

THE BIRTH OF THE BÁB¹

Jaine Toth

VOICE 1 – RED

VOICE 2 – BLUE

VOICE 3 – BLACK

OPENING PRAYER

“O Thou Who art the Lord of grace abounding! Let Thy celestial aid surround those who love Thee, and bestow upon us the gifts and the bounties Thou dost possess. Be Thou sufficient unto us of all things, forgive our sins and have mercy upon us. Thou art Our Lord and the Lord of all created things. No one else do we invoke but Thee, and naught do we beseech but thy favors. Thou art the Lord of bounty and grace, invincible in Thy power and the most skillful in Thy designs. No god is there but Thee, the All-Possessing, the Most Exalted.

“Confer Thy blessings, O my Lord, upon the Messengers, the holy ones and the righteous. Verily, Thou art God, the Peerless, the All-Compelling.”ⁱ

Ismael Velasco reflects: “On the night of October 20th 1819 . . . slumbering humanity slept on, and few were the souls that rose to greet the birth of Siyyid ‘Alí Muhammad,” born to Fátimih Bagum at her uncle Áqá Mírzá ‘Alí’s home “in the fabled city of Shíráz.”ⁱⁱ

¹ See online along with related material at https://bahai-library.com/toth_scripts_holy_days

Velasco muses, "Shíráz, fortunate city! Well did the celebrated [orientalist] E.G. Browne speak of you as 'the home of Persian culture, the mother of Persian genius, the sanctuary of poetry and philosophy, Shíráz.'"

Replete with lush gardens, exquisitely crafted mosaics, intricate silverwork, and other arts, some boast of Shíráz as the home of poets, most notably the venerated Háfiz and the wordsmith Saadi, sometimes referred to as the Master of Speech. Referring to that city confettied with gardens, Browne mused, "A thousand times over was Háfiz's supplication granted, when he cried out in his love for you:"ⁱⁱⁱ

"Sweet is Shíráz and its incomparable site! O God, preserve it from decline!"^{iv}

Even should it experience some decline, it will be but temporary, because Shíráz, that illustrious city, is destined to be celebrated in future so much more for the birth of One Who ushered in a new stage in the fortunes of mankind. Twas the dawn of the new Age. That realization moved musician Robert Bassett to compose his song, *The Báb*. 🎵

Velasco describes that babe "born 'from the world of concealment into the visible world.' twenty-five years, four months, and four days before the birth of His Revelation, the promised Day of God; yet unseen and pulsating within the soul of a newly born Child."^v

The noble infant exhibited a unique sense of tranquility that remained with Him throughout the various trials He was fated to endure. His devoted mother related:

“Often He was serene and made no noise. During the 24–hr period, he would desire milk only four times and while nursing would be most gentle and no movement was discerned from his mouth. Many a time I would be disturbed as to why this Child was not like others and thought that perhaps He suffered some internal ailment which made Him not desire milk. Then I would console myself that if indeed He experienced some unknown illness, He would manifest signs of agitation and restlessness. Unlike other children, during the weaning period, He did not complain nor behaved in any unseemly manner. I was most thankful that now that the Exalted Lord had granted me this one Child, He was gentle and agreeable.”^{vi}

Extraordinarily gifted, from His earliest childhood, both spiritually and intellectually — many who knew Him as a youngster recalled His beautiful chanting — melodious and enraptured. Others spoke of His excellent calligraphy.

Raised by a devoted maternal uncle due to the death of His father when the Báb was only a few years old, the Child strove to be obedient, but that proved a huge challenge. Not because He was naughty, but because He seemed to live on a higher plane than those around Him.

Sent to be educated by one Shaykh Abid, known by his pupils as Shaykhuna, a man of piety and learning, His innate knowledge confounded that beloved tutor. Years later, the Shaykh recalled, "One day I asked the Báb to recite the opening words of the Qur'án. . . He hesitated, pleading that unless He were told what these words signified, He would in no wise attempt to pronounce them. I pretended not to know their meaning. 'I know what these words signify,' observed my pupil; 'by your leave, I will explain them.' He spoke with such knowledge and fluency that I was struck with amazement. He expounded the

meaning of 'Allah,² of 'Rahman,³ and 'Rahim,⁴ in terms such as I had neither read nor heard. The sweetness of His utterance still lingers in my memory. I felt impelled to take Him back to His uncle and to deliver into his hands the Trust he had committed to my care. I determined to tell him how unworthy I felt to teach so remarkable a child. I found His uncle alone in his office. 'I have brought Him back to you,' I said, 'and commit Him to your vigilant protection. He is not to be treated as a mere child, for in Him I can already discern evidences of that mysterious power which the Revelation of the [Qá'im] alone can reveal. It is incumbent upon you to surround Him with your most loving care. Keep Him in your house, for He, verily, stands in no need of teachers such as I.'^{vii}

Chastised by His uncle for embarrassing the teacher, He returned to school after promising to remain silent, listen, and learn. He sincerely tried to conduct Himself like the other students so as not to give offense. But the teacher realized the futility of the effort. He felt as though he were the student and 'Alí-Muhammad the instructor.

Years later, after hearing the claim of the Báb, the schoolmaster recalled not only His intellectual acumen, but more importantly, His nobility — His dignity — His serenity. The tutor remembered times when this remarkable student would be late and when questioned would always answer that he had been at the home of His "Grandfather."¹ Indeed, at times He would be so late that the teacher would send others for Him and they inevitably discovered that pious Youth immersed in prayer. The teacher came to realize that those words were not just a childish

² Allah is the one and only God in Islam; also, the term meaning 'God' for speakers of Arabic irrespective of religion.

³ one of the 99 names of Allah, emphasizing his attribute of boundless mercy and compassion towards all creation.

⁴ "Rahim" is one of the 99 names of Allah, specifically highlighting His attribute of being merciful and kind.

¹ Reference of Siyyids to the Prophet Muhammad.

pretense but had much deeper significance. His years of schooling only lasted a short time — from age 5 till no longer than age 13.

At approximately 15 years of age, the Teen, considered in His culture now to be a man, entered into His uncles' merchant establishment. Within a year He assumed complete management of the trading house. As a businessman He was highly respected and trusted due to His honesty, integrity and ethical dealings.

At this time He was also writing — much of the content worried one uncle who feared it would arouse envy amongst some of the people, This uncle pled with the employer, Haji Siyyid Javad,

"Give some good counsel to my nephew ... tell Him not to write certain things which can only arouse the jealousy of some people: these people cannot bear to see a young merchant of little schooling show such erudition, they feel envious."^{viii}

The tutor replied: "The fair of face cannot put up with the veil; shut him in, and out of the window will he show his visage. We are earthbound and He is celestial. Our counsel is of no use to Him."^{ix}

At approximately age 20 the young merchant left for pilgrimage to the holy cities in 'Iráq. During His stay in Karbilá He occasionally visited the classes of Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashti where that blessed Youth was always treated by the great teacher with a respect that caused wonder amongst his disciples. During one class session, Siyyid Kázim, pointing to the Báb, declared,

'What more shall I say? Lo, the Truth is more manifest than the ray of light that has fallen upon that lap!'

In light of the fact that the entire purpose of this enlightened instructor was to prepare his students to seek out and recognize the coming of the Promised One, that incident was indeed prophetic.

Prophetic indeed. William Sears writes, "On May 24, 1844 in Washington D. C., Mr. Samuel F. B. Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, stepped to the keyboard of his new instrument. He was about to send the first official telegram in history flashing across the wires from Washington to Baltimore."^x

"The press had heralded this day as a modern miracle. By this invention the world would soon be united . . . in the twinkling of an eye, they said."^{xi}

"The scholars of Scripture asked: Is this not still another proof that the hour has come for Christ's appearance? Is it not written in the book of Job that only God can send "lightnings that they may go and say unto thee here we are! "Was not this electric telegraph of Morse the "lightnings" spoken of by which the "Word" would go?"^{xii}

"Morse put his hand to the keyboard and tapped out the message . . . chosen from the Bible, from the Book of Numbers: "What hath God wrought?"^{xiii}

On 23 May 1844, the evening prior to that historic message, an even more historic event took place. Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad laid claim to a direct Revelation from God and declared that He was the Promised One yearned for, prayed for,

hoped for, waited for with earnest expectation by people around the world, of every faith and tradition.

Although He brought His own religion and His own Holy Book, yet His entire Purpose, He said, was to prepare the way for the coming of an even greater Revelation, admonishing His followers to watch for "Him Whom God will make manifest." He chose for Himself the title of, and is still referred to as, "The Báb," which means the Gate.

Ah, but to this day He is known by many different titles as we will hear in this song, *The Primal Point, Titles of the Bab*, 🎵 by Erika Mahoney with Luke Slott.

Prior to His declaration, the gentle Báb married Khadíjih-Bagum and together they welcomed a son, Ahmad. But their happiness was short lived. First the young son died, and soon the grieving mother was to lose her other Beloved.

When I ponder the hardships and suffering that Holy couple endured, one of the Bab's prayers comes to mind. In just a few lines it intimates trust in, love of, and need for nothing more than our faith in God. God is all we need. Anything more is an extra. I'm sure it helped sustain them. Many musicians have put this prayer to music. Here is LuAnne Hightower chanting, *Say: God Sufficeth*. 🎵

Feared and vilified by the Muslim clergy, the Báb was persecuted, imprisoned, beaten on His precious feet with the bastinado, and finally executed a mere six years after the declaration of His mission.

The efforts of the authorities to eradicate the new religion, which spread rapidly and widely, were to no avail. Its growth could not be quelled. Even their attempts

to have the Báb's body left in a ditch to be devoured by wild animals was for naught.

His blessed remains were rescued by His followers and for forty years moved from place to place, hidden and protected, until at last they were laid to rest on God's Holy Mountain, Mt. Carmel in Haifa, in what was then Palestine, now known as Israel.

A magnificent superstructure built around the sacred tomb is now visited by pilgrims from around the world who come to pay homage to the youthful prophet of Whom many accolades have been given by people of note. Let's hear what some of them had to say:

Rev. T.K. Cheyne, in *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions*: "His combination of mildness and power is so rare that we have to place him in a line with supernormal men . . .

"The gentle spirit of the Báb is surely high up in the cycles of eternity. Who can fail, as Professor Browne says, to be attracted by him?"^{xiv}

British Orientalist, Professor Edmund G. Browne: "His sorrowful and persecuted life; his purity of conduct, and youth; his courage and uncomplaining patience under misfortune; his complete self-negation, the dim ideal of a better state of things which can be discerned through the obscure mystic utterances of the *Bayán*; but most of all his tragic death, all serve to enlist our sympathies on behalf of the young prophet of Shíráz."^{xv}

Leo Tolstoy, Translated from a letter to Mme. Isabel Grinevskaya, Oct. 22, 1903: “. . . the teachings of the Báb . . . inasmuch as they keep to the principal fundamental ideas of brotherhood, equality and love, have a great future before them . . . I sympathize with Bábism with all my heart inasmuch as it teaches people brotherhood and equality and sacrifice of material life for service to God.”^{xvi}

We'll close out the story here and pivot to poetry. *The Orchard*, a metaphorical piece by Ian Kluge, penned in honor of the Birth of the Bab.

I saw an apple orchard in a dream
And all the trees it seemed were dying there —
Or dead — the old Twisted, gnarled branches bare,
Dried, broken, cracked, up-
lifted in the air Like desperate hands or limbs out-stretched
In one last gesture of
despair . . .

And though I slept, I still could sense
A lingering glow of past magnificence
Around them where they stood, With great, now fruitless, boughs
Up-raised, as phosphor glows
Softly on fallen or soon falling wood,
Sad evidence of former
strengths and glory gone . . .

And as I wandered on, I saw a few, as sometimes old trees do,
Grew leaves in wild profusion,
A furious confusion, Whole hurricanes of galaxies of green
Fresh leaves on countless twigs and shoots — Yet, looking at their boughs and round
their roots I found no fruit
And felt their secret grief.

Indeed, a wealth of green was theirs, And leaves as numberless as stars
Gave shade or shelter to whoever came
In sun or storm, yet they were doomed — their
power Mere shows because they lacked — for all their leaves —
A single flower . . .

Dreaming, I asked, "Are there no blossoms here? No flowers of sheer pure white that makes each apple tree A galaxy of bursting stars whose light Condenses in the ripening dew That crimson fruit whose seeds Enkindle life upon the fields of night . . .?"

And turning, saw, not far from me A flower, suddenly unfold, no — flare — Blaze into splendor on a slender tree That stood alone beside the orchard's broken fence, Holding aloft its blossom — a bright star Of sheerest white magnificence Whose petals of pure light reach to embrace The darkness of unending space And all the sadness of this place Where green in secret grieves . . .

"O holy Blossom! Star! O let us be the wise men who attend Your birth, Coming, as we all do, from far Off countries on this grievous earth.

Accept our gifts —

our best —

our hearts Made gentle by deep sorrows,

Scarred,

Dust-covered,

cracked

But beating still, though wracked By ills —

O Flower — Star! What else have we to give?

Accept our gifts — Or else how shall we live?

Sweet fragrant Bloom! Within your holy fruit shall crystallize
The seed from which
New orchards, worlds, and galaxies shall rise,

New hearts and eyes To feel with and to see

New skies above a new humanity.

O blessed Flower, be! And let me look and look and look
Until that holy tree on
which You grow Grows deep in me!"

Thus sang my heart and so my dream
Came to an end, and though the sun
Had not yet risen on the world, within I felt the radiance of a perfect dawn
Had just begun . . .

That dawn, alluded to in Kluge's closing line, led to a spiritual springtime. As the blessed Báb foretold, His coming was necessary to prepare the souls of men for "Him Whom God would make manifest," Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God. So entwined are these two Revelations, coming in such rapid succession like blips on a radar screen, that the calendar of the Bahá'í Faith begins with the year of the

Báb's declaration, May 1844.

This phenomenon is referred to variously as the Twin Manifestations,

the Twin Revelations,

the Twin Holy Trees,

the Twin Founders of the Faith of God,

these Twin great Lights,

these Twin Luminaries

These appellations suggest the inherent importance, the intrinsic value of Their Message.

It devolves then, upon us, to heed their Message,

to awaken our slumbering souls,

to absorb some of their Holy Light and let it then emanate from our being to those around us, struggling to emerge from the dark,

To share the Divine Love, in which we ourselves have been enveloped, with those who feel bereft.

In the Middle East, it is from the minaret that the faithful are called to prayer. The musical group, Minarets of the West, shares songs that spread these deific gifts. In the following selection they ask, as do we as we listen, to become a "*Minaret of Love.*" 🎵

Thank you, friends, for joining us in joyous celebration of that auspicious day that witnessed the birth of the blessed Báb. We'll close with a recitation of the Tablet of Visitation after which we invite you to partake of refreshments so lovingly provided by . . .

ⁱ The Báb *Baha'i Prayers*, p. 54

ⁱⁱ Ismael Velasco, *Meditation on the Occasion of the Birth of the Báb*

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} EG Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (1893), p.287, Century Publishing edition, London, 1984

^v Ismael Velasco, *Meditation on the Occasion of the Birth of the Báb*

^{vi} Cited in Miízá Habíbu'lláh Afnan's account of the Bab in Shiraz, translated by Ahang Rabbani,

Translations of Shaykhí, Bábí and Bahá'í Texts, No. 11, Dec 1997, H-Bahá'í

^{vii}^{viii} Nabíl-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 75

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} H. M. Balyuzi, *The Báb, The Herald of the Days*, p. 39

^x William Sears, *Release the Sun*, p. 192

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} Cited in George Townshend, *The Promise of All Ages*, p. 5

^{xv} Ibid., p. 18

^{xvi} Shoghi Effendi, *Appreciation of the Bahá'í Faith*, pp. 34–35