the person awaiting them was a well-dressed and impressive man. Mullá Ḥusayn immediately figured out that he could be no one but the harsh warden, 'Alí-Khán, who had become subservient to the wishes of the Báb. But still! What was 'Alí-Khán doing there that early in the morning so fully dressed as if he were going to welcome the king?

Their perplexity came to a sudden end when 'Ali-Khán threw himself at the dusty feet of Mullá Husayn and spoke, "Last night I had an inspiring dream. In my dream I was startled by the sudden message that Muḥammad, the Prophet, was soon to arrive at Máh-kú and directly go to the fortress to visit the Báb, and offer His congratulations on the advent of Naw-Rúz. With such a message, I ran out to meet Him, and at a distance from town saw two men walking towards me. I thought one was Muḥammad and the other His companion. I bent to kiss the hem of His garment when I suddenly woke up. The vividness of that dream left no doubt that it was a true vision."

"Immediately I got up, did my ablution and prayer, put on my finest attire. It was before sunrise when I began to walk to the spot seen in my dream. Also, I instructed my stable master to saddle three of my best horses and follow me. The sun was just rising when I reached the bridge and now I see the same two people in my dream walking towards me."

'Ali-Khán later related, "I threw myself on the feet of the one whom I thought was the Prophet and kissed his feet. I begged him and his companion to mount the horses which I had prepared for them but the answer was, 'No, I have vowed to accomplish the whole of my journey on foot. I will walk to the summit of this mountain, and there will visit your Prisoner.'"

'Ali-Khán accompanied them on foot climbing towards the fortress. There at the gate was a sight to behold. The Báb was at the gate to receive Mullá Husayn with open arms. Then all the believers living nearby were summoned to celebrate that Naw-Rúz in the presence of their Lord and the first man to believe in Him. Truly, the events of that visit were breathtaking.

The next story is from the time of Bahá'u'lláh. Naw-Rúz of 1863 was a memorable festivity to which all the believers of Bagh^hdad were invited. Each year after such a celebration in the delightful garden of Vashshásh, near the House of Bahá'u'lláh and close to the river, all counted days and hours to the next Naw-Rúz to spend nearly two weeks in the divine presence of Bahá'u'lláh. In this garden with its murmuring streams, fragrant blossoms and songbirds, each year they would gather to welcome

the new year in the Persian custom.

The tents were raised, and in the morning Bahá'u'lláh blessed the garden by His footsteps. It is very possible that Bahá'u'lláh handed a dish of candy to each of the participants as He had done on other occasions. In the first few days the excitement of His presence blotted out any suspicion about the fast approaching events alluded to by Him.

In the afternoon of the 5th day of Naw-Rúz Bahá'u'lláh retired to His tent while the believers visited each other. After a while Bahá'u'lláh emerged from His tent and asked His scribe to chant the Tablet of the Holy Mariner which had just been revealed. In that Tablet the ominous forecast of the calamities ahead changed everyone's ecstasy to gloom and despair. Immediately after it was chanted Bahá'u'lláh ordered the tents to be folded for the last time and the companions to return to the city. The friends had not left yet when a message came from the governor requesting to meet with Bahá'u'lláh. As we know, the governor was required to tell Bahá'u'lláh that an order from the capital had come banishing Him from Baghdad. One month later Bahá'u'lláh was at the Garden of Riḍván, and declared His mission before leaving Baghdad forever.

Now we will read excerpts from a tablet written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (Star of the West, March 21, 1917.)

O ye children of the Kingdom! It is New Year; that is to say, the rounding of the cycle of the year. A year is the expression of a cycle of the sun; but now is the beginning of a cycle of Reality, a New Cycle, a New Age, a New Century, a New Time and a New Year. Therefore, it is very blessed. I wish this blessing to appear and become manifest in the faces and characteristics of the believers, so that they, too, may become a new people, and having found new life and been baptized with fire and spirit, may make the world a new world, to the end that the old ideas depart and new thoughts come;...ancient politics whose foundation is war be discarded and modern politics founded on peace raise the standards of victory; the new star shine and gleam and the

new sun illumine and radiate... I desire for you that you will have this great assistance and partake of this great bounty, and that in spirit and heart you will strive and endeavor until the world of war become the world of peace; the world of darkness, the world of light; satanic conduct be turned into heavenly behavior; the ruined places become built up; the sword be turned into the olive branch; ...all the nations of the world one nation; all races as one race; and all national anthems harmonized into one melody.."

The last story is about a special Naw-Rúz in the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

After 'Abdu'l-Bahá's release from incarceration in the desolate prison city of 'Akká He moved to Haifa, never to set foot again in that city which had held Him captive for forty years. The downfall of the sultán, the removal of restrictions and freedom for 'Abdu'l-Baha to travel brought great joy to everyone.

Naw-Rúz of 1909 was approaching. The completion of the Shrine of the Báb, in spite of many overwhelming obstacles, was reason to rejoice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá considered the building of the Shrine of the Báb His greatest accomplishment. Then, on that Naw-Rúz of 1909, He laid with His own hands the sacred remains of the Blessed Báb and His companion-martyr within the heart of Mount Carmel, protected by the Shrine. He had stated, "Every brick of it was laid with the labor of love and every inch of it was raised with tears of agony."

At the final moment, in that electrifying atmosphere, filled at once with tragedy and triumph, He took off His turban, shoes and cloak, and laid His blessed head on the corner of the holy casket and wept so intensely that everyone there wept with Him.

That same night a joyous telegram arrived bearing the news of the formation of the first Bahá'í national convention in Chicago.

We will close with the Naw-Rúz prayer by Bahá'u'lláh:

Praised be Thou, O my God, that Thou hast ordained Naw-Rúz as a festival unto those who have observed the fast for love of Thee and abstained from all that is abhorrent unto Thee. Grant, O my Lord, that the fire of Thy love and the heat produced by the fast enjoined by Thee may inflame them in Thy Cause, and make them to be occupied with Thy praise and with remembrance of Thee.

Since Thou hast adorned them, O my Lord, with the ornament of the fast prescribed by Thee, do Thou adorn them also with the ornament of Thine acceptance, through Thy grace and bountiful favor. For the doings of men are all dependent upon Thy good pleasure, and are conditioned by Thy behest. Shouldst Thou regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity had been keeping the fast. And shouldst Thou decree that he who hath observed the fast hath broken it, that person would be numbered with such as have caused the Robe of Thy Revelation to be stained with dust, and been far removed from the crystal waters of this living Fountain.

Thou art He through Whom the ensign "Praiseworthy art Thou in Thy works" hath been lifted up, and the standard "Obeyed art Thou in Thy behest" hath been unfurled. Make known this Thy station, O my God, unto Thy servants, that they may be made aware that the excellence of all things is dependent upon Thy bidding and Thy word, and the virtue of every act is conditioned by Thy leave and the good pleasure of Thy will, and may recognize that the reins of men's doings are within the grasp of Thine acceptance and Thy commandment. Make this known unto them, that nothing whatsoever may shut them out from Thy Beauty, in these days whereon the Christ exclaimeth:

"All dominion is Thine, O Thou the Begetter of the Spirit"; and Thy Friend crieth out: "Glory be to Thee, O Thou the Best-Beloved, for that Thou hast uncovered Thy Beauty, and written down for Thy chosen ones what will cause them to attain unto the seat of the revelation of Thy Most Great Name, through which all the peoples have lamented except such as have detached themselves from all else except Thee, and set themselves towards Him Who is the Revealer of Thyself and the

Manifestation of Thine attributes."

He Who is Thy Branch and all Thy company, O my Lord, have broken this day their fast, after having observed it within the precincts of Thy court and in their eagerness to please Thee. Do Thou ordain for Him, and for them, and for all such as have entered Thy presence in those days, all the good Thou didst destine in Thy Book. Supply them, then, with that which will profit them in both this life and in the life beyond. Thou, in truth, art the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."

RIDVÁN

What better words for opening the celebration of the King of Festivals than this utterance of Bahá'u'lláh:

"Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face and hear the Voice of the Promised One. The call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted upon men. It behooveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission and the tokens of His glory."

(GL. p 10-11)

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas He states this about the festival of Riḍván:

"Say: The Most Great Festival is, indeed, the King of Festivals. Call ye to mind, O people, the bounty which God hath conferred upon you. Ye were sunk in slumber, and then lo! He aroused you by the reviving breezes of His Revelation, and made known unto you His manifest and undeviating path." (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 112)

A few words on the history preceding that epoch-making event and mention of a few facts helps us to better appreciate the significance of Riḍván of 1863.

The first luminary heralding the advent of the Báb, namely Shaykh Ahmad-i-Aḥsáí, made this precise promise about Bahá'u'lláh. As you may know, he died in 1826 when the Báb was seven years old. Shaykh Ahmad wrote the following, "The Mystery of this Cause must needs be manifest, and the Secret of this Message must needs be divulged. I can say no more. I can appoint no time. His Cause will be made known after Hin." In Abjad letters Hin equals 68 and 1268 in Islamic calendar coincides with the year 1852. The closing verse of that passage is quite alarming as he said, "Ask me not of things which if revealed unto you might only pain you." That visionary man could see the Black Pit of Tehran where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned and where He received His Mission.

(Dawn-Breakers, p. 18)

Although the Báb had made several references to the years 9 and 19 for the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh; nevertheless, He makes it abundantly clear that the time of the advent of Bahá'u'lláh is entirely in His own hands. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p.48) The years 9 and 19 synchronize with 1852 and 1863.

The place for such momentous event was foretold by Bahá'u'lláh. The story of Shaykh Ḥasan-i-Zunúzi will illustrate this. During the incarceration of the Báb in the prison-fortress of Chihríq when the struggle of a band of His followers hemmed in at Fort Shaykh Ṭabarsí was at its peak, He told this to Shaykh Ḥasan: "Had it not been for My confinement in this prison I would be going and lending My assistance to Quddús." Quddús was the last Letter of the Living and the leader in that fort. Then He told Shaykh Ḥasan, "However, this obligation does not apply to you. You proceed to Karbila and stay there for you shall behold with your own eyes the countenance of Bahá'u'lláh." He obeyed His Lord and after the passing of a year or so he heard the news of the martyrdom of the Báb in Tabriz. It was in October of 1851 when for the first time he saw the radiant face of Bahá'u'lláh. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 57)

Bahá'u'lláh, then known as Jináb-i-Bahá, approached the Shaykh, and walked in the market place as He held Shaykh Ḥasan's hand. He told the Shaykh, "Praise be to God that you have remained in Karbila and are beholding the beauty of the Promised One." The awe-struck Shaykh remembered the promise of the Báb and wished at once to shout his discovery. Bahá'u'lláh told him to conceal ~~it~~ it and contain his excitement. Then Bahá'u'lláh said, "Not yet. The appointed hour is approaching." On that occasion Bahá'u'lláh told him that such a declaration would take place in Baghdad. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 58) Friends, this was 12 years before His Declaration in the Riḍván garden of Baghdad, and before His imprisonment in the Siyáh-Chál.

And now these words of Bahá'u'lláh about the festival of Riḍván which Shaykh Aḥmad and Ḥasan yearned to see:

"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.' The realm of glory exclaimeth: 'Would that my life could be sacrificed for thee, for He Who is the Beloved of the All-Merciful hath established His sovereignty upon thee, through the power of His Name that has been promised unto all things, whether of the past or of the future.'"

A review of the highlights of the last year of Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Baghdad leading up to His Declaration prepares us for that occasion.

The British consul-general in Baghdad offered Bahá'u'lláh the protection of British citizenship and His safe transfer to India or anywhere. Bahá'u'lláh declined that offer. The friendly governor of Baghdad, Námiq Páshá, received the first of five successive commands from the Grand Vizier of Turkey to transfer Bahá'u'lláh to Constantinople, now called Istanbul. In the next three months four more orders were received and similarly ignored before the governor was compelled to comply.

Meanwhile, with approach of Naw-Rúz, the followers were busy preparing the garden of Vashshásh and raised the needed tents. This delightful spot was not too far from Bahá'u'lláh's house and was close to the river. Again, everyone anticipated another two weeks in the presence of their Beloved, celebrating Naw-Rúz. In the Persian custom, Naw-Rúz is celebrated for 12 days and the thirteenth should be spent in the country. It was in the afternoon of the 5th day of Naw-Rúz when Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, forecasting the ominous events. Immediately after His scribe chanted the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh ordered that all tents should be folded for the last time and everyone return to the city. The companions had not left yet when a messenger from the governor arrived summoning Bahá'u'lláh. The next day the deputy governor handed over the order from the central government to Bahá'u'lláh. The governor could not bring himself to be the one to break the sad news.

(A Basic Bahá'í Chronology p. 67-68)

On learning of His imminent departure, large numbers of admirers and followers crowded His house which could not accommodate the visitors, and the Holy Family had to begin preparing for the journey. A notable of Baghdad, Najíb Páshá, immediately put his garden-park, called Najíbíyyih, at Bahá'u'lláh's disposal.

In that year, Naw-Rúz fell on the 22nd of March. Thirty-one days after Naw-Rúz, the 22nd of April 1863, Bahá'u'lláh wore a táj as a symbol of His station and left His house for the last time. When Bahá'u'lláh appeared in the courtyard of His house, His grief-stricken companions prostrated at His feet. For some time He stood there speaking words of comfort to the weeping crowd.

Bahá'u'lláh, in a tablet, mentions that when He had walked towards the gate of His house a child of only a few years ran forward, and clinging to His robe, wept aloud, begging Him in his tender, young voice not to leave. (The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 260) The lamentation of the admirers outside His house was not less than that of His followers. As He walked towards the banks of the river Tigris, among the disconsolate and grief-stricken crowd, a Persian lady of noble birth who was not a believer, pushed her way into the crowd and with gesture of sacrifice laid her child at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh. At length, He reached the banks of the river and was ferried across, accompanied by His sons and the scribe. Of course, some followers had gone in advance to prepare that heavenly spot. The muezzin had just raised the afternoon call for prayer when Bahá'u'lláh entered the Najíbíyyih garden, later called by His followers, the Garden of Ridván, or paradise. Although previous to His Declaration, He had not disclosed His station, some Bábís far and near were convinced that He was the Promised One by the Báb, but the majority had no idea.

The Pen of Bahá'u'lláh wrote of that spring day:

"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. Speak and hold not thy peace. The Day Star 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." (GL p. 27-8)

Bahá'u'lláh spent 12 days in that garden. According to 'Abdu'lBahá, on the first day He declared His Mission to the companions who were present, and announced with great joy the inauguration of the Festival of Ridván. (Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol 1, p. 260) Through His historic, awe-inspiring Declaration, He changed all sorrow into joy. In one of His tablets, He has referred to the first day of Ridván as the "Day of supreme felicity," and has called on His followers to rejoice with exceeding gladness in remembrance of that day. (Rev. of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol 1, p. 262)

The exact circumstances and Bahá'u'lláh's exact words are shrouded in obscurity. The fragmentary description left for posterity is by the historian, Nabíl. He writes: "Every day, ere the hour of dawn, the gardeners would pick the roses which lined the four avenues of the garden, and would pile them in the center of the floor of His blessed tent. So great would be the heap that when His companions gathered to drink their morning tea in His presence, they would be unable to see each other across it. All these roses, Bahá'u'lláh would, with His own hands, entrust to those whom He dismissed from His presence every morning to be delivered on His behalf to His Arab and Persian friends in the city." (Days to Remember, p. 36)

A constant stream of people from all walks of life flowed to that garden each day. As for the believers, Bahá'u'lláh would summon a number of them to come each day and would dismiss them in the evening. Only those without family ties were allowed to remain for the night. Some of them would keep vigil around His tent. (Rev. of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol.1, p. 275)

Although the words of His Declaration are not known, there is a tablet from Bahá'u'lláh which throws light on some of His utterances on that day. According to that tablet on the first day of Ridván, Bahá'u'lláh made three important statements to His followers. The first was to forbid

the use of the sword when attacked or persecuted on account of their Faith. The second statement was that no Manifestation of God would appear before the expiration of a thousand years. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas (note 62) specifies that October 1852 when He received His Mission in the Siyáh-Chál marks the commencement of the one thousand years or more. The third was that the moment He uttered those words all the names and attributes of God were fully manifested within all created things. By this, He implied the advent of a new Day and the infusion of a fresh capacity into all beings. (Rev. of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol.1, p. 279)

Of the notables and the government officials who came to see Him, one was Námíq Páshá, the governor. He apologized for what had occurred and insisted on being of some service. Bahá'u'lláh told him to be considerate and fair to the followers to which he gave his promise. He also wrote a letter addressed to the officials on the way to provide for the travellers and handed it to the officer who accompanied Bahá'u'lláh. However, Bahá'u'lláh did not permit acceptance of such offers and bought all of the provisions needed in those 4 months on the road from Bagh^hdad to Istanbul.

Referring to His Declaration, Bahá'u'lláh states: "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." (King of Glory, p. 171)

Of those memorable days, Nabil states: "One night, the ninth night of the waxing moon, I happened to be one of those who watched beside His blessed tent. As the hour of midnight approached, I saw Him issue from His tent, pass by the places where some of His companions were sleeping and begin to pace up and down the moonlit, flower-bordered avenues of the garden. So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him could distinctly hear His voice. He continued to walk until, pausing in the midst of one of these avenues, He observed, 'Consider these nightingales. So great is their love for

these roses, that sleepless from dusk to 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?'

"For three successive nights I watched and circled round His blessed tent. Every time I passed by the couch whereon He lay, I would find Him wakeful, and every day from morn to eventide, I would see Him ceaselessly engaged in conversing with the stream of visitors who kept flowing in from Baghdad. Not once I could discover in the words He spoke any trace of dissimulation." (Rev. of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 1, p. 276)

On the ninth day of Riḍván the family of Bahá'u'lláh moved to the Najíbíyyih Garden, and the twelfth day was appointed for departure. Of the twelve days that Bahá'u'lláh spent in the garden of Riḍván, three are regarded as Holy Days - the first day, the ninth day and the twelfth day. According to Shoghi Effendi, the ninth day is on account of the holiness of the number 9. (Lights of Guidance, 1983, p. 230)

At last the mules were loaded and howdahs were mounted on them for the ladies and children. Then as sunset was approaching, everyone took their places, and a beautiful red roan stallion called Saúdí, the finest horse His followers could afford, was brought out for Bahá'u'lláh. At this time Bahá'u'lláh wore a táj, a finely embroidered felt headdress. In Persian, the meaning of táj is crown. During His years in Baghdad, though horses were available, He chose to ride a donkey, but on the last day of Riḍván, He visibly wielded the symbolic signs of divine authority by wearing a táj and riding a horse.

Seeing Bahá'u'lláh in the saddle and ready to depart evoked from the vast crowd heart-rending cries of agony. People threw themselves in the path of His horse and, as a believer has related, it seemed as if that heavenly steed was passing over sanctified bodies. The tearful eyes of His followers and admirers watched Him disappear into the setting sun.

We will close this celebration of the anniversary of the twelve days of

Riḍván with this utterance of Bahá'u'lláh:

"Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Riḍván, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendors of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes. This, verily, is a token of My loving providence, which hath encompassed all the worlds."

(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 75)

DECLARATION OF THE BĀB

and Anniversary of the birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

May 23, 1844, when the Báb's Declaration took place, as well as the day of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's birth, was celebrated exclusively during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the anniversary of the inauguration of the Báb's Dispensation. However, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, his appointed successor, Shoghi Effendi, wrote, "...the anniversaries of the birth and the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are not to be regarded as days on which work is prohibited. The celebration of these two days is, however, obligatory." (Bahá'í World, Vol. 9, p. 750) In the presentation for today both joyous occasions will be addressed.

The Báb proclaims: "I am the Mystic Fane which the Hand of Omnipotence hath reared. I am the lamp which the Finger of God hath lit within its niche and caused to shine with deathless splendor. I am the Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai..." and from the prison-fortress of Máh-Kú, He wrote this to the King, "I am the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things." (WOB p.126)

The Guardian, referring to the station of the Báb, asserts "That He is not be regarded merely as an inspired Precursor of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, that in His Person, as He Himself bears witness in the Persian Bayán, the object of all the prophets gone before Him have been fulfilled is a truth which I feel it my duty to demonstrate and emphasize." (WOB p. 123)

Then the Guardian states: "Indeed, the chief motive actuating me to undertake the task of editing and translating Nabíl's immortal narrative has been to enable every follower of the Faith in the West to better understand and more readily grasp the tremendous implications of His exalted station and more ardently admire and love Him." (WOB p. 123)

The appearance of two Manifestations of God within such a short interval of nine years is addressed in the following utterance of Bahá'u'lláh: "That so brief a span should have separated this most mighty and wondrous Revelation from Mine own previous Manifestation, is a secret that no man can unravel and a mystery such as no mind can fathom." (WOB, p. 124)

With this introduction, the significance of the celebration of the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb is better understood and appreciated.

On that 22nd day of May, 1844, the prophetic cycle ended, and the cycle of fulfilment was ushered in by the Declaration of the Báb. The anniversary of that unique and wondrous Day will be celebrated for 5,000 centuries, the duration of this cycle.

On that day, the Báb, whose given name was 'Alí-Muhammad, a merchant from Shiráz, a city in southern Iran, declared His Cause to Mullá Husayn, a 32 year old theological student. The Báb's age was 25. Mullá Husayn, like most of the followers of their last teacher, was searching for the promised Qá'im and through a magnetic force was drawn towards Shiráz.

Let Nabíl, the great historian tell you the story told to him first hand:
"On that very day, a few hours before sunset, whilst walking outside the gate of the city, his eyes fell suddenly upon a Youth of radiant countenance, who wore a green turban and who, advancing towards him, greeted him with a smile of loving welcome. He embraced Mullá Husayn with tender affection as though he had been his intimate and lifelong friend. Mullá Husayn thought Him at first to be a disciple of Siyyid Kázim who, on being informed of his approach to Shiráz, had come out to welcome him.

Mírzá Aḥmad-i-Qazvíní, the martyr...is quoted, "I have heard Mullá Husayn repeatedly and graphically describe the circumstances of that remarkable interview: 'The Youth who met me outside the gate of Shiráz overwhelmed me with expressions of affection and loving-kindness. He extended to me a warm invitation to visit His home, and there refresh myself after the fatigues of my journey. I prayed to be excused, pleading that my two companions had already arranged for my stay in that city, and were now awaiting my return. "Commit them to the care of God," was His reply; "He will surely protect and watch over them." Having spoken these words, He bade me follow Him. I was profoundly impressed by the gentle yet compelling manner in which that...Youth spoke to me. As I followed Him, His gait, the charm of His voice, the dignity of His bearing, served to enhance my first impressions of this unexpected meeting.

"We soon found ourselves standing at the gate of a house of modest appearance. He knocked at the door which was soon opened by an Ethiopian servant. "Enter therein in peace, secure," were His words as He crossed the threshold and motioned me to follow Him. His invitation, uttered with power and majesty, penetrated my soul. I thought it a good augury to be addressed in such words, standing as I did on the threshold of the first house I was entering in Shíráz, a city the very atmosphere of which had produced already an indescribable impression upon me. Might not my visit to this house, I thought to myself, enable me to draw nearer to the Object of my quest? Might it not hasten the termination of a period of intense longing, of strenuous search, of increasing anxiety, which such a quest involves? As I entered the house and followed my Host to His chamber, a feeling of unutterable joy invaded my being. Immediately we were seated, He ordered a ewer of water to be brought, and bade me wash away from my hands and feet the stains of travel. I pleaded permission to retire from His presence and perform my ablutions in an adjoining room. He refused to grant my request, and proceeded to pour the water over my hands. He then gave me to drink of a refreshing beverage, after which He asked for the samovar and Himself prepared the tea which He offered me. "Overwhelmed with His acts of extreme kindness, I arose to depart. "The time for evening prayer is approaching," I ventured to observe. "I have promised my friends to join them at that hour in the Masjidi-Ílkhání." With extreme courtesy and calm He replied: "You must surely have made the hour of your return conditional upon the will and pleasure of God. It seems that His will has decreed otherwise. You need have no fear of having broken your pledge." His dignity and self-assurance silenced me. I renewed my ablutions and prepared for prayer. He, too, stood beside me and prayed. Whilst praying, I unburdened my soul, which was much oppressed, both by the mystery of this interview and the strain and stress of my search. I breathed this prayer: "I have striven with all my soul, O my God, and until now have failed to find Thy promised Messenger. I testify that Thy word faileth not, and that Thy promise is sure."

"That night, that memorable night, was the eve preceding the fifth day of Jamádiyü'l-Avval, in the year 1260 A.H. (corresponding to the evening of May 22, 1844 A.D.) It was about an hour after sunset when my youthful Host began to converse with me. "Whom, after Siyyid Kázim," He asked me, "do you regard

as his successor and your leader?" "At the hour of his death," I replied, "our departed teacher insistently exhorted us to forsake our homes, to scatter far and wide, in quest of the promised Beloved. I have, accordingly, journeyed to Persia, have arisen to accomplish his will, and am still engaged in my quest."

"Has your teacher," He further enquired, "given any detailed indications as to the distinguishing features of the promised One?" "Yes, I replied, "He is of pure lineage, is of illustrious descent, and of the seed of Fatimih. As to His age, He is more than twenty and less than thirty. He is endowed with innate knowledge. He is of medium height, abstains from smoking, and is free from bodily deficiency." He paused for a while and then with vibrant voice declared: "Behold, all these signs are manifest in Me!" He then considered each of the above-mentioned signs separately, and conclusively demonstrated that each and all were applicable to His person. I was greatly surprised, and politely observed: "He whose advent we await is a Man of unsurpassed holiness, and the cause He is to reveal, a Cause of tremendous power. Many and diverse are the requirements which He who claims to be its visible embodiment must needs fulfil. How often has Siyyid Kazim referred to the vastness of the knowledge of the promised One! How often did he say: 'My own knowledge is but a drop compared with that with which He has been endowed. All my attainments are but a speck of dust in the face of the immensity of His knowledge. Nay, immeasurable is the difference!'"

"No sooner had those words dropped from my lips than I found myself seized with fear and remorse, such as I could neither conceal nor explain. I bitterly reproved myself, and resolved at that very moment to alter my attitude and to soften my tone. I vowed to God that should my Host again refer to the subject, I would, with the utmost humility, answer and say: "If you be willing to substantiate your claim, you will most assuredly deliver me from the anxiety and suspense which so heavily oppress my soul. I shall truly be indebted to you for such deliverance."

"When I first started upon my quest, I determined to regard the two following standards as those whereby I could ascertain the truth of whosoever might claim to be the promised Qá'im. The first was a treatise which I had myself

composed, bearing upon the abstruse and hidden teachings propounded by Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim. Whoever seemed to me capable of unravelling the mysterious allusions made in that treatise, to him I would next submit my second request, and would ask him to reveal, without the least hesitation or reflection, a commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, in a style and language entirely different from the prevailing standards of the time. I had previously requested Siyyid Kázim, in private, to write a commentary on that same Súrih, which he refused, saying: 'This is, verily, beyond me. He, that great One, who comes after me will, unasked, reveal it for you. That commentary will constitute one of the weightiest testimonies of His truth, and one of the clearest evidences of the loftiness of His position.'

"I was revolving these things in my mind, when my distinguished Host again remarked: 'Observe attentively. Might not the Person intended by Siyyid Kázim be none other than I?' I thereupon felt impelled to present to Him a copy of the treatise which I had with me. "Will you," I asked Him, "read this book of mine and look at its pages with indulgent eyes? I pray you to overlook my weaknesses and failings. He graciously complied with my wish. He opened the book, glanced at certain passages, closed it, and began to address me. Within a few minutes He had, with characteristic vigour and charm, unravelled all its mysteries and resolved all its problems. Having to my entire satisfaction accomplished, within so short a time, the task I had expected Him to perform, He further expounded to me certain truths which could be found neither in the reported sayings of the Imáms of the Faith nor in the writings of Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim. These truths, which I have never heard before, seemed to be endowed with refreshing vividness and power.

"'Had you not been My guest,' He afterwards observed, ' your position would indeed have been a grievous one. The all-encompassing grace of God has saved you. It is for God to test His servants, and not for His servants to judge Him in accordance with their deficient standards. Were I to fail to resolve your perplexities, could the Reality that shines within Me be regarded as powerless, or My knowledge be accused as faulty? Nay, by the righteousness of God! It behoves, in this day, the peoples and nations of both the East and the West to hasten to this threshold, and here seek to obtain the reviving grace of the Merciful. Whoso hesitates will indeed be in grievous loss.

Do not the peoples of the earth testify that the fundamental purpose of their creation is the knowledge and adoration of God? It behoves them to arise, as earnestly and spontaneously as you have arisen, and to seek with determination and constancy their promised Beloved.'

"He then proceeded to say: 'Now is the time to reveal the commentary on the Súrih of Joseph.' He took up His pen and with incredible rapidity revealed the entire Súrih of Mulk, the first chapter of His commentary on the Súrih of Joseph. The overpowering effect of the manner in which He wrote was heightened by the gentle intonation of His voice which accompanied His writing. Not for one moment did He interrupt the flow of the verses which streamed from His pen. Not once did He pause till the Súrih of Mulk was finished. I sat enraptured by the magic of His voice and the sweeping force of His revelation. At last I reluctantly arose from my seat and begged leave to depart. He smilingly bade me be seated, and said: 'If you leave in such a state, whoever sees you will assuredly say: 'This poor youth has lost his mind.' At that moment the clock registered two hours and eleven minutes after sunset....'This night,' He declared, 'this very hour will, in the days to come, be celebrated as one of the greatest and most significant of all festivals. Render thanks to God for having graciously assisted you to attain your heart's desire, and for having quaffed from the sealed wine of His utterance. "Well is it with them that attain thereunto."

"At the third hour after sunset my Host ordered the dinner to be served. That same Ethiopian servant appeared again and spread before us the choicest food. That holy repast refreshed alike my body and soul. In the presence of my Host, at that hour, I felt as though I were feeding upon the fruits of Paradise. I could not but marvel at the manners and the devoted attentions of that Ethiopian servant whose very life seemed to have been transformed by the regenerating influence of his Master. I then, for the first time, recognised the significance of this well-known traditional utterance ascribed to Muḥammad: 'I have prepared for the godly and righteous among My servants what eye hath seen not, ear heard not, nor human heart conceived.' Had my youthful Host no other claim to greatness, this were sufficient - that He received me with that quality of hospitality and loving-kindness which I was convinced no other human being could possibly reveal."

"I sat spellbound by His utterance, oblivious of time and of those who awaited me. Suddenly the call of the muadh^hdhin, summoning the faithful to their morning prayer, awakened me from the state of ecstasy into which I seemed to have fallen.....Sleep had departed from me that night. I was enthralled by the music of that voice which rose and fell as He chanted; now swelling forth as He revealed verses of the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá, again acquiring ethereal, subtle harmonies as He uttered the prayers He was revealing...."

"He then addressed me in these words: 'O thou who art the first to believe in Me! Verily I say, I am the Bá**b**, the Gate of God, and thou art the Bábu'l-Báb, the gate of that Gate. Eighteen souls must, in the beginning, spontaneously and of their own accord, accept Me and recognise the truth of My Revelation. Unwarned and uninvited, each of these must seek independently to find Me. And when their number is complete, one of them must needs be chosen to accompany Me on My pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.... It is incumbent upon you not to divulge, either to your companions or to any other soul, that which you have seen and heard. Be engaged in the Masjid-i-Ílkhání in prayer and in teaching. I, too, will there join you in congregational prayer. Beware lest your attitude towards Me betray the secret of your faith. You should continue in this occupation and maintain this attitude until our departure for Hġjáz. Ere we depart, we shall appoint unto each of the eighteen souls his special mission, and shall send them forth to accomplish their task. We shall instruct them to teach the Word of God and to quicken the souls of men.' Having spoken these words to me, He dismissed me from His presence. Accompanying me to the door of the house, He committed me to the care of God."
(The Dawn-Breakers, p.52-65)

As was mentioned in the introduction, the Guardian stated that it is obligatory to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

This tribute of Bahá'u'lláh in a letter He wrote in His own handwriting to 'Abdu'l-Bahá while the latter was on a trip to Beirut gives an indication about His rank and station in Bahá'u'lláh's eyes.

"Praise be to Him Who hath honoured the Land of Ba through the presence of Him round Whom all names revolve. All the atoms of the earth have announced

unto all created things that from behind the gate of the Prison-city there hath appeared, and above its horizon there hath shone forth the Orb of the beauty of the great, the Most Mighty Branch - His ancient and immutable Mystery - proceeding on its way to another land. Sorrow, thereby, hath enveloped this prison-city, whilst another land rejoiceth...."Blessed, double blessed, is the ground which His footsteps have trodden, the eye that hath been cheered by the beauty of His countenance, the ear that hath been honoured by hearkening to His call, the heart that hath tasted the sweetness of His love, the breast that hath dilated through His remembrance, the pen that hath voiced His praise, the scroll that hath borne the testimony of His writings. We beseech God - blessed and exalted be He - that He may honour us with meeting Him soon. He is, in truth, the All-Hearing, the All-Powerful, He Who is ready to answer. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 227-8)

'Abdu'l-Bahá was the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh and Ásíyih Khánum, also called Navváb, but not their firstborn. Two before Him died in infancy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, named 'Abbás, was born in Tehran, in the ninth year of His parents' marriage.

In His childhood He suffered from the serious illness of tuberculosis. He witnessed how after Bahá'u'lláh's arrest and imprisonment in 1852, His mother went from riches to poverty to the point that one day, she could give him nothing to eat but a handful of flour. The worst trauma was seeing His father brought out with the rest of the prisoners to the courtyard of the prison. The appearance of His beloved Father was so degraded from the cruelties inflicted upon Him that 'Abdu'l-Bahá fainted. He was only eight years old. Then, on their exile in the middle of winter to Baghdad, His feet became injured from frostbite.

A pleasant note in the childhood of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Tehran is the following story which staggers the mind. You remember that Táhirih spent about four years in Tehran, the first few months as a guest in the house of Bahá'u'lláh. One day she was playing with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when she was informed about the arrival of Vahíd, the distinguished follower of the Báb, to visit her. Vahíd's prominence was acknowledged by all. To the surprise of everyone, she did not appear eager to go and speak to him. The bewilderment of the ladies in

attendance increased as her delay prolonged. Then one of the ladies, feeling quite uneasy, said that it would be preferable if the distinguished Vahíd were not kept waiting any longer. Upon hearing this, Ṭáhirih turned to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and said, "Shall I leave you, the Protector of the Cause, for visiting a follower of the Cause?" What insight! Her intuition was repeatedly demonstrated during her dazzling but tragic life.

In those days it was customary to escape the hot months of summer in Tehran. Families of notables would leave Tehran for summer homes in the mountain. Such was the custom for Bahá'u'lláh's family, also. However one summer 'Abdu'l-Bahá could not leave the city because His illness of tuberculosis needed medical attention in Tehran. He considered his illness a blessing for when His beloved Father was imprisoned in the Black Pit that summer, He was there to help His mother and to be included in the exile journey to Baghdad.

And thus was born on this very day in 1844, the Mystery of God, Whose life span of 77 years covered the heroic or apostolic age of the Bahá'í Era. It is no coincidence that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's birth was on the day of the Declaration of the Báb, and His resting-place is next to that of the Báb's under the golden dome of the Shrine of the Báb on the slopes of Mount Carmel.

ASCENSION OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

"The Sun of Bahá has set," was the opening line of a telegram which on May 29, 1892, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent to the Sultán of Turkey, and also informed him that He intended to inter the sacred remains near the Mansion of Bahjí.

Bahá'u'lláh's counsels and assurances could be found in many passages of His writings, such as: "Let not your hearts be perturbed, O people, when the glory of My Presence is withdrawn and the ocean of My utterance is stilled. In My Presence amongst you there is a wisdom, and in My absence there is yet another, inscrutable to all but God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with hosts of the concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels." (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, parag. 53)

About nine months before His passing, Bahá'u'lláh, as attested by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had voiced His desire to depart from this world. Thereafter, from the tone of His remarks, it became increasingly evident that the end of His earthly life was approaching. But He avoided mentioning it openly. On May 8, 1892, three weeks before His ascension He contracted a slight fever which got worse by the next day but soon after subsided. He continued to permit visits by certain friends and pilgrims, but soon it became evident that He was not well. (GPB p. 221-3)

'Abdu'l-Bahá, who with His family lived within the walled city of 'Akká, went to stay in the Mansion of Bahjí so He could personally attend His Father in His last days. Bahá'u'lláh's general condition steadily grew worse. In His room there were two cases in which Bahá'u'lláh used to keep His writings and seals whenever He went away from the Mansion. One day Bahá'u'lláh told His beloved Son to gather all papers and place them in the cases. On hearing this, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became grief stricken, recognizing that the last hours were near. Distraught with sadness, He hesitatingly and slowly moved to comply. Bahá'u'lláh, for the second time, instructed Him to finish the task. A cousin of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who later proved treacherous, entered Bahá'u'lláh's room. With his help, 'Abdu'l-Bahá placed everything in the cases. When finished, Bahá'u'lláh told 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in front of the cousin, that from now on those

two cases belonged to 'Abdu'l-Bahá; however, they were stolen by the faithless ones.

Six days before His passing, He summoned to His presence the entire company of believers for what proved to be their last audience with Him. As He lay in bed leaning against one of His sons, gently and affectionately, He addressed the weeping crowd with these words, "I am well pleased with you all. You have rendered many services and been very assiduous in your labors. You have come here every morning and evening. May God assist you to remain united. May He aid you to exalt the Cause of God, the Lord of being." Then He spoke to the women with loving words of encouragement and assured them that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had the document which entrusted them to His care. (GPB p. 222)

It was in the very early morning of May 29, 1892, eight hours after sunset, in the 75th year of His life, that the spirit of the Blessed Beauty winged its flight to the Realm of Glory.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, assisted by a younger half-brother, washed His sacred body in preparation for interment. How agonizing for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to see the scars from awful chains upon His blessed body, testifying to the depth of persecution He endured for the redemption of mankind.

The interment took place the same day shortly after sunset in a building near the Mansion where He spent the last 12 years of His life. His resting-place, known as the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, is the Qiblih, or the Point of Adoration for all the Bahá'ís to turn to during the obligatory prayers. For a full week a vast number of mourners of all classes, creeds and nationalities poured in along with countless letters of condolence from far and near.

Bahá'u'lláh's Will and Testament, called by Him the Book of My Covenant, which had been kept in a sealed envelope and entrusted to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was opened on the 9th day after the Ascension. The contents left no doubt about the appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as His successor and the Center of His Covenant.

The inconsolable Nabíl, the great historian, who had followed Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdad days and had the privilege of a private audience with Him during His

last days, could not bear the burden of separation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had chosen him to select passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh to compose the Tablet of Visitation. After he accomplished this, he drowned himself in the sea. The Guardian wrote that "With the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh draws to a close a period which, in many ways, is unparalleled in the world's religious history...God's newborn Faith...had been fully and unreservedly proclaimed. The prophecies announcing its advent had been remarkably fulfilled. Its fundamental laws and cardinal principles, the warp and woof of the fabric of its future World Order, had been clearly enunciated....The Covenant designed to safeguard the unity and integrity of its world-embracing system had been irrevocably bequeathed to posterity." (GPB p. 223)

We will close with the Tablet of Visitation:

The praise which hath dawned from Thy most august Self, and the glory which hath shone forth from Thy most effulgent Beauty, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art the Manifestation of Grandeur, and the King of Eternity, and the Lord of all who are in heaven and on earth! I testify that through Thee the sovereignty of God and His dominion, and the majesty of God and His grandeur, were revealed, and the Daystars of ancient splendor have shed their radiance in the heaven of Thine irrevocable decree, and the Beauty of the Unseen hath shone forth above the horizon of creation. I testify, moreover, that with but a movement of Thy Pen Thine injunction "Be Thou" hath been enforced, and God's hidden Secret hath been divulged, and all created things have been called into being, and all the Revelations have been sent down.

I bear witness, moreover, that through Thy beauty the beauty of the Adored One hath been unveiled, and through Thy face the face of the Desired One hath shone forth, and that through a word from Thee Thou hast decided between all created things, causing them who are devoted to Thee to ascend unto the summit of glory, and the infidels to fall into the lowest abyss.

I bear witness that he who hath known Thee hath known God, and he who hath attained unto Thy presence hath attained unto the presence of God.

Great, therefore, is the blessedness of him who hath believed in Thee, and in Thy signs, and hath humbled himself before Thy sovereignty, and hath been honored with meeting Thee, and hath attained the good pleasure of Thy will, and circled around Thee, and stood before Thy throne. Woe betide him that hath transgressed against Thee, and hath denied Thee, and repudiated Thy

signs, and gainsaid Thy sovereignty, and risen up against Thee, and were proud before Thy face, and hath disputed Thy testimonies, and fled from Thy rule and Thy dominion, and been numbered with the infidels whose names have been inscribed by the fingers of Thy behest upon Thy holy Tablets. Waft, then, unto me, O my God and my Beloved, from the right hand of Thy mercy and Thy loving-kindness, the holy breaths of Thy favors, that they may draw me away from myself and from the world unto the courts of Thy nearness and Thy presence. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou, truly, hast been supreme over all things.

The remembrance of God and His praise, and the glory of God and His splendor, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art His Beauty! I bear witness that the eye of creation hath never gazed upon one wronged like Thee. Thou wast immersed all the days of Thy life beneath an ocean of tribulations. At one time Thou wast in chains and fetters; at another Thou wast threatened by the sword of Thine enemies. Yet, despite all this, Thou didst enjoin upon all men to observe what had been prescribed unto Thee by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

May my spirit be a sacrifice to the wrongs Thou didst suffer, and my soul be a ransom for the adversities Thou didst sustain. I beseech God, by Thee and by them whose faces have been illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy countenance, and who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden, to remove the veils that have come in between Thee and Thy creatures, and to supply me with the good of this world and the world to come. Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate.

Bless Thou, O Lord my God, the Divine Lote-Tree and its leaves, and its boughs, and its branches, and its stems, and its offshoots, as long as Thy most excellent titles will endure and Thy most august attributes will last. Protect it, then, from the mischief of the aggressor and the hosts of tyranny. Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the Most Powerful. Bless Thou, also, O Lord my God, Thy servants and Thy handmaidens who have attained unto Thee. Thou, truly, art the All-Bountiful, Whose grace is infinite. No God is there save Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous."

(Bahá'í Prayers, p. 230-3)

MARTYRDOM OF THE BÁB

How eagerly the Báḅ yearned to be a sacrifice in the path of Bahá'u'lláh. In a passage He states: "Fear not: I am come into this world to bear witness to the glory of sacrifice.... The drops of this consecrated blood will be the seed out of which will arise the mighty Tree of God, the Tree that will gather beneath its all-embracing shadow the peoples and kindreds of earth." (The DawnBreakers, p. 140-1) Obviously, the Tree refers to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The following graphic account of the martyrdom of the Báḅ in the city of Tabríz on that July 9, 1850, is best told by Nabíl in his immortal narrative, The Dawn-Breakers: (p. 507-519)

"Deprived of His turban and sash, the twin emblems of His noble lineage, the Báḅ, together with Siyyid Ḥusayn, His amanuensis, was driven to yet another confinement which He well knew was but a step further on the way leading Him to the goal He had set Himself to attain. That day witnessed a tremendous commotion in the city of Tabríz. The great convulsion associated in the ideas of its inhabitants with the Day of Judgment seemed at last to have come upon them. Never had that city experienced a turmoil so fierce and so mysterious as the one which seized its inhabitants on that day the Báḅ was led to that place which was to be the scene of His martyrdom. As He approached the courtyard of the barracks, a youth suddenly leaped forward who, in his eagerness to overtake Him, had forced his way through the crowd, utterly ignoring the risks and perils which such an attempt might involve. His face was haggard, his feet were bare, and his hair dishevelled. Breathless with excitement and exhausted with fatigue, he flung himself at the feet of the Báḅ and, seizing the hem of His garment, passionately implored Him: 'Send me not from Thee, O Master. Wherever Thou goest, suffer me to follow Thee.' 'Muḥammad-ÁlÍ' answered the Báḅ, 'arise, and rest assured that you will be with Me. Tomorrow you shall witness what God has decreed.' Two other companions, unable to contain themselves, rushed forward and assured Him of their unalterable loyalty. These, together with Muḥammad-ÁlÍy-i-Zunúzí, were seized and placed in the same cell in which the Báḅ and Siyyid Ḥusayn were confined.

I have heard Siyyid Ḥusayn bear witness to the following:

"That night the face of the Báḅ was aglow with joy, a joy such as had never shone from His countenance. Indifferent to the storm that raged about Him, He conversed with us with gaiety and cheerfulness. The sorrows that had weighed so heavily upon Him seemed to have completely vanished. Their weight appeared to have dissolved in the consciousness of approaching victory.

'Tomorrow,' He said to us, 'will be the day of My martyrdom. Would that one of you might now arise and, with his own hands, end My life. I prefer to be slain by the hand of a friend rather than by that of the enemy.' Tears rained from our eyes as we heard Him express that wish. We shrank, however, at the thought of taking away with our own hands so precious a life. We refused, and remained silent....Muḥammad-‘Alí suddenly sprang to his feet and announced himself ready to obey whatever the Báḅ might desire. 'This same youth who has risen to comply with My wish,' the Báḅ declared,...'will, together with Me, suffer martyrdom. Him will I choose to share with Me its crown.'"

Early in the morning, Mirzá Ḥasan Khán ordered his farrásh-báshí to conduct the Báḅ into the presence of the leading mujtahids of the city and to obtain from them the authorisation required for His execution. As the Báḅ was leaving the barracks, Siyyid Ḥusayn asked Him what he should do. "Confess not your faith," He advised him. "Thereby you will be enabled, when the hour comes, to convey to those who are destined to hear you, the things of which you alone are aware." He was engaged in a confidential conversation with him when the farrásh-báshí suddenly interrupted and holding Siyyid Ḥusayn by the hand, drew him aside and severely rebuked him. "Not until I have said to him all those things that I wish to say," the Báḅ warned the farrásh-báshí, "can any earthly power silence Me. Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall they be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling to the last word My intention." The farrásh-báshí was amazed at such a bold assertion....

When...Muḥammad-‘Alí was ushered into the presence of the mujtahids, he was repeatedly urged, in view of the position which his stepfather, Siyyid ‘Alíy-i-Zunúzí, occupied, to recant his faith. "Never," he exclaimed, "will I renounce my Master. He is of the essence of my faith, and the object of my truest adoration. In Him I have found my paradise, and in the observance

of His law I recognise the ark of my salvation." "Hold your peace!" thundered Mullá Muḥammad-i-Mamaqání, before whom that youth was brought. "Such words betray your madness; I can well excuse the words for which you are not responsible." "I am not mad," he retorted. "Such a charge should rather be brought against you who have sentenced to death a man no less holy than the promised Qá'im. He is not a fool who has embraced His Faith and is longing to shed his blood in His path."

The Báb was in His turn brought before Mullá Muḥammad-i-Mamaqání, who as soon as he had recognised Him, seized the death-warrant he had previously written and handing it to his attendant, bade him deliver it to the farrásh-i-báshí. "No need, he cried, "to bring the Siyyid-i-Báb into my presence. This death-warrant I penned the very day I met him at the gathering presided over by the crown prince. He surely is the same man whom I saw on that occasion, and has not in the meantime surrendered any of his claims."

From thence the Báb was conducted to the house of Mírzá Báqir....When they arrived, they found his attendant standing at the gate and holding in his hand the Báb's death-warrant. "No need to enter," he told them.... Mullá Murtaḍá-Qulí, following in the footsteps of the other two mujtahids, had previously issued his own written testimony and refused to meet face-to-face his dreaded opponent. No sooner had the farrásh-i-báshí secured the necessary documents than he delivered his Captive into the hands of Sám Khán, assuring him that he could proceed with his task now that he had obtained the sanction of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the realm.

Siyyid Ḥusayn had remained confined in the same room in which he had spent the previous night with the Báb. They were proceeding to place... Muḥammad-'Alí in that same room when he burst forth into tears and entreated them to allow him to remain with his Master. He was delivered into the hands of Sám Khán, who was ordered to execute him also, if he persisted in his refusal to deny his Faith.

Sám Khán was in the meantime finding himself increasingly affected by the behaviour of his Captive and the treatment that had been meted out to Him. He was seized with great fear lest his action should bring upon him the wrath

of God. "I profess the Christian Faith," he explained to the Báb, "and entertain no ill will against you. If your Cause be the Cause of Truth, enable me to free myself from the obligation to shed your blood." "Follow your instructions," the Báb replied, "and if your intention be sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you from your perplexity."

Sám Khán ordered his men to drive a nail into the pillar...and to make fast two ropes to that nail, from which the Báb and His companion were to be separately suspended.... Muḥammad-‘Alí begged Sám Khán to be placed in such a manner that his own body would shield that of the Báb. He was eventually suspended in such a position that his head reposed on the breast of his Master. As soon as they were fastened, a regiment of soldiers ranged itself in three files, each of two hundred and fifty men, each of which was ordered to open fire in its turn until the whole detachment had discharged the volleys of its bullets. The smoke of the firing of the seven hundred and fifty rifles was such as to turn the light of the noonday sun into darkness. There had crowded on the roof of the barracks, as well as the tops of the adjoining houses, about ten thousand people, all of whom were witnesses to that sad and moving scene.

As soon as the cloud of smoke had cleared away, an astounded multitude were looking upon a scene which their eyes could scarcely believe. There, standing before them alive and unhurt, was the companion of the Báb, whilst He Himself had vanished uninjured from their sight. Though the cords with which they were suspended had been rent in pieces by the bullets, yet their bodies had miraculously escaped the volleys. Even the tunic which... Muḥammad-‘Alí was wearing had, despite the thickness of the smoke, remained unsullied.

"The Siyyid-i-Báb has gone from our sight!" rang out the voices of the bewildered multitude. They set out in a frenzied search for Him, and found Him, eventually, seated in the same room which He had occupied the night before, engaged in completing His interrupted conversation with Siyyid Ḥusayn. An expression of unruffled calm was upon His face. His body had emerged unscathed from the shower of bullets which the regiment had directed against Him. "I have finished My conversation with Siyyid Ḥusayn," the Báb told the farrásh-báshí. "Now you may proceed to fulfil your intention." The man was too much shaken to resume what he had already attempted. Refusing to

accomplish his duty, he that same moment left that scene and resigned his post....

Sám Khán was likewise stunned by the force of this tremendous revelation. He ordered his men to leave the barracks immediately, and refused ever again to associate himself and his regiment with any act that involved the least injury to the Bá**ab**. He swore, as he left that courtyard, never again to resume that task even though his refusal should entail the loss of his own life.

No sooner had Sám Khán departed than Áqá Ján Khán-i-Khamsih.... volunteered to carry out the order for execution. On the same wall and in the same manner, the Bá**ab** and His companion were again suspended, while the regiment formed in line to open fire upon them. The last words of the Bá**ab** to the gazing multitude were: "Had you believed in Me, O wayward generation, every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and willingly would have sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognised Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you."

The very moment the shots were fired, a gale of exceptional severity arose and swept over the whole city. A whirlwind of dust of incredible density obscured the light of the sun and blinded the eyes of the people. The entire city remained enveloped in that darkness from noon till night." As for the people of Tabríz, their witnessing the failure of the first regiment to injure the Bá**ab**, and the dust storm darkening the city did not induce them to pause and reflect upon the significance of such momentous events. Blinded they were, and blinded they remain.

The account in The Dawn-Breakers continues, "On the evening of that same day, the mangled bodies of the Bá**ab** and His companion were removed from the courtyard of the barracks to the edge of the moat outside the gate of the city. Four companies, each consisting of ten sentinels, were ordered to keep watch in turn over them. On the morning following the day of martyrdom, the Russian consul in Tabríz, accompanied by an artist, went to that spot and ordered that a sketch be made of the remains as they lay beside the moat....It was such a faithful portrait of the Bá**ab** that I looked upon! No bullet had struck His forehead, His cheeks, or His lips. I gazed upon a smile which seemed

to be still lingering upon His countenance. His body, however, had been severely mutilated. I could recognise the arms and head of His companion who seemed to be holding Him in his embrace. As I gazed horror-struck upon that haunting picture...my heart sank within me. I turned away my face in anguish and regaining my house locked myself within my room. For three days and three nights, I could neither sleep nor eat, so overwhelmed was I with emotion. That short and tumultuous life with all its sorrows, its turmoils, its banishments, and eventually the awe-inspiring martyrdom with which it had been crowned, seemed again to be re-enacted before my eyes....

(The Dawn-Breakers, p. 507-518)

The Guardian in his book, *God Passes By*, (p. 54-5) completes the picture: "In the middle of the following night a follower of the Báb, Hájí Sulaymán-Khán, succeeded...in removing the bodies to the silk factory owned by one of the believers of Milán, and laid them...in a...wooden casket, which he later transferred to a place of safety." Under the direction of Bahá'u'lláh, the remains were first moved to Tehran, and for nearly fifty years kept in hiding places. Finally, by the instruction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the remains of the Báb and His martyred companion were transferred to the Holy Land. In 1909 the sacred remains were permanently and ceremoniously laid to rest by Him in a specially erected mausoleum on the slopes of Mt. Carmel.

"Thus ended a life which posterity will recognize as standing at the confluence of two universal prophetic cycles, the Adamic Cycle stretching back as far as the first dawns of the world's recorded religious history and the Bahá'í Cycle destined to propel itself across the unborn reaches of time for a period of no less than five thousand centuries...." So momentous an event could hardly fail to arouse widespread and keen interest even beyond the confines of the land in which it had occurred.... "Many persons from all parts of the world," is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's written assertion, "set out for Persia and began to investigate wholeheartedly the matter." ...In countries as remote as those of Western Europe an interest no less profound was kindled, and spread with great rapidity to literary, artistic, diplomatic and intellectual circles....nowhere in the whole compass of the world's religious literature, except in the Gospels, do we find any record relating to the death of any of the religion-founders of the past comparable to the martyrdom suffered

by the Prophet of Shiráz....The passion of Jesus Christ, and indeed His whole public ministry, alone offer a parallel to the Mission and death of the Báb...." (GPB p.55-56)

All those involved in the killing of the Báb sooner or later met with dire and fatal consequences, details of which are found in the Guardian's writings. The following words of Bahá'u'lláh judges those who opposed, persecuted, and in the end cruelly martyred the Báb: "The more He exhorted them, the fiercer grew their enmity, till at the last, they put Him to death with shameful cruelty. The curse of God be upon the oppressors." (Gleanings, p. 146)

Now, the Tablet of Visitation:

The praise which hath dawned from Thy most august Self, and the glory which hath shone forth from Thy most effulgent Beauty, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art the Manifestation of Grandeur, and the King of Eternity, and the Lord of all who are in heaven and on earth! I testify that through Thee the sovereignty of God and His dominion, and the majesty of God and His grandeur, were revealed, and the Daystars of ancient splendor have shed their radiance in the heaven of Thine irrevocable decree, and the Beauty of the Unseen hath shone forth above the horizon of creation. I testify, moreover, that with but a movement of Thy Pen Thine injunction "Be Thou" hath been enforced, and God's hidden Secret hath been divulged, and all created things have been called into being, and all the Revelations have been sent down.

I bear witness, moreover, that through Thy beauty the beauty of the Adored One hath been unveiled, and through Thy face the face of the Desired One hath shone forth, and that through a word from Thee Thou hast decided between all created things, causing them who are devoted to Thee to ascend unto the summit of glory, and the infidels to fall into the lowest abyss.

I bear witness that he who hath known Thee hath known God, and he who hath attained unto Thy presence hath attained unto the presence of God.

Great, therefore, is the blessedness of him who hath believed in Thee, and in Thy signs, and hath humbled himself before Thy sovereignty, and hath been honored with meeting Thee, and hath attained the good pleasure of Thy will, and circled around Thee, and stood before Thy throne. Woe betide him that hath transgressed against Thee, and hath denied Thee, and repudiated Thy signs, and gainsaid Thy sovereignty, and risen up against Thee, and waxed

BIRTH OF THE BÁB

On that October 20th day of 1819 a most unique Child was born. He was named 'Alí-Muḥammad. His destiny was to usher in a new cycle in religious evolution. He was born in the city of nightingales and poets, Shiráz in southern Iran. Both of His parents were descendants of the prophet Muḥammad, signified by the prefix of Siyyid.

In a Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh glorifies the Báb in the following words:

"All praise be to Thee, O my God, inasmuch as Thou hast adorned the world with the splendour of the dawn following the night wherein was born the One Who heralded the Manifestation of Thy transcendent sovereignty, the Dayspring of Thy divine Essence and the Revelation of Thy supreme Lordship. I beseech Thee, O Creator of the heavens and Fashioner of names, to graciously aid those who have sheltered beneath the shadow of Thine abounding mercy and have raised their voices amidst the peoples of the world for the glorification of Thy name."

Bahá'u'lláh closes the Tablet with this utterance:

"This glorious Tablet hath been revealed on the Anniversary of the Birth (of the Báb) that thou mayest recite it in a spirit of humility and supplication and give thanks unto Thy Lord, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. Make thou every effort to render service unto God, that from thee may appear that which will immortalize thy memory in His glorious and exalted heaven.

Say: Glorified art Thou, O my God! I implore Thee by the Dawning-place of Thy signs and by the Revealer of Thy clear tokens to grant that I may, under all conditions, hold fast the cord of Thy loving providence and cling tenaciously to the hem of Thy generosity. Reckon me then with those whom the changes and chances of the world have failed to deter from serving Thee and from bearing allegiance unto Thee, whom the onslaught of the people hath been powerless to hinder from magnifying Thy Name and celebrating Thy praise. Graciously assist me, O my Lord, to do whatever Thou lovest and desirest. Enable me then to fulfil that which will exalt Thy Name and will set ablaze the fire of Thy love. Thou art, in truth, the Forgiving, the Bountiful.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 233-4)

The Báb less than 9 years old when His father passed away, and was raised by His maternal uncle, Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí, who later believed in Him and was martyred. That blessed uncle placed the Báb under the care of a tutor by the name of Shaykh ‘Abid. The Báb was not inclined to study but submitted to His uncle's will. Shaykh ‘Abid, a man of piety and learning, had been a disciple of the two luminaries, Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim. The memoirs of Shaykh ‘Abid about his most unusual and illustrious student are in the hands of his descendants who have not made it available to the Bahá'ís. You like to know that later on the Shaykh became a follower of the Báb.

(The Báb, Balyuzi, p. 231)

Of a few stories available from that period of the Báb's life one will be shared with you: Shaykh ‘Abid states that one day he asked the Báb to recite the opening words of the Qur'án: "Bismullá'hir-raḥmánir-raḥím" meaning "in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." The Báb hesitated and said unless He was told the significance of those words He would not recite them. The Shaykh pretended he did not know. Then the Báb stated, "I know and if you permit me I will explain it." The Shaykh states, "He spoke with such knowledge and fluency that I was struck with amazement, and in terms such as I had neither read or heard. The sweetness of His utterance still rings in my memory. I felt impelled to take Him back to His uncle and deliver into his hands the Trust he had committed to my care. I determined to tell him how unworthy I felt to teach so remarkable a Child. I found His uncle alone in his office and said, 'I have brought Him back to you and commit Him to your vigilant protection.' The uncle sternly rebuked the Báb and told Him 'Have you forgotten my instructions? Have I not already admonished you to follow the example of your fellow-pupils, to observe silence, and listen attentively to every word spoken by your teacher?' Then the uncle told the Báb to return to school. All together He had 6 or 7 years of schooling and after repeated evidence of His superhuman wisdom and innate knowledge, the uncle accepted to let the young Báb leave the school. (The Dawn-Breakers, p. 7276)

The following are the stories of the Báb's early years. It was related by Ḥájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'i, a veteran and distinguished believer in both the Báb and later in Bahá'u'lláh. He resided in Karbila but was a man of travel. One of His journeys took him to Shíráz when the Báb was about 9 years

old. While visiting the Báb's eldest uncle he states on one occasion he heard the melodious and enchanting voice of a young person chanting. Then the Báb came out of a room and the uncle introduced Him as his nephew who was orphaned. In another occasion Hájí's visit was at the time when the Báb returned from school, holding a batch of papers. Upon questioning, He told Hájí that they were His penmanship exercise. When Hájí looked at His penmanship he could not help but to marvel at its excellence. Sometime later Hájí saw the Báb in the port-city of Búshíhr working in association with His eldest uncle. The final visit was when the Báb in His early twenties went to Karbilá. It is gratifying to know that a man blest to watch the Báb as a child, youth and adult came to recognize the station of that Holy Youth.

(The Báb, Balyuzi, p. 37)

The Báb instructed all the Letters of the Living to disperse and spread the glad tidings of His appearance. However, they were forbidden to mention His name and identity. When Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámi arrived in Karbilá with the breathtaking news of the advent of the Báb, it rapidly spread far and wide. Of course, Hájí, a devout disciple of Siyyid Kázim, took it seriously, but was totally mystified as to who might be the person declaring such a claim. He invited Mullá 'Alí to his house and tried various approaches to find the identity of the one claiming to be the Báb. He was told over and over by Mullá Ali that it was forbidden to mention His name. Badly frustrated he resorted to force. By his own admission, Hájí Javád grabbed the arms of Mullá 'Alí, pushed him against the wall and exclaimed, "What am I to do with you? Kill you?" Gasping for breath, Mullá 'Alí said, "You are a learned man and know well what the word forbidden means." Then without any forethought, Mullá 'Alí said that the Báb had instructed him to gather all of the letters which the Báb had written to people in Karbilá and send them to Him. Hájí Javád states as soon as Mullá 'Alí mentioned the letters, he had in a flash a mental picture of Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad. Hájí let go of Mullá 'Alí and went to get the letters he had from Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad. When Mullá 'Alí saw the Báb's seal on them he burst into tears and so did his host, Hájí Javád. They wept for joy and between his sobs Mullá 'Alí kept repeating, "I did not mention any name to you. It is forbidden." (The Báb, Balyuzi, p. 39)

The Báb, after 6 or 7 years of schooling with Shaykh 'Abid in all probability left the school before He was 13. He joined His two uncles in business as a merchant when He was 15 years old. Then shortly afterwards at age 16, He moved to the seaport city of Búshihr in association with His eldest uncle. Because of his skill and uncompromised honesty, He soon took over the complete management of the trading house there. When about 22 years old He went for pilgrimage to Karbilá. Upon His return at the age of 23, He married Khadíjih Bagum. From that union a son named Ahmad was born who died soon after birth, in 1843. (The Báb, Balyzi, p. 39)

We close with these words in praise of the Báb from one of the prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh:

Magnify Thou, O Lord my God, Him Who is the Primal Point, the Divine Mystery, the Unseen Essence, the Dayspring of Divinity, and the Manifestation of Thy Lordship, through Whom all the knowledge of the past and all the knowledge of the future were made plain, through Whom the pearls of Thy hidden wisdom were uncovered, and the mystery of Thy treasured name disclosed, Whom Thou hast appointed as the Announcer of the One through Whose name the letter B and the letter E have been joined and united, through Whom Thy majesty, Thy sovereignty and Thy might were made known, through Whom Thy words have been sent down, and Thy laws set forth with clearness, and Thy signs spread abroad, and Thy Word established, through Whom the hearts of Thy chosen ones were laid bare, and all that were in the heavens and all that were on the earth were gathered together, Whom Thou hast called 'Alí-Muhammad in the kingdom of Thy names, and the Spirit of Spirits in the Tablets of Thine irrevocable decree, Whom Thou hast invested with Thine own title, unto Whose name all other names have, at Thy bidding and through the power of Thy might, been made to return, and in Whom Thou hast caused all Thine attributes and titles to attain their final consummation. To Him also belong such names as lay hid within Thy stainless tabernacles, in Thine invisible world and Thy sanctified cities." (Bahá'í Prayers, p. 258-9)

BIRTH OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh addresses Tehran with these words: (para. 92)
"Rejoice with great joy, for God hath made thee 'the Dayspring of His light,' inasmuch as within thee was born the Manifestation of His Glory. Be thou glad for this name that hath been conferred upon thee - a name through which the Daystar of grace hath shed its splendor, through which both earth and heaven have been illumined."

On that dawn of November 12, 1817, when ordinary people were fast asleep, a visionary holy man was awake realizing who was born at that hour. His name was Hájí Hasan from Ná'in (Dawn-Breakers p. 8) His disciple has related these stories to Nabil, the historian, states: "I heard him one day after he had offered his morning prayer speak words as these: 'Erelong will the earth be turned to paradise. Erelong will Persia be made the shrine round which will circle the peoples of the earth.'" On the morning of November 12, 1817, at the hour of dawn the disciple found Hájí Hasan, "...fallen upon his face, repeating in wrapt devotion the words "Alláh-u-Akbar," (meaning God is Most Great.) He states " To my great surprise he turned to me and said, 'That which I have been announcing to you is now revealed. At this very hour the light of the promised One has broken and is shedding illumination upon the world.'"

The words which that holy man spoke to him kept ringing in his ears until he heard of the advent of the Báb, but when he inquired from His followers about the date of His birth it did not correspond with November 12, 1817. Matter of fact, it was 2 years later. However, when Bahá'u'lláh was in Baghdad, he learned that the hour and the date of His birth was exactly when Hájí Hasan had recognized it and announced it to him. That disciple of Hájí Hasan told Nabil, "...I fell prostrate on the ground and exclaimed: 'Glorified art Thou, O my God, for having enabled me to attain unto this promised Day. If now I be called to Thee, I die content and assured.'" That very year he passed away. (The Dawn-Breakers, p. 8-9)

Mírzá Husayn-'Alí, who in 1863 assumed the name Bahá'u'lláh, was born and raised in Tehran. His geneology goes to Yazdigird III, the last king of the Sássánian dynasty and to Zoroaster, prophet of Persia in ancient times. Bahá'u'lláh's father,

Mírzá 'Abbás, from the district of Núr, was a man of nobility and had a position in the royal court. His title given by the king was Mírzá Buzurg-i-Vazír. Vazír is a title for anyone holding a position in the court. Bahá'u'lláh's mother, Khadíjih Khánum, had been married before and had three children. When she was widowed, Mírzá Buzurg married her. Bahá'u'lláh was the third child from that union.

The infancy of Bahá'u'lláh was a cause of astonishment to his mother as He never cried. When only 5 or 6 years old, He dreamt that He was in a garden where huge birds were flying overhead and attacking Him, but they could not harm Him. Then He went to bathe in the sea and there He was attacked by fishes, but they, too, could cause Him no injury. Bahá'u'lláh related this strange dream to His father who sent for a man who interpreted dreams. After the ritual of calculations, he told Bahá'u'lláh's father that the expanse of the sea was this world in its entirety, and the birds and fishes were the peoples of the world assailing his son, because He would promulgate something of vital importance related to the minds of men, but they would be powerless to harm Him. He would triumph over them all. (King of Glory, p. 19-23)

It is related that one day when Bahá'u'lláh was seven years old, as He was walking His parents were watching Him, and His mother remarked that He was a little short in stature. His father replied, "That matters not. Do you not know how intelligent He is and what a wonderful mind He has!"

When Bahá'u'lláh was a child His father saw an unusual dream which was somewhat alarming. He dreamt that Bahá'u'lláh appeared to be swimming in a vast limitless ocean. Around His head, which could distinctly be seen above the waters, there radiated in all directions His long, jet black locks, flowing in great profusion above the waves. In that dream he saw that a multitude of fishes gathered around Him each one holding fast to the end of one hair. They followed Him in whatsoever direction He swam, holding tight to each hair but could not detach a single hair from His head. Greatly impressed by this dream, the father summoned a dream interpreter who gave a similar interpretation as the one before. Later on that interpreter was taken to look at Bahá'u'lláh. Among his comments, one particularly stands out. He said, "Every expression in that face revealed to his eyes a sign of His concealed glory." From that day on His father became more passionately devoted to Him.

The education which Bahá'u'lláh received was limited both in nature and extent. As He Himself states in the Tablet to the king of Persia:

"The learning current amongst men I studied not; their schools I entered not. Ask of the city where I dwelt, that thou mayest be well-assured that I am not of them who speak falsely."

In those days, the sons of noble houses were taught in matters such as horsemanship, handling a gun, wielding a sword, calligraphy, classical literature, and knowledge of the Holy Book, the Qur'án. By the time Bahá'u'lláh was fourteen, His rare understanding, His complete mastery of reason and logic, and His unparalleled power of exposition, were remarked upon in all circles. However, He never was assertive or argumentative, rather, always courteous and patient. Only one thing offended Him greatly and that was when anyone made a disrespectful reference to the Messengers of God. Even then, He would admonish the offender with kindness and calm.

In a tablet, Baha'u'llah tells of an incident in His childhood when two hugely-turbaned divines were expounding on some theological questions. One such question was whether the angel Gabriel had a higher station than the slave of Imám 'Alí. Bahá'u'lláh writes that His response to that question was that Gabriel was the One through Whom the Holy Spirit descended upon Muḥammad, then even the master of that slave, namely Imám 'Alí had no entry to that station. There are many stories revealing His innate knowledge. You may wonder if the young Bahá'u'lláh knew who He was before He received His Mission in the Síyah-Chál at the age of 35.

Bahá'u'lláh, in a tablet, states that as a child a transformation occurred and the ocean of utterance began to surge within Him and never stopped. (tape of Tahirzadeh) 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that a prophet of God is born a prophet, but is like a lamp under a bushel. When He receives His mission, that is the time that the covering is removed and the light shines forth. Or He is like a sleeping man in whom all faculties and powers are latent until he wakes up.

Let us now celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Prince of Peace, Bahá'u'lláh, and be grateful that we live in this Day of Days which Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, "This is the Day whereon naught can be seen except the splendors of

the light that shineth from the face of thy Lord, the Gracious, the Most Bountiful.

(GPB 93-7)

The Birth of Bahá'u'lláh is the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision in every regard, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

(Isaiah 9:6, 7)

DAY OF THE COVENANT

November 26

When some believers asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá if they could celebrate His birthday, He told them that because it falls on the Declaration of the Báb, that day should be devoted only to the anniversary of the Declaration; however, He designated November 26 as the Day of the Covenant to celebrate Bahá'u'lláh's appointment of the Center of His Covenant. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Balyuzi, p. 523)

The Day of the Covenant reminds us how blessed and fortunate we are for living in this Day, which as prophesied "...shall not be followed by night." (GPB p. 245) The Báb stated that the day in the cycle of any religion is when the Manifestation is living and the night comes after His passing when luminaries guide the people. (Sel. Writings of the Báb, p. 129) However, in religions of the past such guidance failed to preserve the unity of the followers and integrity of the teachings and laws. Now that humanity is approaching maturity it can understand and obey the covenant through which the Cause of God is protected from all of the contentions and misfortunes of the past. (Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, Taherzadeh, p. 159)

This is a pen-portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá given by Professor Browne, the eminent orientalist, who met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1890, when he came to 'Akká for the purpose of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. The following is what he wrote about 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then 46 years old. "Seldom have I seen one whose appearance impressed me more. A tall strongly-built man holding himself straight as an arrow, with white turban and raiment, long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder, broad powerful forehead indicating a strong intellect combined with an unswerving will, eyes keen as a hawk's, and strongly marked but pleasing features---such was my first impression of 'Abbás Effendi, 'the master'...as he...is called.... Subsequent conversation with him served only to heighten the respect with which his appearance had from the first inspired me. One more eloquent of speech,...more

apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could...scarcely be found.... These qualities, combined with a bearing at once majestic and genial, made me cease to wonder at the influence and esteem which he enjoyed even beyond the circle of his father's followers. About the greatness of this man and his power no one who had seen him could entertain a doubt." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Balyuzi, p. 4-5)

Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces towards Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root." Later, in the Book of His Covenant, referring to this verse, Bahá'u'lláh explicitly states: "The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch." 'Abdu'l-Bahá was known as the Most Mighty Branch or the Most Great Branch.

A passage from the Tablet of the Branch revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople 25 years before His passing will be recited. "...well is it with him that hath sought His shelter and abideth beneath His shadow. Verily the Limb of the Law of God hath sprung forth from this Root which God hath firmly implanted in the Ground of His Will, and Whose Branch hath been so uplifted as to encompass the whole of creation.... 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...." (WOB, p. 135)

According to the writings of Shoghi Effendi, the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not have the same rank as the words of Bahá'u'lláh but have the same validity. In the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi states, "Exalted as is the rank of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and how profuse the praises with which...Bahá'u'lláh has glorified His son, so unique a distinction must never be construed as conferring upon its recipient a station identical with or equivalent to that of His Father, the Manifestation Himself." (WOB, p. 136-8)

May we all be worthy of such a gift from Bahá'u'lláh - His Covenant and its Center, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We need to pray for firmness in the Covenant which is not only belief in the infallibility of the authorized successorship, but also obedience to them. (The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, Taherzadeh, p. 267)

We will close with this prayer from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

"O God, my God! Shield Thy trusted servants from the evils of self and passion, protect them with the watchful eye of Thy loving kindness from all rancor, hate and envy, shelter them in the impregnable stronghold of Thy Care and, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, make them the manifestations of Thy glorious Signs, illumine their faces with the effulgent rays shed from the Dayspring of Thy divine unity, gladden their hearts with the verses revealed from Thy holy kingdom, strengthen their loins by Thine all-swaying power that cometh from Thy realm of glory. Thou art the All-Bountiful, the Protector, the Almighty, the Gracious. (Bahá'í Prayers, p. 135-6)

ASCENSION OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

November 28, 1921

The mission of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was fast approaching its end. His allusions about the nearness of the hour mostly fell on deaf ears because life without 'Abdu'l-Bahá was unthinkable.

Here are the words of Shoghi Effendi on the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:
(GPB 309-11) "'Abdu'l-Bahá's great work was now ended. The historic Mission with which His Father had 29 years previously invested Him had been gloriously consummated."

"Several years before He had thus alluded to His passing: 'O ye My faithful loved ones! Should at any time afflicting events come to pass in the Holy Land, never feel disturbed or agitated. Fear not, neither grieve. For whatsoever thing happeneth will cause the Word of God to be exalted....Remember, whether or not I be on earth, My presence will be with you always.'"

"In a Tablet addressed to the American believers, a few days before He passed away, He thus voiced His pent-up longing to depart from this world: 'I have renounced the world and the people thereof...In the cage of this world I flutter even as a frightened bird, and yearn every day to take My flight unto Thy Kingdom. Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá! Make me drink of the cup of sacrifice, and set Me free.'"

"Through the dreams He dreamed, through the conversations He held, through the Tablets He revealed, it became increasingly evident that His end was fast approaching." "...whilst occupying a solitary room in the garden of His house, He recounted another dream to those around Him. 'I dreamed a dream,' He said, 'and behold, the Blessed Beauty came and said to Me, 'Destroy this room.'"

"A month before His death (which occurred ...in the early hours of November 28, 1921) He had referred expressly to it.... And about two weeks before His passing He had spoken to His faithful gardener in a manner that clearly indicated He knew His end to be nigh. 'I am so fatigued,' He observed to him, 'the hour is come when I must leave everything and take my flight. I am too weary to walk.'"

"Till the very last day of His earthly life 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued to shower that

same love upon high and low alike.... On the Friday before His passing, despite great fatigue, He attended the noonday prayer at the mosque, and distributed afterwards alms, as was His custom, among the poor; dictated some Tablets - the last ones He revealed-; blessed the marriage of a trusted servant, which He had insisted should take place that day;...felt feverish the next day, and being unable to leave the house on the following Sunday, sent all the believers to the Tomb of the Báb to attend a feast...on the occasion of the anniversary of the Declaration of the Covenant; received with His unfailing courtesy and kindness that same afternoon...the Muftí of Haifa, the Mayor and the Head of the Police; and inquired that night - the last of His life...after the health of every member of His household, of the pilgrims and the friends in Haifa."

Now we go to a narrative written by Shoghi Effendi and Lady Blomfield called the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Balyuzi, p. 462)

"At 8 in the evening, He retired to bed after taking a little nourishment, saying: 'I am quite well.' He told the family to go to bed and rest. Two of his daughters, however, stayed with Him. That night the Master had gone to sleep very calmly, quite free from fever.

"He awoke about 1:15 am, got up and walked across to a table where He drank some water. He took off an outer garment, saying: 'I am too warm.' He went back to bed and when his daughter Rúhá Khánúm, later on approached, she found Him lying peacefully and, as He looked into her face, He asked her to lift up the net curtains, saying, 'I have difficulty in breathing, give me more air.' Some rose-water was brought of which he drank, sitting up in bed to do so without any help. He again laid down, and as some food was offered Him, He remarked in a clear and distinct voice: 'You wish me to take some food, and I am going?' He gave them a beautiful look. His face was so calm, His expression so serene, they thought Him asleep...

They eyes that had always looked out with loving-kindness upon humanity, whether friends or foes, were now closed. The hands that had ever been stretched forth to give alms to the poor and the needy...had now finished their labor. The feet that, with untiring zeal, had gone upon the ceaseless errands of the Lord of Compassion were now at rest. The lips that had so eloquently championed the cause of the suffering sons of men were now hushed in silence....His glorious spirit

had passed from the life of earth, from the persecutions of the enemies of righteousness, from the sorrow and stress of well nigh eighty years of undefatigable toil for the good of others."

Balyuzi writes: "Sorrow and anguish were most intense. But decisions had to be taken, preparations had to be made. First of all, where was to be the resting-place of the earthly remains of 'Abdu'l-Bahá? It was remembered that there was another vault next to the vault where the remains of the Báb lay. The Greatest Holy Leaf, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, decided that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tomb should be there. The funeral of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was indeed a funeral the like of which the Holy Land had never witnessed."

In the words of Shoghi Effendi and Lady Blomfield: "The High Commissioner of Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, the Governor of Jerusalem, the Governor of Phoenicia, the chief officials of the government, the counsels of the various countries resident in Haifa, the head of the various religious communities...all about ten thousand in number, mourning the loss of their Beloved one.... The sacred coffin was upraised on the shoulders of loved ones. Immediately behind it came the members of his family, next to them walked the officials.

The casket appeared in a distance to be borne aloft by invisible hands, so high above the heads of the people was it carried. After 2 hours walking, they reached the garden of the Tomb of the Báb. Tenderly was the sacred coffin placed upon a plain table covered with a fair white table cloth."

"After the funeral orations were delivered, the High Commissioner stepped forth to perform his act of homage and other officials followed him. Then came the moment when the casket passed slowly ...into its simple, hallowed resting-place."

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, entrusted to the care of the Greatest Holy Leaf, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, was in a sealed envelope, addressed to Shoghi Effendi. Its contents could not be made known until Shoghi Effendi reached Haifa. He was at Oxford in England when 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed away. After his arrival on January third 1922 the Will was read to the senior males of the household and four days later to all the believers there. Then on January sixteen the Greatest Holy Leaf sent the following cable to the Bahá'ís of the world: "In Will Shoghi Effendi appointed Guardian of Cause and Head of House of Justice". ('Abdu'l-Bahá by Balyuzi, p. 482).

Some years before His passing 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written a prayer with this preface:
"Whoso reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervor will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant; it will be even as meeting Him face to face."

(pause)

He is the All-Glorious! O God, my God! Lowly and tearful, I raise my suppliant hands to Thee and cover my face in the dust of that Threshold of Thine, exalted above the knowledge of the learned, and the praise of all that glorify Thee. Graciously look upon Thy servant, humble and lowly at Thy door, with the glances of the eye of Thy mercy, and immerse him in the Ocean of Thine eternal grace. Lord! He is a poor and lowly servant of Thine, enthralled and imploring Thee, trusting in Thee, in tears before Thy face, calling to Thee and beseeching Thee, saying: O Lord, my God! Give me Thy grace to serve Thy loved ones, strengthen me in my servitude to Thee, illumine my brow with the light of adoration in Thy court of holiness, and of prayer to Thy kingdom of grandeur. Help me to be selfless at the heavenly entrance of Thy gate, and aid me to be detached from all things within Thy holy precincts. Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones, and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path, O Lord of Glory in the Highest. With this prayer doth Thy servant call Thee, at dawntide and in the night-season. Fulfill his heart's desire, O Lord! Illumine his heart, gladden his bosom, kindle his light, that he may serve Thy Cause and Thy servants. Thou art the Bestower, the Pitiful, the Most Bountiful, the Gracious, the Merciful, the Compassionate. (Bahá'í Prayers. p. 234-5)