

# A Day in the Blessed Presence of the Beloved Báb at the Fortress of Mákú: The Letter of Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Qazvíní<sup>1</sup> to the Greatest Uncle, Hají Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí

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## Introduction and background:

The Báb arrived at the Fortress of Mákú sometime between the beginning and middle of May, 1847, and there remained in confinement until the early days of April, 1848, when He was transferred to the Fortress of Chihriq. During this period of seclusion, those favored to behold His presence returned with precious accounts of His inner thoughts, comportment, and the luminous manner in which He sustained His bond with His beloved family and devoted followers. Among these privileged witnesses were Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Qazvíní, Shaykh ‘Alí Turshízí (Ázím),<sup>3</sup> Áqá Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ardistání,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Qazvíní (also known as Mírzá Aḥmad-i-Kátib, “the Scribe,” or Mírzá Aḥmad-i- Qazvíní) was one of the Báb’s secretaries, a teacher of Nabíl-i-Zarandí, and a close associate of Bahá’u’lláh. Born into a merchant family in Qazvín in the late 1830s, he studied law and theology under Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím-i- ‘Iravání, who proclaimed him a mujtahid. Feeling unworthy, he was reassured by a dream—interpreted by the Shaykhí merchant Hají Allāh-vardí Farhádí as a vision of Siyyid Kāzím-i-Rashtí—that led him, with his brother ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamid, to Karbalá, where he briefly attended Siyyid Kāzím’s classes before returning to Qazvín to pursue a mercantile life and raise a family. Upon hearing of the Báb’s declaration, he set out for Shíráz—reportedly on foot. In Tíhrán, he learned the Báb had called His followers to Karbalá, but arriving there discovered that the Báb had gone instead to Búshíhr and Shíráz. Joining other Shaykhís in their search, he paused in Isfahán before at last attaining the Báb’s presence in Shíráz, among the first believers admitted to His audience. From then on, he remained a steadfast and devoted follower (John Walbridge, “Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim Qazvini (Mirza Ahmad Katib),” in Bahá’í Library Online, comp. Jonah Winters, [Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim Qazvini \(Mirza Ahmad Katib\)](#)).

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<sup>3</sup> Shaykh ‘Alí Turshízí was among the Báb’s earliest and most steadfast disciples. The Báb refers to him as *Ázím* (“Mighty”). He was martyred in Tíhrán in 1852, during the persecutions that followed the attempt on the life of Náṣirí’-d-Dín Sháh, steadfastly refusing to recant his faith.

<sup>4</sup> Áqá Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ardistání was among the heroic defenders of the fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsí. In the thick of battle, he was grievously wounded and taken captive to the presence of Mírzá Mahdí-Qulí Mírzá. Summoned to disclose the condition of his companions and the circumstances within the fort, he remained steadfastly silent, refusing to betray the trust of his brethren. At length, his captors demanded of him: “*In what manner shall we put thee to death?*” To which he replied with unshaken resolve: “*In whatsoever fashion it be, so long as it be not more grievous.*” Thereupon they placed the muzzle of a musket against his right eye and fired. Thus, did he, in that very instant, attain the crown of martyrdom, sealing with his life-blood the testimony of his faith (‘*Ahd-i- ‘Alá*, p. 228).

Shaykh Ḥassan Zunúzí,<sup>5</sup> Áqá Siyyid Husyan-i Katib,<sup>6</sup> his brother Siyyid Ḥassan, and Hajj Muḥammad-Taqí Mílání.<sup>7</sup>

Mákú, a new and strange land, was unfamiliar to the kindred and beloved kin of the Báb. The letters and accounts that reached them from this distant stronghold brought solace to their hearts and assurance to their souls, bearing witness to the steadfastness and resplendent presence of the Blessed Báb. Among these missives, one stands preeminent: a letter that renders with extraordinary vividness the daily life of the Báb within that fortress, the devotion and conduct of those who came before Him, and the profound impression of His Cause upon all who dwelt in His presence.

This remarkable letter, composed by Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Qazvíní and addressed to Hájí Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí, the venerable uncle of the Báb, is preserved in its entirety in Persian and appears to have been composed between mid to late 1847, amid the Báb’s confinement in Mákú. In reading it, the reader is transported to His blessed presence, witnessing the visitors who come unto Him and beholding the multitude enraptured by the majesty and sanctity of His Being. Throughout its words, one discerns the devotion, wonder, and steadfastness that radiated from all who encountered that ineffable Light, which illumines every heart.

What follows is a provisional English rendering of this luminous letter, translated with the utmost reverence and care. For the purposes of this study, the typed Persian text published in *‘Ahd-i A’lá*, pp. 277–279, has been consulted.

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<sup>5</sup> Shaykh Ḥassan Zunúzí (d. c. 1868) was an early Bábí and a prominent Shaykhí scholar. He served as an amanuensis to the Báb and was among the first to recognize Bahá’u’lláh’s station as a Manifestation of God. According to *God Passes By*, he was a close companion of Siyyid Kázim and was residing in Karbilá in the 1840s. He later moved to Zanján and was among the first to become aware of Bahá’u’lláh’s station as a Manifestation of God. He died in Kirmanshah around 1868. The surname *Zúnuzí* indicates that Shaykh Ḥassan came from the city of Zunuz, located in the central part of Marand County in East Azerbaijan Province, Iran. This form of designation reflects the traditional practice of linking individuals to their place of origin.

<sup>6</sup> Áqá Siyyid Husayn-i Yazdí (d. 1852) was among the first eighteen Letters of the Living. The Báb refers to him as Azíz (“Dear”). He served as the scribe and amanuensis of the Báb and was His close companion during His imprisonment in Mákú and Chihriq.

<sup>7</sup> Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí Mílání was a prominent merchant and early adherent of the Báb. According to Nabíl-i-A`zam’s *Dawn-Breakers*, he, along with Hájí ‘Alí-‘Askar, ventured to meet the Báb shortly after His arrival in Shiraz. Despite warnings of potential risks, they proceeded and were arrested upon attempting to interview the Báb. This act of courage marked the beginning of his association with the Bábí community. Later, he became involved in the recovery of the Báb’s remains, assisting in their eventual placement in the Shrine of the Báb.

## Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Qazvíní Writes Thus:

*“He is the Most High, the All-Glorious, the Exalted*

*May I be offered up for the dwellers of Thy threshold, and may I become the ransom of Thy friends! Since I am on the point of departure, I deem it incumbent and binding upon myself to lay, in humble service, a brief account of my honoured Master and exalted Lord before Thy noble personage and before the grandmother of my Lord, His Holliness, the All-Compelling.<sup>8</sup>*

*May I be thy sacrifice! In sum, the condition is thus: let there be no perturbation or anxiety whatsoever concerning that august Figure.<sup>9</sup> For, praise be to God, devoted servants and selfless adorers are abundant throughout all regions and quarters, in every city and land.*

*And not every land is like this one, which,<sup>10</sup> akin to Mecca, is the very mine of the infidels. Rather, in those climes, among every class and kind of people, are devoted and faithful souls, who lay down their lives at His feet, and bring unto Him all that He may require.*

*And that august Person,<sup>11</sup> by the Lord of Lords—and by the Imams, the Pure, upon Them be the peace of God —bestows a favour upon him whose gift He deigneth to accept.*

*So numerous were the garments sewn and dispatched, that He apportioned them among others. And so abundant the consignments of sugar and tea sent, that He too distributed them among the friends.*

*And at all times attendants from among the foremost and most honoured of the sincere are engaged in His service; nor doth He debar the petitions and inquiries of the people.*

*And among the high and the low, by God Himself, He is honoured, revered, and exalted.*

*And ‘Alī Khān,<sup>12</sup> together with his household and womenfolk, evinced profound devotion; and day by day, in those regions, His Cause standeth revealed with ever greater splendour.*

*So deeply hath His love taken root in the hearts of many a man and woman, that not a thousand trials and afflictions could tear it therefrom. This, indeed, is a clear testimony in this station.*

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<sup>8</sup> The expression “grandmother of my Lord, His Holliness, the All-Compelling” (جدّه ولی حضرت جبار) is a reference to the Báb’s paternal grandmother.

<sup>9</sup> The Báb.

<sup>10</sup> By the phrase “not every land is like this one,” Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím is most likely referring to the city of Shíráz, whose inhabitants, together with its governor, subjected the Báb to harsh treatment and hostility.

<sup>11</sup> The Báb.

<sup>12</sup> The “‘Alí Khán” mentioned here is ‘Alí Khán-i-Mákú’í, the warden of the fortress of Mákú under whose custody the Báb was confined from May 1847 to April 1848. Initially hostile, he gradually softened in attitude towards the Báb, though he continued to carry out his official duties as the appointed keeper.

*'The heart of whomsoever Thou hast captured never lifteth its head from Thy snare, nor hath it any hope of release from Thy chain.'*<sup>13</sup>

*And the women of that land, in their love for that Exalted One,<sup>14</sup> are more enraptured, more utterly overcome than even the most pious and righteous among men.*

*Certain verses, in praise of the Remnant of the Pure,<sup>15</sup> were uttered; which, when this devoted one heard, was seized with wonder.*

*I bear witness by God that some among those very ones whom this devoted one know are so enraptured, so bewildered in their love for that Guardian of the Merciful,<sup>16</sup> that, at times, overwhelmed by the intensity of passion and devotion, they become restless and fall from speech.*

*Yet, may my life be offered up for thee, although that august Person regardeth no one, and accounteth all—man and woman alike—as of no account; nevertheless, He manifesteth toward you a wondrous and singular regard, and at times bringeth thy mention, with consummate love, into the midst.*

*May my life be offered up for thee: in the sorrow of His removal and remoteness, in the anguish of separation, and in the pain of estrangement, be not at all impatient.*

*For the All-Loving Lord, the Sovereign of beneficence, of bounty, of bestowal, and of generosity, and the Bestower of the munificence of His Being, hath vouchsafed unto you an existence that is the envy of all that are beheld, and the desire of all that exist, whether of the unseen or of the manifest.*

*And thou art beloved of the Praised One: Sovereign of Being and of Place, the Great Light in the depths of Possibility, the Perfect Youth in the realms of existence, the honoured Star among realities, the Point of Essential Being, and the universal Source of all hearts.*

*Verily, verily — again, verily, verily: be exceedingly glad and rejoice with utmost felicity, and render praise unto the Lord; render thanks unto thy Sustainer, for ye possess the pride of the world — provided, however, that ye do not account this affair a light matter.*

*May my life be offered up for thee: the fabric of this world is founded upon nothingness, and its delights are the source of sorrow and vexation. Render praise and thanksgiving, and give no heed to the cares and sorrows of this world.*

*To be grief-stricken in the face of such bounty, and sorrowful notwithstanding so great a gift and honour, is proof of ignorance of the worth of God's beneficence, and of failure to follow the Imams of Guidance — upon Them be the peace of God.*

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<sup>13</sup> Mullá 'Abdu'l-Karím quotes this bayt (distich) from Sa'í dī, Divān, Ghazaliyāt, Ghazal no. 34.

<sup>14</sup> The Báb.

<sup>15</sup> The Báb.

<sup>16</sup> The Báb.

*Yet, may my life be offered up for thee: God willing, on the morrow night the caravan departeth, and it seemeth there will be no delay; I, thy humble servant, shall accompany the caravan by God's power and might.*

*And since, according to the decree, I must present myself before the Blessed Presence by the first of Muharram,<sup>17</sup> make known whatsoever message or communication ye possess concerning the Signs of the Imam—peace be upon Him—and the Refuge of Mankind<sup>18</sup>, that august uncle and Friend of God Most High may, with his blessed hand, write it and dispatch it without delay.*

*And further: I am in possession of the blessed Epistle<sup>19</sup> from His honoured hand,<sup>20</sup> addressed to the noble Tāj al-Ḥajj,<sup>21</sup> Ḥajī Mīrzā Ḥasan 'Alī.*

*The brief purport thereof is this: upon thee be the pleasure of thy mother and of thy sister, for My pleasure is in their pleasure. Go unto the sacred places; and if they cannot go thither, then go unto them, and bring them to contentment with the thought of taking up their abode in the town where thou dwellest.<sup>22</sup> And whatsoever my mother desireth, convey unto her.*

*In fine, God willing, in these days I shall, by God's aid, present myself in the service of that most venerable Ḥajj, and I shall convey unto him the blessed Epistle.*

*Peace be upon you. Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds.”*

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<sup>17</sup> By “the first of Muharram” (غرة محرم) is meant the first day of Muharram in the year 1264 A.H. According to the Islamic lunar calendar, Muharram is the first month of the Hijri year. This date corresponds to 9 December 1848 C.E. in the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>18</sup> The phrase “the Signs of the Imam—peace be upon Him—and the Refuge of Mankind” refers honorifically to the Báb. “Signs of the Imam” (آیات امام) denotes His station as the Manifestation and proof of the Imam, while “Refuge of Mankind” (كهف الانام) evokes His role as a spiritual stronghold and shelter for all creation.

<sup>19</sup> The blessed Epistle of the Báb addressed to His uncle can be accessed via [A Letter of the Bab to His Uncle, Siyyid Hasan-'Alī \(Khál-i-Aṣghar\)](#).

<sup>20</sup> The Báb.

<sup>21</sup> The honorific Tāj al-Ḥajj, literally “Crown of the Pilgrim,” is a title of distinction conferred upon a Muslim who has completed the Hajj pilgrimage with recognized piety and social standing. In Qajar-era Persia, such titles were often combined with the individual's given name and family name (here, Ḥājji Mīrzā Ḥasan 'Alī) to indicate both spiritual accomplishment and social rank. The prefix Tāj emphasizes preeminence or excellence among those entitled to the honorific Ḥajj, marking the recipient as a person of particular esteem within both religious and communal hierarchies.

<sup>22</sup> The phrase “in the town where thou dwellest” refers specifically to the city of Yazd, the residence of Ḥajī Mīrzā Ḥasan 'Alī, the beloved uncle of the Báb.

## The Letter of Mullá 'Abdu'l-Karím Qazvíní to the Greatest Uncle, Hají Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí, Transcribed from a Typed Copy

مکتوب ملا عبدالکریم قزوینی به خال اعظم

### هو العلی المتکبر الرفیع

قربان سکان آستان شوم و بلاگردان دوستان گردم چون بنای مرخص شدن دارم و بر خود لازم و واجب می‌شمارم که شمه ای از اخبار آقای بزرگوارم و مولای عالم‌مقدارم به خدمت سرکار والا تبارم و جده ولی حضرت جبارم عرضه دارم قربانت شوم اجمال احوال بدین منوال است که تشویش و انتظار بهیچ طوری از اطوار در خصوص آن بزرگوار نداشته باشید زیرا که فدوی و جان نثار در اطراف و اقطار در بلاد و امصار بحمدالله بسیار است و همه جا مثل این ولا نیست که مثل مکه معدن کفار است بلکه در آن دیار از هر قسمی از اقسام مردم مخلص و مصدق دارند که جان در قدمش می‌سپارند و از جمیع مایحتاج بخدمت ایشان می‌آرند و آن جناب به رب الارباب قسم است و به ائمه اطیاب سلام الله علیهم سوگند منت بر آن

کس می‌گذارند که هدیه اش را قبول می‌فرمایند آنقدر لباس دوخته و ارسال نمودند که به دیگران قسمت فرمودند و آنقدر قند و چانی فرستادند که ایشان هم به دوستان دادند و همیشه از اجله و اعزه مخلصین در خدمتش خادم می‌باشند و مانع عرائض و سئوالات مردم نیستند و در میان اعلی و ادنی بخدا قسم محترم و مکرم و معظم هستند و علی خان با عیال و نسوان اظهار ارادت بسیار می‌کردند و روز بروز امر ایشان در آن صفحات در بروز است و چنان محبت ایشان در دل‌های بسیاری از مردان و زنان رسوخ نکرده که بهزار اذیت و آزار بیرون شود خوب شاهی است در این مقام

دل هر که صید کردی نکشد سر از کمندت

نه دگر امید دارد که رها شود ز بندت

و زن های آن دیار بی اختیارتر از مردهای ابرار و اخیار در محبت آن بزرگوار هستند پاره ای اشعار در مدح بقیه .  
الاطهار گفته اند که مخلص شنیدم و حیرت کردم اشهد بالله پاره ای از همان کسان که مخلص می‌شناسم چنان واله و حیران در محبت آن ولی رحمان هستند که گاهی از شدت عشق و محبت بی تاب و طاقت شده از تکلم می‌افتند باری فدایت شوم با آنکه جناب ایشان اعتناء به کسی ندارند و همه را از مرد و زن کالعدم می‌شمارند مع ذلك التفات غریبی با شما دارند و گاهی ذکر شما را یکمال محبت در میان می‌آرند قربانت شوم در غم مهاجرت و دوری و الم مفارقت و مهجوری ابداً ناصبوری مفرمائید که رب و دود و سلطان احسان و کرم و عطا و جود وجودی به شما کرامت فرمود که محسود کل مشهود و مقصود کل موجود از غیب و شهود است و محبوب حضرت محمود است سلطان کون و مکان و نیر اعظم در قعر امکان و بدر معظم در اکوان و نجم مکرم در اعیان نقطه هویه ایجاد و مصدر کلی کل فواد می‌باشند. البته البته باز البته البته به کمال نشاط و سرور مسرور بوده و حمد کردگار نموده شکر حضرت پروردگار بجا آرید که همه فخر بر عالم دارید بشرطی که این امر را سهل نشمارید قربانت شوم بنای دنیا بر فنا است و نعیمش مایه رنج و عنا حمد و ثنا نمائید و اعتنا به هم و غم دنیا نفرمائید که مهموم بودن با وجود این نعمت و مغموم بودن با چنین عطیه و کرامت دلیل ندانستن قدر و قیمت نعمت خدا و تاسی نمودن به ائمه هدی سلام الله علیهم می‌باشد باری فدایت شوم انشاء الله تعالی فردا شب قافله می‌رود و گویا تخلف ننماید مخلص هم به همراهی قافله بحول الله و قوته هستم و چون حسب الحكم جناب الی غرة محرم باید وارد حضور مبارک شوم لهذا هرگونه پیام و پیغام نسبت بآیه امام علیه السلام و کشف الانام دارید بیان فرمائید که حضرت خال و خلیل الله المتعال به خط مبارک خود نوشته بزودی ارسال فرمایند و عرض دیگر اینکه توقیع مبارک از جناب دارم که به سرکار تاج الحاج حاج میرزا حسنعلی نوشته اند و

مختصر مضمون این است که بر تو باد رضای مادر و خواهرت زیرا که رضای من در رضای ایشان است به سوی امکان مقدسه و اگر نرفتن (نرفتنند) به امکان مقدسه برو بسوی ایشان و راضی کن ایشان را در اینکه در بلدی که تو نشسته ای بنشینند و هر چه مادرم بخواهد به او برسان باری انشاء الله تعالی در این ایام به یار (ی) خدا (؟) بخدمت جناب حاج معظم الیه خواهم رسید و توقیع مبارک را به ایشان خواهم رسانید و السلام علیکم و الحمد لله رب العالمین

**The Letter of Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Qazvíní to the Greatest Uncle, Hají Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí (facsimile of the original)**

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