

Festival of Naw-Rúz

A Dramatic Reading by Marlene Macke *

March 2018

Reader #1

With the Bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh so recently held, we have been studying His life more closely. Within a month, we'll examine the Ridván Festival when He publically declared His prophethood. Today, let us survey the period around Naw-Rúz in 1863 to see what was happening with the Bábí community in Baghdad in the month prior to His Declaration, and learn more about the significance of the Festival of Naw-Rúz.

Reader #2

Naw-Rúz was a Bábí holy day because the Báb had revealed the Bádí Calendar during His ministry. It was, as well, an ancient Persian festival celebrated since before the time of the Prophet Zoroaster to mark the first day of their year, or New Year. Then, as today, it marked the vernal equinox in the northern hemisphere, or the arrival of spring.

Reader #3

At this time of year in Baghdad, the spring weather is balmy and very pleasant. Mírzá Músá, Bahá'u'lláh's faithful brother, knew how much Bahá'u'lláh loved the open countryside and being surrounded by nature and beautiful scenery. Bahá'u'lláh especially loved walking on the Tigris River bank. Therefore Mírzá Músá rented a farm field located on the outskirts of the city beside the river. Bahá'u'lláh and a number of His companions repaired to the farm and pitched their tents, planning to stay for several days.

* See more about this document at https://bahai-library.com/macke_dramatic_readings

Reader #1

In the two or three years prior to Naw-Rúz 1863, Baghdad witnessed a time of joyful ferment. Bahá'u'lláh was revealing Tablets on nearly a daily basis. One of His most important books, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, known to us as the Book of Certitude, was revealed in 1861. As copies of it spread widely throughout Persia, more and more Bábís eagerly travelled to Baghdad to meet Bahá'u'lláh and drink in His inspiring words for themselves.

Reader #2

In his first volume of *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Adib Taherzadeh enumerated the names of several Bábís who came to realize that Bahá'u'lláh was the Promised One, Him whom God shall make manifest, as prophesied by the Báb. This recognition came months and sometimes years before Bahá'u'lláh's actual public declaration in the Garden of Ridván in April 1863. While many other Bábís may not have known consciously that Bahá'u'lláh was the Promised One, they were deeply attracted to Him, like moths irresistibly attracted to a spiritual Light.

Reader #3

Moreover, those Tablets and other spiritual writings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, contained many allusions to His future station, and even to the trials and tribulations that were in store. But these hints were probably far from the minds of the men who were simply enjoying the pleasant camping experience along the side of the Tigris River 155 years ago today.

Reader #1

Then, five days after Naw-Rúz, Mírzá Áqa Ján, trusted secretary and companion for nearly 40 years until the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, emerged from His tent. He called the men to gather around, and proceeded to chant a just-revealed Tablet, the mournful Tablet known as the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. Sadness engulfed the companions. Future trials and difficulties were described in unmistakable detail in that Tablet.

Reader #2

Nabíl, the great chronicler of the events surrounding the life of Bahá'u'lláh, recorded the following observations: “Oceans of sorrow surged in the hearts of the listeners when the Tablet of the Holy Mariner was read aloud... It was evident to every one that the chapter of Baghdad was about to be closed, and a new one opened, in its stead. No sooner had that Tablet been chanted than Bahá'u'lláh ordered that the tents which had been pitched should be folded up...”

Reader #3

The companions understood that they had to return to the city. While the campsite was being dismantled, Bahá'u'lláh remarked: “These tents may be likened to the trappings of the world, which no sooner are they spread out than the time cometh for them to be rolled up.” The companions instinctively knew they would never again spread their tents in this field along side the river. Little did they know that the Governor had finally delivered the summons to Bahá'u'lláh to relocate immediately to Constantinople. The next chapter was indeed about to unfold a month later in the Ridván Garden.

Reader #1

As mentioned previously, Naw-Rúz was included in the Bádí calendar. This new calendar revealed for this era is composed of 19 months, each of 19 days. Each month is named after a virtue or attribute of God. The first month is named Bahá, an Arabic word meaning splendour or glory, as is the first day of each week. Thus Naw-Rúz, the first day of the year, is the day of Bahá in the month of Bahá. The Báb called this day the Day of God.

Reader #2

Bahá'u'lláh, who is recognized as the messianic figure expected by the Báb, confirmed the new calendar and the designation of Naw-Rúz as a holy day and a festival for this Dispensation. Because of its designation by the Báb, Naw-Rúz will always be associated with the Most Great Name of God or the Glory of God, Bahá'u'lláh.

Reader #3

The celebration of Naw-Rúz as a festival is very ancient. The world-ruling Shāh Jamshid of Persian legend and mythology was said to be the fourth king of the world. The festival was first celebrated in his reign and from its beginning symbolized rejuvenation and revitalization. In addition to signifying a time of spiritual and physical renewal, it embodied a spirit of gratitude for blessings, and an outlook of hope and optimism towards the future.

Reader #1

This festival became integrated into various cultures and faith traditions. Naw-Rúz is celebrated in many parts of the Middle East and Central and South Asia, particularly among peoples influenced by Persian and Turkic civilizations. Today, however, in the many Eastern cultures which celebrate it, it is more of a secular holiday, akin to the West's January 1st New Year's festivities.

Reader #2

However the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh explicitly identify the symbolic notion of spiritual renewal in each religious dispensation. The Bahá'í calendar and new year make this spiritual metaphor more concrete. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's son and successor, also explained the significance of Naw-Rúz in terms of spring and the renewed life the spring season brings. He explained that the equinox is a symbol of the Manifestations of God, who include Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh among others, and the message that they proclaim is like a spiritual springtime.

Reader #3

While the Bahá'í celebration of Naw-Rúz parallels previous religious commemorations of spring time and renewal, we are mindful of two additional elements. One, the day was called the Day of God by the Báb, and is therefore associated with "Him whom God shall make manifest" or Bahá'u'lláh. And secondly, Naw-Rúz is a special gift to us in its connection with the Nineteen Day Fast. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* or the Book of Laws for this age, Bahá'u'lláh enjoined upon us the Fast and at its close, designated Naw-Rúz as a festival for those who had observed it.

Reader #1

With this connection between the Fast and the festival which closes it thus established, let us listen to the prayer that Bahá'u'lláh revealed for Naw-Rúz.

“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 favour. 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

(Jesus)”; and Thy Friend (Muhammad) 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.”

Reader #2

‘Abdu’l-Bahá reiterated the Greater Covenant of God to renew of His progressive guidance through Bahá’u’lláh:

“In winter come the storms, and the great winds blow, but then will follow spring in all its beauty, adorning hill and plain with perfumed plants and red anemones, fair to see. Then will the birds trill out upon the branches their songs of joy, and sermonize in lilting tones from the pulpits of the trees. Ere long shall ye bear witness that the lights are streaming forth, the banners of the realm above are waving, the sweet scents of the All-Merciful are wafted abroad, the hosts of the Kingdom are marching down, the angels of heaven are rushing forward, and the Holy Spirit is breathing upon all those regions.”

Reader #3

And our hearts sing with another of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings:

“O ye loved ones of God! The wine-cup of Heaven overfloweth, the banquet of God’s Covenant is bright with festive lights, the dawn of all bestowals is breaking, the gentle winds of grace are blowing, and out of the invisible world come good tidings of bounties and gifts. In flower-spangled meadows hath the divine springtime pitched its tents, and the spiritual are inhaling sweet scents from the Sheba of the spirit, carried their way by the east wind. Now doth the mystic nightingale carol its odes, and buds of inner meaning are bursting into blossoms delicate and fair. The field larks are become the festival’s musicians, and lifting wondrous voices they cry and sing to the melodies of the Company on high, ‘Blessed are ye! Glad Tidings! Glad Tidings!’ And they urge on the revellers of the Abhá Paradise to drink their fill, and they eloquently hold forth upon the celestial tree, and utter their sacred cries. All this, that withered souls who tread the desert of the heedless, and faded ones lost in the sands of unconcern, may come to throbbing life again, and present themselves at the feasts and revels of the Lord God.”

[Compiled by Marlene Macke primarily from *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh* by Adib Taherzadeh, and online sources such as the Bahá’í Reference Library and Wikipedia. March 2018.]