

The Epistle of the Báb to The Greatest Uncle, Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí, Revealed in Isfahán

Mohammad Norozi¹

24.10.2025

Introduction and Background:

The Báb departed from Shíráz towards the end of September 1846, with the intention of proceeding ultimately to Tīhrán to seek an audience with Muḥammad Sháh Qájár. On the way, He sojourned for approximately six months in Isfahán, where He was the honored guest of Manūchehr Khān Mu‘tamid al-Dawlih,² the governor of the province. During this period, the Báb revealed several Tablets of exceptional theological and historical significance. Among these are the Commentary on the Surah of Val-‘Asr, revealed at the request of Imām Jumih of Isfahán, and the Tablet of Nabūwat-i Khāṣṣah (The Special Prophethood of Muḥammad), revealed at the request of Manūchehr Khān himself.

The present Epistle, addressed to His uncle, Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí (the “Greatest Uncle”),³ was revealed in Arabic and is particularly noteworthy because the Báb specifies the exact date of its revelation—on Friday, the seventh day of Dhū’l-Ḥijjah, 1262 A.H. (27 November 1846 C.E.).

Furthermore, the Epistle alludes to an intended *mubáhalah* (mutual imprecation)⁴ that was to take place publicly in the Masjid-i-Jámi‘ of Isfahán, on either the Day of ‘Arafah (9 Dhū’l-Ḥijjah)⁵ or the Day of Sacrifice (10 Dhū’l-Ḥijjah).⁶ This solemn encounter was meant to be held between the Báb and the divines of Isfahán, invoking the judgment of God between truth and falsehood. The Báb explicitly refers to this anticipated event, indicating that the matter would reach its fulfilment, “*through confrontation with the divines—whensoever they gather on the Day of ‘Arafah or on the Day of Sacrifice—for the purpose of mutual imprecation.*” However, this meeting never came to pass, for the divines failed to appear.

Presented below is a provisional English rendering of this sacred Epistle, offered for scholarly study and reflection. The typed version of the original text has been previously published in Abú’l-Qásim Afnán, *Ādh-i-‘Alá*, p. 231, which has served as the principal textual basis for the present translation and ensures fidelity to the original Arabic script. The very same Epistle of the Báb is also reproduced in *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Tārīkh Zuhūr al-Bābiyyah wa’l-Bahā’iyyah* (Persian–Arabic edition, vol. 1, p. 105) by ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Āvárīh. In this latter source, however, the year noted at the

¹ Contact email address: nsm_dist@hotmail.com.

² Manūchehr Khān Mu‘tamid al-Dawlih (d. 9 February 1847), a capable and enlightened statesman of Georgian origin, was among the more competent administrators of the Qájár era. Noted for his firmness and tolerance, he played a key role in maintaining order amid the political and religious unrest of his time.

³ Abú’l-Qásim Afnán, *Ādh-i-‘Alá*, p. 231, indicates that this Epistle was revealed in honor of Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí, the maternal uncle of the Báb.

⁴ The term *mubáhalah* (مباہلة) refers to the Qur’ānic practice of invoking the curse of God upon the liar (cf. *Qur’ān* 3:61). Historically, it denotes a solemn confrontation wherein contending parties beseech God to destroy whosoever is false in claim. The Báb’s reference to a *mubáhalah* “with the divines” points to His challenge to the leading ‘ulamā’ of Isfahán. The Báb had called upon them to meet Him publicly on either the Day of ‘Arafah or the Day of Sacrifice (the ninth and tenth days of Dhū’l-Ḥijjah) to invoke God’s judgment upon the liar. The challenge was never accepted. The event recalls similar prophetic precedents and exemplifies the Báb’s fearlessness in upholding His mission before the religious authorities.

⁵ The Day of ‘Arafah is the ninth day of the Islamic month of Dhū’l-Ḥijjah, observed by pilgrims in Mecca as the day on which they stand in vigil on the plain of ‘Arafah, seeking divine forgiveness and mercy. It is the day immediately preceding the festival of Eid al-Adha (Day of Sacrifice) and holds profound theological significance in Islamic ritual practice.

⁶ The Day of Sacrifice, or Eid al-Adha, falls on the tenth day of Dhū’l-Ḥijjah, immediately following the Day of ‘Arafah. It commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham (Ibrāhīm) to offer his son in obedience to God, and is observed by Muslims through ritual sacrifice and acts of devotion.

conclusion of the Epistle is erroneously given as 1263 A.H. (1847 C.E.), instead of 1262 A.H. (1846 C.E.)—a discrepancy that is historically untenable, since by 1263 A.H. the Báb had already been confined within the fortress of Mákú.

Thus Doth the Báb Reveal:

“In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Praise be unto God, Who hath conferred upon Me the favour of tribulation, and I glorify Him for what hath befallen Me of adversity and affliction at the hands of the idolaters and the rebellious—without justice or right.

Verily, unto God do I complain of My sorrow and My grief; and they who have committed wrong shall soon learn unto what end they shall return.

And now: that which thou didst inscribe has reached Me, and I have beheld that which has shone forth from the radiance of thy love. May God reward thee for all that thou hast wrought in His Cause, and for thy resolute striving in His path.

By Him in Whose hand is My soul! Those who have quaffed from the chalice of love—they indeed are secure; but those who turn away from the authority of the Guardianship—they verily are lost. How, then, can I begin to recount that which hath befallen Me upon that land?⁷ Verily, the ink would prove insufficient, and the tablet cannot contain it. Yet a mere allusion thereto may suffice to acquaint thee with some of what overwhelmed Me.

The matter began thus: when I departed from that land to present My case before Him Whom God hath made sovereign of the earth,⁸ I arrived at this land⁹ and alighted thereon by the leave of His Excellency Mu‘tamid al-Dawlih—may God perpetuate his honour and bestow upon him from His bounty that which befits his station.

In truth, he hath not fallen short in devotion or in mercy. Indeed, one night, in his very presence and in the company of certain men, there befell that which God willed and ordained. And the matter shall be consummated, if God so willeth, through confrontation with the divines—whensoever they gather on the Day of ‘Arafah or on the Day of Sacrifice—for the purpose of mutual imprecation (mubáhalah). Such was the decree I pronounced among them.

⁷ The phrase “upon that land” refers to the Báb’s native city of Shíráz, where, upon His return from pilgrimage, He was met with fierce opposition and grievous mistreatment at the hands of Ḥusayn Khán, the Governor of Fárs, the ‘ulamā’ of Shíráz, and the ignorant populace of the city.

⁸ The phrase “Him Whom God hath made sovereign of the earth” refers to Muḥammad Sháh Qájár (r. 1834–1848), the reigning monarch of Iran at the time of the Báb’s ministry.

⁹ The phrase “this land” refers to the city of Isfáhán, where the Báb resided for several months in late 1846, enjoying the protection and hospitality of Manūchehr Khán Mu‘tamid al-Dawlih, the governor of the province.

Soon shall God vindicate the Truth through His words, and expose the deeds of all people. We shall journey to the court of nearness unto the King of Bounty.¹⁰ When thou hearest of this, be thou present there and bear witness to what thou hast beheld of the deeds of the ignorant.

Verily, we are God's, and unto our Lord shall we return. Peace be upon thee, and upon Aḥmad,¹¹ and upon him to whom thou didst write in reply, and upon those who have followed the Cause of God, and upon those who, in their footsteps, shall yet follow.

This day shall be fulfilled that which I promised thee—five minutes before noon.

Dated Friday, the seventh day of the month of Dhū'l-Ḥijjah al-Ḥarām,¹² in the year 1262 A.H.¹³

¹⁰ The phrase “*the King of Bounty*” refers to Muḥammad Shāh Qājār (r. 1834–1848), the reigning monarch of Iran at the time of the Báb's ministry.

¹¹ The name “Aḥmad” possibly refers to Mullá ‘Abdu'l-Karím Qazvíní—also known as Mírzá Aḥmad-i-Kátib (“the Scribe”) or Mírzá Aḥmad-i-Qazvíní—who was among the Báb's secretaries, a teacher of Nábíl-i-Zarandí, and later a close associate of Bahá'u'lláh.

¹² The epithet *al-Ḥarām* literally means “the sacred” or “the inviolable,” and is traditionally appended to the name of the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, *Dhū'l-Ḥijjah*, in recognition of its sanctity. This month is distinguished by the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) and the rites of sacrifice (*ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā*), and its designation as *al-Ḥarām* underscores its spiritual eminence in Islamic and subsequent Bahá'í historical contexts.

¹³ The date recorded by the Báb—*Friday, the seventh of Dhū'l-Ḥijjah 1262 A.H.*—corresponds, according to the observational lunar calendar then current in Persia, to 27 November 1846 C.E. In the arithmetical (tabular) Hijrī calendar, the same day aligns with 25 November 1846 (Wednesday). The divergence arises from the difference between the *actual sighting* of the new moon, on which the Persian calendar was based, and the *computed lunar cycle* employed in modern conversions. The Báb's own designation of the weekday, however, confirms the accuracy of the Friday, 27 November 1846 reckoning.

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(According to a Typed Copy)**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله الذي من على بالبلاء و احمده بما نزل على من البأساء و الضراء بما فعل بغير حق اهل الشرك والعصيان و انا الى الله اشكو بثى و حزنى و سيعلم الذين ظلموا اى منقلب ينقلبون و بعد قد نزل ما سطرت من عندك و اطلعت بما اشرقت من حبك فجزاك الله بما عملت في دين الله و تريد فى سبيل الله فوالذى نفسى بيده ان الشاربيين من كأس المحبة هم الأمنون و أن المعرضين عن حكم الولاية هم الخاسرون فكيف افضل ذكر ما قضى على على تلك الارض و أن المداد لنفى و اللوح لا يسع ولكن الاشارة اليه يعرفك بعض ما جرى البداء بالامضاء و هو لما هاجرت من تلك الارض لعرض الحال الى الذي جعله الله ملك الارض قد بلغت الى هذه الارض و نزلت عليها باذن حضرة معتمد دولة العالى ادام الله اقباله و جزاه الله من عناياته كما هو اهله فبالحقيقة ما قصر عن التوجه و الرحمة و لقد وقع ليلة في محضره مع بعض الرجال ما اراد الله و شاء و ليتم الامر اذا شاء الله مع العلماء اذا حضروا يوم العرفة او الاضحى للمباهلة و ان ذلك كان حكى بينهم فسوف يحق الله الحق بكلماته و يظهر عمل الناس اجمعين فسوف نساقر الى ساحة قرب ملك الفضل فاذا سمعت فاحضر هنالك و اظهر ما رأيت من عمل الجاهلين فانا لله و انا الى

ربنا لمنقلبون

والسلام عليك و على احمد و على الذى أجبتة بالكتاب و على الذين اتبعوا امر الله و الذينهم بهم يلحقون اليوم يقضى ما وعدتك به في قرب الزوال بخمس دقيقة. مورخة

يوم الجمعة سابع شهر ذى الحجة الحرام سنة ١٢٦٢