

The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

By Susan Gammage ¹

The story which follows was taken from H.M. Balyuzi's book: *Abdu'l-Bahá - The Centre of the Covenant*, p. 452-460). The program itself takes about 50 minutes. I hope you enjoy it.



In the land that we know as the Holy Land, in all its turbulent history of the last two thousand years, there had never been an event which could unite all its inhabitants of diverse faiths and origins and purposes, in a single expression of thought and feeling, as did the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Jews and Christians and Muslims and Druzes, of all persuasions and denominations; Arabs and Turks and Kurds and Armenians and other ethnic groups were united in mourning His passing, in being

aware of a great loss they had suffered. (p. 453)

Video: *Behold a Candle*: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2nA7NaV_F4

Shoghi Effendi and Lady Blomfield wrote, in *The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*:

We have now come to realize that the Master knew the day and hour when, his mission on earth being finished, he would return to the shelter of heaven. He was, however, careful that his family should not have any premonition of the coming sorrow. It seemed as though their eyes were veiled by him, with his ever-loving consideration for his dear ones, that they should not see the significance of certain dreams and other signs of the culminating event. This they now realize was his thought for them, in order that their strength might be preserved to face the great ordeal when it should arrive, that they should not be devitalized by anguish of mind in its anticipation. (p. 457)

The night of July 10th 1921 'Abdu'l-Bahá was on Mount Carmel by the Shrine of the Báb. There, He revealed a Tablet and a prayer in honour of a 'kinsman of the Báb', who had died recently. 'Abdu'l-Bahá beseeched God, in that prayer, for His own release from this world. He spoke of His 'loneliness', of being 'broken-winged', 'submerged in seas of sorrows':

'O Lord! My bones are weakened, and the hoar hairs glisten on My head ... and I have now reached old age, failing in My powers ... No strength is there left in Me wherewith to arise and serve Thy loved ones ... O Lord, My Lord! Hasten My ascension unto Thy sublime Threshold ... and My arrival at the Door of Thy grace beneath the shadow of Thy most great mercy ...'

That prayer was answered less than five months later. He passed away in the early hours of November 28th. (p.452)

¹ Prepared by David Bowie (2023) for posting, with permission of author, at https://bahai-library.com/gammage_holy_day_programs

Out of the many signs of the approach of the hour when he could say of his work on earth: 'It is finished', the following two dreams seem remarkable. Less than eight weeks before his passing the Master related this to his family:

'I seemed to be standing within a great Mosque ... in the place of the Imam himself. I became aware that a large number of people were flocking into the Mosque; more and yet more crowded in, taking their places in rows behind me, until there was a vast multitude. As I stood I raised loudly the "Call to Prayer". Suddenly the thought came to me to go forth from the Mosque.

'When I found myself outside I said within myself, "For what reason came I forth, not having led the prayer? But it matters not; now that I have uttered the Call to Prayer, the vast multitude will of themselves chant the prayer ..."'



A few weeks after the preceding dream the Master came in from the solitary room in the garden, which he had occupied of late, and said:

'I dreamed a dream and behold the Blessed Beauty ... came and said unto me, "Destroy this room!"'

The family, who had been wishing that he would come and sleep in the house, not being happy that he should be alone at night, exclaimed, 'Yes Master, we think your dream means that you should leave that room and come into the house.' When he heard this from us, he smiled meaningly as though not agreeing with our interpretation. Afterwards we understood that by the 'room' was meant the temple of his body.

A month before his last hour, Doctor Sulayman Rafat Bey, a Turkish friend, who was a guest in the house, received a telegram telling him of the sudden death of his brother. 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaking words of comfort to him, whispered, 'Sorrow not, for he is only transferred from this plane to a higher one; I too shall soon be transferred, for my days are numbered.' Then patting him gently on the shoulder, he looked him in the face and said, 'And it will be in the days that are shortly to come.'

In the same week he revealed a Tablet to America, in which is the following prayer:

'Ya Baha'í'l-Abha! (O Thou the Glory of Glories) I have renounced the world and the people thereof, and am heart-broken and sorely afflicted because of the unfaithful. In the cage of this world, I flutter even as a frightened bird, and yearn every day to take my flight unto Thy Kingdom.

'Ya Baha'í'l-Abha! Make me to drink of the cup of sacrifice and set me free. Relieve me from these woes and trials, from these afflictions and troubles. Thou art He that aideth, that succoureth, that protecteth, that stretcheth forth the hand of help.' (pp. 457-458)

His good and faithful servant, Isma'il Aqa, relates the following: 'Some time, about twenty days before my Master passed away I was near the garden when I heard him summon an old believer saying:

"Come with me that we may admire together the beauty of the garden. Behold, what the spirit of devotion is able to achieve! This flourishing place was, a few years ago, but a heap of stones, and now it is verdant with foliage and flowers. My desire is that after I am gone, the loved ones may all arise to serve the Divine Cause and, please God, so it shall be. Ere long men will arise who shall bring life to the world."

'A few days after this he said: "I am so fatigued! The hour is come when I must leave everything and take my flight. I am too weary to walk." Then he said: "It was during the closing days of the Blessed Beauty, when I was engaged in gathering together His papers, which were strewn over the sofa in His writing chamber at Bahji that He turned to me and said, 'It is of no use to gather them, I must leave them and flee away.'

"I also have finished my work, I can do nothing more, therefore must I leave it and take my departure."(p.459)

'Three days before his ascension whilst seated in the garden, he called me [Isma'il Aqa] and said, "I am sick with fatigue. Bring two of your oranges for me that I may eat them for your sake." This I did, and he having eaten them turned to me, saying "Have you any of your sweet lemons?" He bade me fetch a few ... Whilst I was plucking them, he came over to the tree, saying, "Nay, but I must gather them with my own hands." Having eaten of the fruit he turned to me and asked "Do you desire anything more?" Then with a pathetic gesture of his hands, he touchingly, emphatically and deliberately said:

"Now it is finished, it is finished!"

'These significant words penetrated my very soul. I felt each time he uttered them as if a knife were struck into my heart. I understood his meaning but never dreamed his end was so nigh.' (pp. 459-460)

John Bosch was one of those whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose as a companion for the time when He should leave the world. Afterward, the friends saw that the Master knew the moment of His passing and had prepared for it. Some who had asked permission to visit Him at that time, He had gently turned away. But to John He had written, 'I am longing to see you,' and when John and Louise, responding, asked to come, His cable replied: 'Permitted.' They reached Haifa about November 13, 1921. John was present on November 19 at the Master's last public talk; 'Abdu'l-Bahá pointed to John on this occasion and addressed the talk to him: He spoke of divine love, and how different it is from human love.

Three days before the last, John [Bosch] was in the garden and all at once he saw the Master. 'He walked as straight as if He had been a young man. He looked well and strong. He walked like a general. When we had made one short round, about fifty steps, He left me. He went up to the garden, and came down and brought me a tangerine. In English He said: "Eat... Good." I didn't do like the Americans and put it away for a keepsake. I peeled it and ate it and put the peelings in my pocket.' (Marzieh Gail, Dawn Over Mount Hira, pp. 201-202)

Watch Video: a prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that says that without pain and sacrifice, there will be no reward or progress:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLa6Vsb3JTU>

On the last Friday morning of his stay on earth (November 25th) he said to his daughters: 'The wedding of Khusraw must take place today. If you are too much occupied, I myself will make the necessary preparations, for it must take place this day.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá attended the noonday prayer at the Mosque. When he came out he found the poor waiting for the alms, which it was his custom to give every Friday. This day, as usual, he stood, in spite of very great fatigue, whilst he gave a coin to everyone with his own hands.

After lunch he dictated some Tablets, his last ones, to Ruhi Effendi (Shoghi Effendi's cousin). When he had rested he walked in the garden. He seemed to be in a deep reverie.

Later in the evening of Friday he blessed the bride and bridegroom who had just been married. He spoke impressively to them. 'Khusraw,' he said, 'you have spent your childhood and youth in the service of this house: it is my hope that you will grow old under the same roof, ever and always serving God.'

During the evening he attended the usual meeting of the friends in his own audience chamber.

In the morning of Saturday, November 26th, he arose early, came to the tea room and had some tea. He asked for the fur-lined coat which had belonged to Bahá'u'lláh. He often put on this coat when he was cold or did not feel well, he so loved it. He then withdrew to his room, lay down on his bed and said, 'Cover me up. I am very cold. Last night I did not sleep well, I felt cold. This is serious, it is the beginning.'

After more blankets had been put on, he asked for the fur coat he had taken off to be placed over him. That day he was rather feverish. In the evening his temperature rose still higher [it reached 104ø F.].

[As He] lay in bed with a fever, His night-robe needed changing. However, none could be found, as He had given them away. (Honnold, Annamarie, Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 66)

During the night the fever left him. After midnight he asked for some tea.

On Sunday morning (November 27th) he said: 'I am quite well and will get up as usual and have tea with you in the tea room.' After he had dressed he was persuaded to remain on the sofa in his room.



In the afternoon he sent all the friends up to the Tomb of the Báb, where on the occasion of the anniversary of the declaration of the Covenant a feast was being held, offered by a Parsi pilgrim who had lately arrived from India.

At four in the afternoon being on the sofa in his room he said: 'Ask my sister and all the family to come and have tea with me.'

After tea the Mufti of Haifa and the head of the Municipality, with another visitor, were received by him. They remained about an hour. He spoke to them about Bahá'u'lláh, related to them his second dream, showed them extraordinary kindness and even more than his usual courtesy. He then bade them farewell, walking with them to the outer door in spite of their pleading that he should remain resting on his sofa. He then received a visit from the head of the police, an Englishman, who, too, had his share of the Master's gracious kindness. To him he gave some silk hand-woven Persian handkerchiefs, which he very greatly appreciated.

His four sons-in-law and Ruhi Effendi came to him after returning from the gathering on the mountain. They said to him: 'The giver of the feast was unhappy because you were not there.' He said unto them:

'But I was there, though my body was absent, my spirit was there in your midst. I was present with the friends at the Tomb. The friends must not attach any importance to the absence of my body. In spirit I am, and shall always be, with the friends, even though I be far away.'

The same evening he asked after the health of every member of the Household, of the pilgrims and of the friends in Haifa. 'Very good, very good' he said when told that none were ill. This was his very last utterance concerning his friends.

At eight in the evening he retired to bed after taking a little nourishment, saying: 'I am quite well.'

He told all 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 a.m., got up and walked across to a table where he drank some water. He took off an outer night garment, saying: 'I am too warm.' He went back to bed and when his daughter Ruha Khanum, 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 lay 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 . . . His long martyrdom was ended!

When Dr Florian Krug was summoned quickly and arrived hastily, 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'had gone from the gaze of his loved ones'.

Video: A poem dedicated to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in commemoration of his

ascension, written and read in Farsi by Mrs. Shahla Nabilzadeh-Ghotbi:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9u2-pjLt8x8>

Soon after 'Abdu'l-Bahá had passed out of this world, Western pilgrims were allowed into the room where His body lay. Louise Bosch wrote on December 5th to Ella Cooper:

At first we were as dumb and speechless, bewildered. We stood or kneeled before the bed. We gazed upon his face and could not trust our eyes. At last the bewilderment subsided and the trust asserted itself. Was it true that his eyes would open no more? Would he not open his eyes to look upon us again? Would he not open his lips to say that he was not dead? We asked the doctors [by then other physicians had been sent for] if he was dead. They said yes, the heart had ceased to beat; they said it was useless to try to revive him -- it could not be done. Then, after awhile, the mosquito netting over the bed was let down, and this covered from our eyes the earthly remains of our Lord. We got up and went into the adjacent room, and the door of the room out of which we came was closed.

But before this, the blood of the wounds of this blow had begun to flow, and the hurt and the pain and the moans increased with every minute. We five European pilgrims were in the room together with the holy family and the holy mother held my husband's hand and the Greatest Holy Leaf held mine. After a time we went back to the Pilgrim House, leaving the holy family alone. It was still night -- no moon at all. Not long afterward the dawn broke, and at last the sun rose with great effulgence over the scene of this memorable night.

John Bosch had this to say: It was in the early hours of Monday, November 28, that we were awakened to the agonizing news that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was suddenly gone from their midst. Curtis Kelsey with another believer was sent to 'Akká with the terrible word. John saw people weeping as he went to the Master's bedroom. He knelt down beside the bed. Then the Most Exalted Leaf, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, took his hand and placed him beside her on the built-in divan along the window. With her he kept a vigil there from two until four o'clock. Once, he rose, walked the two steps to the bed, took the Master's hand and said, 'Oh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá!' It was about three o'clock then. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's hand was still warm. He seemed alive. 'I still hoped He lived,' John told me. The Most Exalted Leaf wept far less than the others, at all times maintaining her great dignity and composure. But many times she sighed, through the night. (Marzieh Gail, Dawn Over Mount Hira, p. 211-213)

A special announcement, issued in the morning, by the family of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'ís of Haifa, gave the public the news of His passing and of the funeral arrangements for the following day.

Cablegrams were dispatched from Haifa at 3 p.m. on 28th November, 1921, and contained the following momentous news:

'His Holiness 'Abdu'l-Bahá ascended to the Kingdom of Abhá. Please inform friends.' (signed) 'Greatest Holy Leaf'.

However, early on Monday morning . . . the news of this sudden calamity had spread over the city, causing an unprecedented stir and tumult, and filling all hearts with unutterable grief.

In the afternoon this statement appeared:

We all belong unto God and unto Him do we all return. The Islamic Association announces with much regret the passing of the highly-learned, greatly-erudite, generous benefactor, His Eminence 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas. His bier will be carried from His home, to-morrow, Tuesday, at 9 o'clock in the morning. You are requested to accept this announcement as a special invitation to assemble for His funeral procession. May God immerse Him in His boundless mercy, and grant solace unto His family and His people.

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 decided that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tomb should be there.

A coffin of plain white wood was expeditiously obtained and John Bosch assisted the sons-in-law of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to place His body in the coffin. They had wrapped the Master in five separate folds of white silk and on His head they had placed a black mitre given to Him by Bahá'u'lláh. His coffin had been placed on two chairs beside the bed. John was present when His sheeted form was lifted into the coffin; while others held the Master's head and shoulders and arms, Mirza Jalal held His feet, and John His knees. His body seemed natural, John said, not rigid. John helped the others to close the coffin down. He said he knew the living Master was there. 'I felt He was there. Not in the body--even now I feel that again--His presence. I am sure He was there.' (Marzieh Gail, Dawn Over Mount Hira, p. 211-213)

But so hurriedly had the coffin been made that its lid could not be properly secured. The night following the interment, Lutfu'llah Hakim sat in the vault and kept watch until the deficiency could be righted.

Video: My name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouHB39Bkyio>

The funeral of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was indeed a funeral the like of which the Holy Land had never witnessed:

John told me that already by seven that Tuesday morning soldiers were lined up on both sides of the street and some were in the Master's compound. As John entered, on the left going up the steps, he saw an Arab soldier standing guard; the man was leaning on his gun and the tears streamed down his face. (Marzieh Gail, Dawn Over Mount Hira, p. 211-213)

The High Commissioner of Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, the Governor of Jerusalem, the Governor of Phoenicia, the Chief Officials of the Government, the Consuls of the various countries, resident in Haifa, the heads of the various religious communities, the notables of Palestine, Jews, Christians, Moslems, Druses, Egyptians, Greeks, Turks, Kurds, and a host of his American, European and native friends, men, women

and children, both of high and low degree, all, about ten thousand in number, mourning the loss of their Beloved One.

This impressive, triumphal procession was headed by a guard of honour, consisting of the City Constabulary Force, followed by the Boy Scouts of the Moslem and Christian communities holding aloft their banners, a company of Moslem choristers chanting their verses from the Quran, the chiefs of the Moslem community headed by the Mufti, a number of Christian priests, Latin, Greek and Anglican, all preceding the sacred coffin, upraised on the shoulders of his loved ones. Immediately behind it came the members of his family, next to them walked the British High Commissioner, the Governor of Jerusalem and the Governor of Phoenicia. After them came the Consuls and the notables of the land, followed by the vast multitude of those who revered and loved him.

On this day there was no cloud in the sky, nor any sound in all the town and surrounding country through which they went, save only the soft, slow, rhythmic chanting of Islam in the Call to Prayer, or the convulsed sobbing moan of those helpless ones, bewailing the loss of their one friend, who had protected them in all their difficulties and sorrows, whose generous bounty had saved them and their little ones from starvation through the terrible years of the 'Great Woe'.

'O God, my God!' the people wailed with one accord, 'Our father has left us, our father has left us!'

O the wonder of that great throng! Peoples of every religion and race and colour, united in heart through the Manifestation of Servitude in the life-long work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá!

On the long way up Mt. Carmel, Sir Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner, walked directly ahead of John [Bosch]. Once John looked back, and saw all the carriages, empty and left behind: the ten thousand mourners were all coming on foot, although the cortege took an hour and five minutes to reach the Shrine. (Marzieh Gail, Dawn Over Mount Hira, p. 211-213)



As they slowly wended their way up Mount Carmel, the Vineyard of God, the casket appeared in the distance to be borne aloft by invisible hands, so high above the heads of the people was it carried. After two 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 linen cloth. As the vast concourse pressed round the Tabernacle of his body, waiting to be laid in its resting place, within the vault, next to that of the Báb, representatives of the various denominations, Moslems, Christians and Jews, all hearts being ablaze with fervent love of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, some on the impulse of the moment, others prepared, raised their voices in eulogy and regret, paying their last homage of farewell to their loved one. So united were they in their acclamation of him, as the wise educator and reconciler of the human race in this perplexed and sorrowful age, that there seemed to be nothing left for the Baha'is to say.

Watch Video: Dastam Begir (which means "Hold Thou my hand")
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqStB_FkkNc

Tablet of Visitation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Whoso reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervour will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant; it will be even as meeting Him face to face.

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, captive in Thy hand, praying fervently to 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 dawning and in the night-season. Fulfil 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.