

BEHOLD!

A Program for the Bicentennial of the Birth of the Báb

(created by Anne Perry, based on passages from Robert Weinberg's compilation
The Primal Point: A selection of testimonials and tributes to the Báb and His followers
published by George Ronald 2019, and other sources as noted.)

Note: This script is totally flexible. It can be performed by adults, youth, or children in a setting that is formal or informal. Passages can be read or memorized. Costumes can be utilized or not. It can be shortened as needed—or lengthened. (Delete or add characters; cast members can play more than one part.) Music or visual projections of photos of the actual people quoted could be included. Commentators can be on stage all at once or come on one at a time. They can stand or sit. MC's remarks are flexible and can be changed; I have left out designations such as "Hand of the Cause" since the program is designed for the public, but these can be added.) *Be creative! AP*

CAST:

MC

Commentators:

Sara Louisa Lady Blomfield
Hasan Balyuzi
Horace Holley
George Townshend
Tahirih
John Ferraby
Mary Hanford Ford

Robert Hayden
A.L.M. Nicolas
Edward Granville Browne
Dr. T. K. Cheyne
Sir Francis Younghusband
Count Leo Tolstoy
Potentially others . . .

MC: Welcome, all, on behalf of (sponsoring body). Today/tonight we have a special treat: a panel of expert commentators on the person of a Persian gentleman known as the Báb, whose 200th birthday we observe today. Ranging in age and cultural background, our commentators all have something in common: a fascination with the Báb and His message. I think you'll find their comments of great interest. So first, let us invite Sara Louisa Lady Blomfield, a distinguished early member of the Baha'í Faith in London, to tell us something of the Báb's childhood and early life.

Lady Blomfield: Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad was born in Shiraz in the year 1819. His father, having died when He was still a child, His mother took Him to live with herself and her brother, Haji Siyyid 'Ali. His devoted mother and uncle brought Him up with loving care. Many are the stories told of His childhood. He showed that His knowledge was innate. His school master came to His uncle and said: ". . . I can teach him nothing! His explanations of difficult passages in the Quran are marvelous! His answers to complex problems are amazing!" So gentle and loving was his character that all who know Him loved Him. The beauty of his mind was reflected in His person. He passed all His time, when He was not dutifully helping His uncle in his work, meditating upon the Holy books. "Surely," said the people, "He is a heavenly soul, this youth who walks with the dignified and serene step, who is of so shining a countenance, and withal so beautiful, and, moreover, greatly learned in the Sacred Writings."

MC: Thank you. Most interesting. Now, we know that there was a special date associated with the Báb, and I call upon Mr. Hasan Balyuzi to say something about this. Mr. Balyuzi, a descendent from the Báb's family, has distinguished himself by his scholarship.

Hasan Balyuzi: On May 22nd, 1844, a young merchant of Shíráz, whose name was Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, revealed Himself to a seeker as that Deliverer Whom the world of Islam anxiously awaited. An independent

Manifestation of God and the Harbinger of a greater Manifestation, He took the title of the Báb, meaning “Gate.” His primary mission was to awaken the slumbering people of Iran. . . .

MC: Thank you, Mr. Balyuzi. And now, Mr. Horace Holley, would you care to elaborate? Mr. Holley is a gifted poet and prolific essayist who has served on Baha’i administrative bodies.

Horace Holley: To these humble servants of the altar of the heart the Báb revealed Himself in 1844, then twenty–five years of age. The Báb . . . exemplified a radiance, a beauty of being and of person, a power of spirit, a penetration of love which became the adoration of a mighty host. In that darkened, ignorant, tyrannical land the Báb arose as with the light of a dawning Sun. So powerful was He in quickening the human spirit . . . that within the span of six years His earthly destiny was fulfilled. Condemned for heresy, denounced as rebel, the Báb was imprisoned and executed in the city of Tabríz. It was a time of profound spiritual experience. Thousands of His followers advanced to martyrdom for His sake and in tribute to the pure religion He revealed for the world. . . . This was no personal and no local experience, but a new enlightenment and impetus for the regeneration of the world. In the Báb they . . . felt the presence of all the Prophets through whom God has manifested in the past. The Báb restored the power of providence to human affairs. Against Him sped the arrows of bitterest ecclesiastical and civil rancor. The Báb was the chosen Victim by whose sacrifice the human spirit could be given life and a new direction established for the course of [humanity’s] spiritual and social evolution. . . . The mission of the Báb initiated the release of forces and powers which since, with increasing intensity, have acted upon [hu]mankind.

MC: Thank you for that articulate explanation, Mr. Holley. Now, since many in our audience no doubt embrace the Christian Faith, how does the Báb’s Revelation relate to Christianity? Mr. Townshend, would you care to tackle this question? Mr. Townshend is an Irish writer and former Anglican clergyman.

George Townshend: THE Bible throughout has for its constant theme [hu]mankind’s . . . journey towards the Kingdom of God and paints its promised attainment with fervor and vividness and illimitable joy. These exquisite pictures have been . . . a source of undying comfort and happiness. . . . Jesus admits expressly that He had other things to say and gives as His reason for withholding the knowledge that [hu]mankind in His day was not advanced and mature enough to understand its future experiences. But now the Herald of the Kingdom had come and gone. The Seal of the Prophets had likewise come and gone. The next great spiritual event was the actual coming of the Kingdom which both these Revelators had announced. With the Báb the Kingdom actually begins. He stands both as a Revealer Prophet bringing His own Dispensation and Laws and also as a Forerunner of One, Bahá’u’lláh, bearing a Revelation immeasurably greater than His own. Standing at the close of the whole Prophetic Cycle His Revelation is described as including twenty-five out of the twenty-seven letters of all knowledge; and with Him each and every past Prophet has a separate Covenant, concerning the One whom He heralded, the Supreme World Redeemer. Thus He stands at the confluence of the Prophetic Cycle which is closed and of the Age of Fulfillment which now opens. The Bahá’í Era begins with His Declaration . . . and ushers in the universal Age of Truth. The creative energies which He imparts endow [hu]mankind with the capacity to attain its maturity, which will enable it in course of time and in conjunction with the still greater power generated by Bahá’u’lláh, to achieve the organic unification of the human race. To any spiritually expectant soul, the Báb’s declaration would have indicated that the Kingdom of God had indeed come. . . . His qualities were so rare in their nobility and beauty, His personality so gentle and yet so forceful, and His natural charm was combined with so much tact and judgment, that after His Declaration He quickly became in Persia a widely popular figure. He would win over almost all with whom He was brought into personal contact, even converting His [jailers] to His Faith. . . . Here once again in human history is the Light shining in a darkness that comprehendeth it not! Here once again is Faith re-arisen upon the world, bringing a New Day, shedding a new glory, calling [us] from sleep to a new life.

MC: So in essence, these Holy Manifestations are all of God and all connected. A remarkable view of human history! Perhaps now we could hear from one of our poets. Tahirih, would you care to share one of your poems related to the Báb? Tahireh is renown for her knowledge, beauty, and bravery, one of the first to believe in the Báb.

Tahirih: Arise

O slumbering one, the beloved has arrived, arise!
Brush off the dust of sleep and self, arise!
Behold the good will has arrived,
Come not before him with tears, arise!
The mender of concerns has come to you,
O heavy-hearted one, arise!
O one afflicted by separation,
Behold the good tidings of the beloved's union, arise!
O you withered by autumn,
Now spring has come, arise!
Behold the New Year brings a fresh life,
O withered corps of yesteryear, up from your tomb, arise!

(Translated by Farzaneh Milani)

MC: Thank you. Inspiring, indeed! Mr. Ferraby, would you care to make a comment? Mr. John Ferraby is from England and has served the Faith in Africa.

John Ferraby: The Bab declared . . . that the purpose of His Revelation was to prepare the way for “Him Whom God shall make manifest”. . . . It is a sign of the greatness of this Day that a Manifestation of God should have been sent as a Forerunner of Baha’u’llah to inaugurate a Dispensation that only lasted nine years. The story of the Báb is indeed a fascinating one. Only 25 when He declared Himself to be from God, He possessed a charming personality, which attracted and overcame all who had dealings with Him. His cruel and corrupt opponents, backed by the power of the Church and State, were quite unable to resist the spread of His doctrines. . . . Eventually, the Báb Himself was condemned to death and shot in circumstances that would be incredible were they not so well attested. . . .

MC: Yes, that is another fascinating story to be told; today we are focused more on His life and mission. Let us now hear from Ms. Mary Hanford Ford, an American writer, lecturer, and outspoken advocate of women’s suffrage.

Mary Hanford Ford: The message of the Báb was for the establishment of a world religion which would unite all creeds and teach [us] to realize that God is one and the same in every faith that has brought truth to the human heart. Such a teaching must have seemed dangerously heretical to the narrow and theological Mohammedan priesthood, and therefore the devotees . . . have suffered terrible persecution. But its tenets have laid a solid foundation of unity, equality, and brotherhood. . . . There is a glory of youth about the tragic mission of the Bab, which, from the human standpoint, is irresistible and compelling. He was but twenty-five years old when he gave his announcement that a new Day of God had dawned, a day of brotherhood and unity, when all men shall begin to love one another, a day of Manifestation, when men shall again learn to know God. . . . Courageous and loving to a supreme degree, the spirit of God upon him seemed to enhance the splendor of his youth, to intensify the accent of his consecration. He was two years younger than Jesus when he gave his life in the same sacrifice for the salvation of the world, declaring himself the precursor of that wonderful second coming so long expected. The theologians have destroyed the beauty of youth in Jesus, but its radiance will always linger upon the Báb, who will be remembered as a wonderful illumined boy going to martyrdom with a smile upon his lips!

MC: Yes, he was quite young. I suppose we can’t get away from the aspect of His martyrdom, and of course the grief that many of His followers suffered as well. Mr. Hayden, I believe you have a poem about one of the people who died for His cause. Mr. Robert Hayden is a fine poet and educator—the first African American US Poet Laureate.

Robert Hayden: Dawnbreaker (*pause*)

Ablaze
with candles sconced
in weeping eyes
of wounds,
He danced
through jeering streets
to death; of sand
against
The drumming
Mockery God's praise.
Flames nested in
His flesh
Fed the
Fires that consume
Us now, the fire that
Will save.

MC: That is a hopeful message. While you are here, perhaps you could share some excerpts from your poem "Words in the Mourning Time" that relate to Baha'u'llah—the Prophet of God the Báb foretold.

Robert Hayden: *Certainly.* (Pause)

I grieve. Yet know the vanity
of grief – through power of
The Blessed Exile's
transilluminating word
aware of how these deaths, how all
the agonies of our deathbed childbed age
are process, major means whereby,
oh dreadfully, our humanness must be achieved.
I bear Him witness now:
Towards Him our history in its disastrous quest
For meaning is impelled. . . .
Who by the light of suns beyond the suns . . .
Bahá'u'lláh,
Logos, poet, cosmic hero, surgeon, architect
of our hope of peace.

MC: Thank you, Mr. Hayden. And Tahirih, perhaps you'd like to share one of your poems about the devotion you feel for the Báb.

Tahirih:

I would explain all my grief
Dot by dot, point by point
If heart to heart we talk
And face to face we meet.
To catch a glimpse of thee
I am wandering like a breeze
From house to house, door to door
Place to place, street to street.
In separation from thee

The blood of my heart gushes out of my eyes
In torrent after torrent, river after river
Wave after wave, stream after stream.
This afflicted heart of mine
Has woven your love
To the stuff of life
Strand by strand, thread to thread.

(Translated by Farzaneh Milani)

MC: That is beautiful. Such devotion! Now, I'd like to invite Mr. A.L.M. Nicholas, a French orientalist and official whose study of the life of the Báb is of singular importance, to share a comment.

A.L.M. Nicholas: "[The Báb's] life is one of the most magnificent examples of courage which it has been the privilege of mankind to behold ... He sacrificed himself for humanity, for it he gave his body and his soul, for it he endured privations, insults, torture and martyrdom. He sealed, with his very lifeblood, the covenant of universal brotherhood. Like Jesus, he paid with his life for the proclamation of a reign of concord, equity and brotherly love. More than anyone, he knew what dreadful dangers he was heaping upon himself ... but all these considerations could not weaken his resolve. Fear had no hold upon his soul and, perfectly calm, never looking back, in full possession of all his powers, he walked into the furnace." . . . So it is necessary not only to admit but to love and admire the Báb. Poor great Prophet, born in the heart of Persia, without any means of instruction, and who, alone in the world, encircled by enemies, succeeds by the force of his genius in creating a universal and wise religion. That Bahá'u'lláh succeeded Him eventually may be, but I want people to admire the sublimity of the Báb, who has, moreover, paid with his life, with his blood, for the reforms he preached. Cite me another similar example.

MC: Indeed. Now, we let's have another orientalist, Mr. Edward Granville Browne, share his thoughts. Mr. Browne is a Cambridge scholar who has researched subjects that few other Western scholars have explored, many related to Persian history and literature.

Edward Granville Browne: "Who can fail to be attracted to the gentle spirit of [the Bab]? His sorrowful and persecuted life, his purity of conduct and youth; his courage and uncomplaining patience under misfortune . . . but most of all his tragic death, all serve to enlist our sympathies on behalf of the young Prophet of Shiraz. The irresistible charm which won him such devotion during his life lives on, and still continues to influence the minds of the Persian people. . . . the objects at which this religion aims are neither trivial nor unworthy of the noble self-devotion and heroism of the Founder and his followers. It is the lives and deaths of these, their hope which knows no despair, their love which knows no colling, their steadfastness which knows no wavering, which stamp this wonderful movement with a character entirely its own. . . . I say nothing of the mighty influence which, as I believe, the Babi faith will exert in the future, nor of the new life it may perchance breathe into a . . . people. . . . [Its] splendid heroism . . . is a thing eternal and indestructible."

MC: Well stated. And now, Dr. T.K. Cheyne, do you have anything to add? Dr. Cheyne is a distinguished English clergyman.

Dr. T. K. Cheyne: . . . "Jesus of the age" . . . "Such a prophet was the Báb . . . a prophet and more than a prophet. His combination of mildness and power is so rare that we have to place him in a line with supernormal men. . . . Such radiance of might and majesty streamed from his countenance that none could bear to look upon the effulgence of his glory and beauty. Nor was it an uncommon occurrence for unbelievers to bow down in lowly obeisance on beholding His holiness. . . . Who can fail, as Professor Browne says, to be attracted by him?"

MC: Thank you. Sir Francis Younghusband, might you have something to add here? Surely a British army officer and explorer who founded the World Congress of Faiths would like to address us now.

Sir Francis Younghusband: "The story of the Bab . . . was the story of spiritual heroism unsurpassed. . . . The Bab's passionate sincerity could not be doubted, for he had given his life for his faith. And that there must be something in his message that appealed to men and satisfied their souls was witnessed to by the fact that thousands gave their lives in his cause and millions now follow him . . . his life must be one of those events in the last hundred years which is really worth study." " . . . And the ideal community which the Báb had in mind . . . would be characterized by brotherly love; by dignity combined with courtesy in all dealings and transactions; by the cultivation of the useful arts and improvements; . . . by the amelioration of the condition of women. . . . by provision of the poor out of the common treasury. . . . He had before him the task . . . of getting [people] who

are set and settled in long established ways of life to change . . . their whole attitude to life. . . . And for such a task not only the most patient loving-kindness was required, but the most perfect grace. He must not only be a lover of his kind, he must be an artist with infinite delicacy of touch in the representation of his views.”

MC: Well, let’s hope that society is moving in that direction. Mr. Tolstoy—er, *Count* Tolstoy, what do you have to say? I would think a Russian novelist of your distinction might have a few words for us.

Count Leo Tolstoy: The Bábí[s] religious teachings are of a very high order. . . . the basis of religion is, according to them, the goodness of life, . . . love for one’s neighbor. . . . I have known about the Bábí for a long time, and am much interested in their teachings. It seems to me that these teachings . . . have a great future, above all because they have rejected all these monstrous hierarchies which divide the old religions, and they aspire to come together into one single religion common to the whole of mankind. . . . I sympathize with all my heart with Bábism, insofar as it preaches brotherhood and equality between all [people], and the sacrifice of material life in the service of God.”

[Note: I’d like to find more women’s voices and add them here. AP]

MC: Perhaps Lady Blomfield would grace us with her thoughts about the day in which we live.

Lady Blomfield: [Certainly.] *pause* It has been said that in the "Latter Days," "The Great Day of God," which is understood to be the day of the Universal Manifestation, He Who should link all the religions and races of the world together in a vast bond of honor and love, free from self-seeking, hatred, and prejudice, would appear. . . . that in His Day the Lord God would send to the earth ten thousand thousand of His Saints. These Saints, referred to as "the Waiting Servants," would be manifested in every religion, in every race, every tongue, every color, and every nation in the world. . . . They would, wherever their abode, be the first to recognize the lessons of the Diving Educator, would be as leaven in the lethargic mass of people, and, arising to set about their Father's work, would be as pure "life blood in the arteries of the sick body of the world." . . . a number of the "Waiting Servants" were already . . . in Persia, and therefore were ready to recognize The Báb as the Promised One, . . . their Expected Leader, Whose ultimate mission was to herald the Great Universal Manifestation. . . . Persistently the "Waiting Servants" gathered round Him, gallant and fearless, increasing in numbers, and in disregard of the danger of bonds, imprisonments, torture, and death, of which the shadow was always near these devoted ones. . . . Thus the amazing six years passed (1844 to 1850). The authorities, instigated by the religious enemies, who feared the increasing numbers of His adherents and their determined steadfastness, which threatened their own influence and power, decided upon the bold step of putting The Báb to death, hoping thereby to end His "troubling of the land." . . . The Martyrdom of The Báb . . . took place on the 9th of July in the year 1850. His Holiness The Báb had accomplished His mission, under difficulties inexpressible, in bonds and imprisonment, steadfastly facing scorn, contempt, revilings. He had succeeded in establishing the conditions of purity of heart in many "Waiting Servants," who had become his devoted follower; this condition of heart being necessary in order to be able to recognize "Him Whom God shall make Manifest." "Blessed are they whose hearts are pure, for they shall see God." As His Holiness the Spirit (the Lord Christ) hath said aforetime. So The Báb said to his believers: "The pure of heart shall see, that is with eyes of the spirit they shall recognize God, in his Great Manifestation now about to arise, as the glorious Sun on a dark and weary world." And the "Gate" was thrown wide open into the Kingdom of Heaven. Through this "Gate" the "Waiting Servants" should pass, drawing with them the despairing, the humble and lowly of heart, those whose heads are adorned with the Crown of Severance from all things of earth, and those pure and holy one, whose lives are made perfect through love. For such are the dwellers in the new heaven, and the new earth.

MC: Well, your words are certainly moving, Lady Blomfield. Does anyone have a concluding statement you wish to make? Mr. Balyuzi, for instance?

Hasan Balyuzi: The towering grandeur and the tender beauty of the life of a Manifestation of God cannot be comprehended by events usually associated with a saintly life. The immensity of such a life presents itself in

that mysterious influence which it exerts over countless lives, an influence which functions not through social status and prestige, wealth, secular power or worldly dominion; indeed not even through a medium of mere superior knowledge and intellectual achievement. The Manifestation of God is the Archetype, and His life is the supreme pattern. His vision, not arrested by time and space, encompasses the future as well as the past. He is the only and the necessary link between one period of social evolution and another. Without Him history is meaningless and coordination is impossible. Furthermore, the Manifestation of God releases deep reservoirs of spiritual power and quickens the forces latent in humanity. By Him, and by Him alone, can Man attain "second birth."

MC: That is quite insightful, Mr. Balyuzi. With that, I think that our comments today can be concluded. I would like to thank our commentators, who have offered such a range of fascinating perspectives, and our audience, who has exerted patience in listening to them.

(End with any additional comments or announcements.)