

The Declaration of the Báb

By Susan Gammage ¹

Opening Music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsNp89kvPjM>

Narrator 1: The opening scene of the initial act of this great drama was laid in the upper chamber of the modest residence of the son of a mercer of Shíráz, in an obscure corner of that city. The time was the hour before sunset, on the 22nd day of May, 1844. The participants were the Báb, a twenty-five year old Siyyid, of pure and holy lineage, and the young Mullá Husayn, the first to believe in Him. Their meeting immediately before that interview seemed to be purely fortuitous. The interview itself was protracted till the hour of dawn. The Host remained closeted alone with His guest, nor was the sleeping city remotely aware of the import of the conversation they held with each other. No record has passed to posterity of that unique night save the fragmentary but highly illuminating account that fell from the lips of Mullá Husayn.

It was this quest for the Qá'im, the Promised One of Islám, that led Mullá Husayn, his brother, and a nephew to the city of Shíráz on May 22, 1844. Having traveled far in search of the Qá'im, he sent his companions to the mosque to await him while he wandered awhile, promising to rejoin them for evening prayers. While walking outside the gates of the city a few hours before sunset, he was unexpectedly greeted by a young man. Mullá Husayn thought this man must be a disciple of Siyyid Kázim who had heard of his arrival in Shíráz and had come to welcome him. Even so, the manner of the greeting was astonishing. He is said to have related:

Mullá Husayn: The Youth who met me outside the gate of Shíráz 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.

Narrator 2: The Báb replied: "Commit them to the care of God. He will surely protect and watch over them."

Mullá Husayn: Having spoken these words, He bade me follow Him. I was profoundly impressed by the gentle yet compelling manner in which that strange Youth spoke to me. He accompanied the young man to his house, where tea was served and preparations begun for the evening prayer.

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

Serve Tea

Narrator 1: Mullá Husayn then relates the astonishing thing that happened next:

Mullá Husayn: 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 [mosque]."

Narrator 2: With extreme courtesy and calm the Báb 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."

Mullá Husayn: His dignity and self-assurance silenced me. I renewed my ablutions and prepared for prayer.

Ablutions and Preparation for Prayer

Mullá Husayn: He, too, stood beside me and prayed....

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eWbdTa_Fqs&feature=related

Mullá Husayn: It was about an hour after sunset when my youthful Host began to converse with me.

Narrator 2: The Báb inquired: "Whom, after Siyyid Kázim do you regard as his successor and your leader?"

Mullá Husayn: At the hour of his death, 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.

Narrator 2: The Báb replied: Has your teacher given you any detailed indications as to the distinguishing features of the Qá'im?

Mullá Husayn: Yes. He is of a pure lineage, is of illustrious descent, and of the seed of Fátimih. 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.

Narrator 2: He paused for a while and then with vibrant voice declared: "Behold, all these signs are manifest in Me!"

Narrator 1: The young man, whose name was Siyyid Alí Muḥammád, proceeded to demonstrate that each of the signs given by Siyyid Kázim were indeed applicable to Him. Yet Mullá Husayn was unsure. He had prepared two tests for anyone claiming to be the Qá'im, and decided to place them before Siyyid Alí Muḥammad in order to prove the matter one way or the other. Those tests, Mullá Husayn related, were as follows:

Mullá Husayn: The first was a treatise which I had myself composed, bearing upon the abstruse and hidden teachings propounded by Shaykh Ahmad 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:

Siyyid Kázim: "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."

Narrator 1: So Mullá Husayn asked his Host to comment on the treatise he had written. The result of that request only further astonished him.

Mullá Husayn: 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 Ahmad and Siyyid Kázim. These truths, which I had never heard before, seemed to be endowed with refreshing vividness and power....

Narrator 2: He then proceeded to say: "Now is the time to reveal the commentary on the Súrih of Joseph."

Narrator 1: 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.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXef8RcQyXg&feature=fvst>

Mullá Husayn: I sat spellbound by His utterance, oblivious of time and of those who awaited me. Suddenly the call of the Mu'adhhdhin, summoning the faithful to their morning prayer, awakened me from the state of ecstasy into which I seemed to have fallen.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Opvp2Ezy62Y>

Mullá Husayn: All the delights, all the ineffable glories, which the Almighty has recounted in His Book as the priceless possessions of the people of Paradise—these I seemed to be experiencing that night. Methinks I was in a place of which it could be truly said: 'Therein no toil shall reach us, and therein no weariness shall touch us;' 'no vain discourse shall they hear therein, nor any falsehood, but only the cry, "Peace! Peace!";' 'their cry therein shall be, "Glory to Thee, O God!" and their salutation therein, "Peace!", and the close of their cry, "Praise be to God, Lord of all creatures!"' 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. At the end of each invocation, He would repeat this verse:

Narrator 2: The Báb replied: "Far from the glory of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, be that which His creatures affirm of Him! And peace be upon His Messengers! And praise be to God, the Lord of all beings!"

Mullá Husayn: This Revelation so suddenly and impetuously thrust upon me, came as a thunderbolt which, for a time, seemed to have benumbed my faculties. I was blinded by its dazzling splendor and overwhelmed by its crushing force. Excitement, joy, awe, and wonder stirred the depths of my soul. Predominant among these emotions was a sense of gladness and strength which seemed to have transfigured me. How feeble and impotent, how dejected and timid, I had felt previously! Then I could neither write nor walk, so tremulous were my hands and feet. Now, however, the knowledge of His Revelation had galvanized my being. I felt possessed of such courage and power that were the world, all its peoples and its potentates, to rise against me, I would, alone and undaunted, withstand their onslaught. The universe seemed but a handful of dust in my grasp. I seemed to be the voice of Gabriel personified, calling unto all mankind: 'Awake, for, lo! the morning Light has broken. Arise, for His Cause is made manifest. The portal of His grace is open wide; enter therein, O peoples of the world! For He Who is your promised One is come!'"

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.... At that moment the clock registered two hours and eleven minutes after sunset....

Narrator 2: The Báb replied: "This night, 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."

Narrator 1: From that day forward, Siyyid Alí Muhammad referred to Himself as the Báb (the Gate) and Mullá Husayn became his first disciple. Although the Báb was indeed the Qá'im foretold by Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kázim, He taught that He was but the Herald of another Messenger who would appear very soon after Him and the power of whose revelation would far exceed any previously sent down by God. The day the Báb declared His mission is now, as He had promised, celebrated by Bahá'ís around the world as "one of the greatest and most significant of all festivals."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyIXcslvZ0A>

Siyyid Kázim (reads 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 231 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, caused 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 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.