

The First Trumpet Blast
Some Letters of the Living share Remembrances
of the First Days of the Báb's Ministry
A Dramatic Reading in Commemoration of His Birthday

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St. Marys, Ontario, Canada
1 November 2018

Cast

Mullá Husayn
Mullá ‘Alí
Táhirih
Quddús
Narrator

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Narrator

In our rational minds the mystery of the advent of a Prophet from God defies logic and reason. How can one man arise out of utter obscurity, proclaim a new spiritual revelation and gather a faithful following of believers in a matter of weeks? Why do men and women reject the standard orthodoxy of their religion to follow a new spiritual path? What is the attraction that will lead to ridicule and rejection by their families and friends, denouncement by the leading clerics of the day, and indeed, the martyrdom of many of them? The answer is nothing more than faith and certitude that a new Messenger of God had arrived; many sought Him and sacrificed everything to follow Him.

Such is the experience of the first 18 souls who renounced families, careers, comfort and secure lives to find and follow the Qá'im, the divine successor to the Prophet Muhammad, in 19th Century Persia. The following narratives describe such people. As well, their stories give us glimpses of the Prophet, the Báb, through their eyes. And lastly, we can honour these fearless first followers and appreciate their roles as the Dawn-Breakers of this new Revelation.

Mullá Husayn

My name is Mullá Husayn. In the years leading to the 1840s, some clergy, scholars and ordinary Muslims felt stirrings of great spiritual anticipation. We yearned for the promised arrival of a new Messenger of God who would sweep away the corruption and strife of the contending sects of Islám. We knew our holy Qur'án contained prophecies of the renewal of God's messages to mankind. Close study revealed the time was near for the emergence of the Qá'im, a title meaning "He Who ariseth", but much of the prophecy was obscured by allegorical language which was hard for ordinary scholars to unravel. Although I was very young and so frail physically that my hand shook when I wrote, I hungered to witness the coming of the Promised One. In 1815 I joined a study group led by a deeply revered and knowledgeable teacher, Siyyid Kázim. I learned that the time was indeed near and the Qá'im even then was living amongst us. Siyyid Kázim was a master in unraveling the prophecies and signs which were indeed allegorical, not literal as orthodox Muslims believed.

He described how to recognize the Promised One. The Qá'im would be of noble lineage, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. He would be young and possess innate knowledge so immense it would be far beyond mere human knowledge. Physically, he would be of medium height and abstain from smoking. As Siyyid Kázim's days on earth drew to a close, he urged us to scatter far and wide to seek the One who was "concealed behind the veils of glory."

When Siyyid Kázim died at the end of December 1843, I asked my fellow disciples why they didn't arise immediately to search for the Qá'im. Each one had an excuse for staying put in the city of Karbilá. Alone, except for my brother and my nephew, I retreated for 40 days to pray and meditate in preparation for my search and then we set out.

Mullá 'Alí

My name is Mullá 'Alí. I too was a student in Siyyid Kázim's school. This school had been the successor to the one started by a great holy man called Shaykh Ahmad. He began to believe that the time was close for the advent of a new Messenger of God. Shaykh Ahmad started to share the spiritual meanings of the Qur'anic verses and traditions that heralded the arrival of the Qá'im. This devout man's teachings imparted such influence and authority that thousands thronged to hear him and a Shaykhi movement emerged. Others joined his school to study full time under his tutoring. Besides his lectures, Shaykh Ahmad authored 96 volumes of commentary. Before he died in 1826, he appointed one of his most devoted and outstanding students, Siyyid Kázim, to carry on his work.

Building on the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad, Siyyid Kázim fearlessly expounded new and unorthodox interpretations. He claimed, for example, that the concepts such as Muhammad's bodily journey into heaven were metaphorical, not literal. This incited the wrath of enemies, particularly in the clergy. They wanted to destroy the Shaykhi movement. But Siyyid Kázim's primary instruction, as we neared the momentous year 1844, was to spread far and wide, making strenuous efforts and persevering in our mission to find the true Qá'im. I still don't know why I didn't instantly arise to do so when Siyyid Kázim died. Each of us manufactured some excuse to tarry in Karbilá except my fellow student Mullá Husayn. He immediately cloistered himself for 40 days of fasting and prayer in order to spiritually purify himself for his quest.

After seeing his example, I was ashamed of myself, as were some dozen of our

fellow students. We joined him in praying and fasting. I wanted to ask Mullá Husayn where he planned to start his search but every time that I approached him, he was so deeply absorbed in prayer that I dared not disturb him. Then one morning I awoke to find him gone. In the middle of the night in the month of February 1844, Mullá Husayn had set out.

Mullá Husayn

My brother, nephew and I reached the gate of Shíráz on the evening of May 22. We were exhausted from our journey but I sent my companions into the city with plans to meet them at the mosque later for evening prayers. I walked and prayed outside the gate, beseeching God to lead me to the Promised One. Just then a handsome and charming young man approached me. He greeted me with a kind welcome and invited me to his home. I felt powerless to resist. As we entered his home, he said, “Enter therein in peace, secure”, a passage from our Holy Qur’án. The power and majesty of those words penetrated to my very soul.

After refreshing ourselves with tea, my host persuaded me to stay for the evening prayers. Afterwards, he asked me questions about my journey and its purpose, and when I informed him about seeking the Qá’im, he asked what signs I looked for. On sharing the signs given us by Siyyid Kázim, he exclaimed, “Behold, all these signs are manifest in Me.” I was dumbfounded. Even unaccountably fearful. But I rallied to humbly ask him to peruse a list of questions, the answers of which had eluded me in my religious studies. My host glanced at the questions and answered each one with profound authority.

Then I remembered that Siyyid Kázim had told us that the Promised One would explain the meaning of the Súrih of Joseph from the Qur’án without us asking him to do so. He dumbfounded me again when he remarked, “Now is the time to reveal the commentary on the Súrih of Joseph.” He proceeded to write the commentary in exquisite script, all the while chanting the words in melodious tones. I was enraptured. At two hours and eleven minutes past sunset, He proclaimed Himself the Promised One.

My host, whose name was Siyyid ‘Alí-Muhammad, was thereafter known as the Báb, or Gate. He represented the first Blast of the Trumpet, one of the prophecies from the Qur’án which references two Blasts of the Trumpet. The Báb taught from the beginning of His Ministry that the primary purpose of His Dispensation was to prepare the way for the imminent advent of the next Prophet, or “Him Who God shall make manifest,” who would embody the Second Blast of the Trumpet.

Mullá ‘Alí

On the night of His Declaration, the Báb called Mullá Husayn the first person to believe in Him. The Báb then revealed that 17 more souls must spontaneously, independently and of their own accord, recognize the truth of His Revelation. No one was to warn them or invite them.

As if God Himself was directing our footsteps, thirteen of us, all Siyyid Kázim’s students, set out. We arrived at the city of Shíráz at dawn one July day. Mullá Husayn already there! We could see that something momentous had happened to him, but he uttered not one word about why he radiated such joyfulness. Three days later, I couldn’t bear my curiosity any longer. I begged him to tell me his secret. He simply replied that I must trust in God who would surely guide my steps. I immediately shared this news with my twelve companions. Rekindled hope flooded our hearts. Repairing to our individual sleeping quarters each of us beseeched God that we would be led to the Qá’im.

On the third night I saw a vision of a bright light and within the light, I saw the face of the Báb. Here was the One Siyyid Kázim had prepared us for. Nearly overcome in rapture, I ran to Mullá Husayn’s room and threw myself into his arms. At dawn, the two of us hurried to the house of the Báb where his servant awaited us at the door. He led us to the upper room where I met the Báb for the first time. Thus was I the second seeker to find my heart’s desire.

Mullá Husayn

One by one, the other twelve companions who had travelled with Mullá ‘Alí, independently of one another, came to recognize the Báb. Whether through a dream or a waking vision or in prayer, all were led to meet him in person and all enrolled under His banner.

The Báb revealed that these first 18 disciples were to be known as the Letters of the Living. We students of Siyyid Kázim were the first 14 disciples. My own brother and nephew who had accompanied me on my journey brought the number to 16. Just two more seekers were needed to fulfil the cadre of 18 believers. The last two were to prove to be among our most illustrious companions.

Táhirih

At birth I was given the name Fátimih, but the Báb endorsed my title Táhirih, meaning the Pure One, which Siyyid Kázim had first given to me.

My society believed women to have a rank little higher than animals and to not even possess souls. The male judges and clerics of Islam interpreted the Qur'án's apparent exhortation compelling women to live under a veil of concealment to mean not just physically, but also intellectually and spiritually. How grateful I am that my father allowed me a tutor so that I was able to learn to read and write, and more importantly, to hone my intellectual capacity.

My father and most of my male relatives were noted in learned circles for their unshakeable orthodox beliefs. I, however, delved into the most complex theological issues. I soundly rejected the prevailing Shí'ah interpretations. Instead, I embraced Shaykhi doctrines. Through studying the signs and prophecies promulgated by the Shaykhi teachings, I became convinced the Qá'im was even now among us. Siyyid Kázim favoured me by responding to my letters and we enjoyed a lively correspondence. My father and husband strenuously objected to my spiritual beliefs, but I defied them, going so far as to travel to Karbilá to meet Siyyid Kázim in person. Alas, he died just ten days before I arrived.

Fortunately, one of my brothers-in-law was studying at Siyyid Kázim's school. I asked him to carry a sealed letter to the Qá'im when he found Him. I also gave him a verbal message to give to the Qá'im. This fragment of poetry affirmed my acceptance of Him and said,

The effulgence of thy face flashed forth and
the rays of thy visage arose on high;
Then speak the word, "Am I not your
Lord?" and "Thou art, Thou art!"
We will all reply.

When my brother-in-law met the Báb, he gave Him the letter and my message, and the Báb accepted me as one of His Letters of the Living.

Mullá Husayn

One night the Báb told me to expect one last arrival the next day. This last person's acceptance of the Báb as the Promised One would complete the number of His chosen disciples. The next evening the Báb and I were walking towards His house when a young man approached us. He turned out to be well-known to me because he also had been a student of Siyyid Kázim. But I couldn't tell him much because, remember, I was still under the Báb's injunction that we were to tell no one of the identity of the Qá'im. Each had to find Him independently.

Quddús

My name is Quddús. Travel-stained and weary, I entered the city of Shíráz. Imagine my delight in recognizing my friend and fellow Shaykhi student, Mullá Husayn, there on the street. After greeting him, I asked him whether he had found the object of his quest. Mullá Husayn would not answer me directly and tried to deflect my questions. I grew indignant at his evasion but then I caught sight of a Man a short distance ahead. I cried out, "Why seek you to hide Him from me? I can recognize Him by His gait. I confidently testify that none besides Him, whether in the East or in the West can claim to be the Truth. None other can manifest the power and majesty that radiate from His holy person."

Mullá Husayn

Amazed at this turn of events, I rejoined the Báb to tell Him what had happened. The Báb told me to marvel not at the young man's strange behaviour. He told me that in the world of the spirit, He had been communing with the young man and knew him already. The Báb asked me to summon him to His presence. The Báb gave him the title Quddús, meaning the Most Holy.

Thus 22-year-old Quddús was the last of the 18 Letters of the Living to recognize the Lord of the Age, the Promised One. All but the courageous Táhirih had the privilege of meeting Him personally. The Báb gave a specific mission to Mullá Alí to travel immediately to 'Iráq to proclaim the arrival of the Qá'im. To the rest of the 16 of the Letters present, He gave each specific missions too. Then with one collective address to all of us, He said:

"O My beloved friends! You are the bearers of the name of God in this Day. ... Verily I say, immensely exalted is this Day above the days of the Apostle of old. Nay, immeasurable is the difference! You are the witnesses of the Dawn of the promised Day of God. ... Beseech the

Lord your God to grant that no earthly entanglements, no worldly affections, no ephemeral pursuits, may tarnish the purity, or embitter the sweetness, of that grace which flows through you. I am preparing you for the advent of a Mighty Day. Exert your utmost endeavour that, in the world to come, I, who am now instructing you, may, before the mercy-seat of God, rejoice in your deeds and glory in your achievements. ... Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.”

Narrator

This ends an account of a few of the remarkable stories regarding the Declaration of the Báb from four of His chosen disciples. A century later Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith described the Letters of the Living. He called them the trail-breakers of the New Day with “a spirit exalted, unquenchable and awe-inspiring, a knowledge surprisingly profound, an eloquence sweeping in its force, a piety unexcelled in fervor, a courage leonine in its fierceness, a self-abnegation saintly in its purity, a resolve granite-like in its firmness, a vision stupendous in its range, a veneration for the Prophet and His Imáms disconcerting to their adversaries, a power of persuasion alarming to their antagonists, a standard of faith and a code of conduct that challenged and revolutionized the lives of their countrymen.”

[Let us now recite the Tablet of Visitation which is frequently used in commemorating His Birth. As a mark of respect, let us rise and face the Qiblih.
NOTE: reading the Tablet is optional, depending on the date and group.]

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Script taken primarily from *The Dawn-Breakers* translated and edited by Shoghi Effendi, *Hour of the Dawn*, *God Passes By* by Shoghi Effendi, *The Life of the Báb* by Mary Perkins, *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees* by Baharieh Rouhani Ma’ani