

Twelfth Day of Ridván 2025 ¹

Jaine Toth

3 Voices:

Voice 1 - Black

Voice 2 - Blue

Voice 3 - Red

All - Purple

Welcome to the celebration of the 12th Day of Ridván.

The Festival of Ridván encompasses a 12-day period that celebrates Bahá'u'lláh's initial announcement to those gathered /hat He was the One promised, Whose advent people of all faiths awaited. This took place on the first day of their arrival in the garden, which He called the Garden of Ridván.

It was in this green oasis that Bahá'u'lláh spent the last days of His ten years in Baghdád, to which he'd been exiled from Persia, while His family busied themselves preparing for the next step in their several banishments.

For most of His followers and well-wishers, this sojourn in the garden turned out to be the last time they'd have the joy of being in the presence of their Adored One.

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

Imagining the atmosphere, Robert Hayden wrote, *Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván*

Agonies confirm His hour,
and swords like compass-needles turn
toward His heart,

The midnight air is forested
with presences that shelter Him
and sheltering praise

The auroral darkness which is God
and sing the word made flesh again
in Him.

Eternal exile whose return
epiphanies repeatedly
foretell

He watches in a borrowed garden,
prays. And sleepers toss upon
their armored beds,

Half-roused by golden knocking at

the doors of consciousness. Energies

like angels dance

Glorias of recognition.

Within the rock the undiscovered suns

release their light.

(Angle of Assent, p. 117)

The Arabic word, Ridván means “good pleasure,” but has grown to also signify “heaven,” “tabernacle,” and “garden.”

The 1st, 9th, and 12th Days are Holy Days. The 9th day is when His family arrived after having been busy preparing for their imminent departure from Baghdád. The 12th day commemorates that departure, another step in the exiles He endured.

Usually we commemorate these Holy Day celebrations by reading historical accounts of the events and quoting from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, and occasionally inserting a poem or two. Today we try something different. More poetry and a few accounts. Poetry was intrinsic in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in both prose and verse. The Báb, His predecessor, alluded to the spiritual impetus for the poet when He said,

“Treasures lie hidden beneath the throne of God; the key to those treasures is the tongue of poets.” (Quoted in Nabil's, *The Dawnbreakers*, pp. 258-259)

Bahá'u'lláh wrote to a believer:

“Every word of thy poetry is indeed like unto a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love thou cherishest for God and His chosen ones are reflected. Well is it with thee who hast quaffed the choice wine of utterance and partaken of the soft flowing stream of true knowledge.” (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 175-176)

And Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, 'Abdul-Bahá, named by Bahá'u'lláh as “The Centre of the Covenant” indicating His authority following Bahá'u'lláh's passing, also loved and wrote poetry. He acknowledged and encouraged a Bahá'í poet with these words:

“O thou bird of pleasing tones! Thy little book of poems, which were very sweet, was read. It was a source of joy, for it was a spiritual anthem and a melody of the love of God.

“Continue as long as thou canst this melody in the gatherings of the beloved; thus may the minds find rest and joy and become in tune with the love of God. When eloquence of expression, beauty of sense and sweetness of composition unite with new melodies, the effect is ever great, especially if it be the anthem of the verses of oneness and the songs of praise to the Lord of **Glory.”** (to Louise (Shahnaz) Waite, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930 printing, vol. 1, p. 59)

Of the many names and titles attributed to Baha'u'llah, one of my favorites is the Nightingale, at times He is referred to as the Heavenly Nightingale, and more often as the Nightingale of Paradise. Music is poetry sung, and Chris Ruhe wrote this ode to Baha'u'llah, simply titled, *Nightingale*. [play]

As we listen to the poetry, let's keep in mind this comment from the Báb in which He was referring to lines from the Persian poet Hafiz:

“It is the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit that causes words such as these to stream from the tongue of poets, the significance of which they themselves are oftentimes unable to apprehend.” (Quoted in Nabil's, *The Dawnbreakers*, p. 258)

Jaine Toth's *Garden of Paradise* demonstrates the power of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and the personal aspect of the term Ridván:

New buds burgeon in springtime glory
Emblazon the landscape; relume our sight
Myriad colors tell the story
Of all things made new in a world gone right.
Hues complement, enhance one another
The antithesis of adversity —
Scents mingle — don't smother each other:
Model unity in diversity,
A garden of humanity is found
In every face of every race.
Amity and understanding abound
And we hold Oneness in our close embrace.
The Promised Age of Peace has had its start.
Redolent is the Ridván of my heart.

Steve Jarrell's, *The Hallowed Hollowness* paints a picture of the effect on individuals who develop that redolent Ridván of their heart.

Oh my Beloved

I am swooning with delight

I rejoice that the pith of self is leaving

And I feel deeply the hallowed hollowness of my soul

I feel your divine love flowing through me

Your sweet breath making me a flute of heavenly atonement

When I comfort it is with Thy hand

When I speak kindness it is with Thy words

When I am radiant it is Thy light

And I bend to Your every word

And see You everywhere and in everyone

And I love with Your love with all my heart, which is Thine.

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By the time the several exiles culminated in His banishment to the Holy Land, Bahá'u'lláh often took refuge in an island garden on the outskirts of Bahji, which He also referred to as the Garden of Ridvan. Janet Ruhe-Schoen imagined this scenario based on descriptions of that little oasis, stories of Him with children, and of people's memories of him. Though it's a different Ridván Garden, doesn't it all mesh together?

one day in heaven

a whisp of a no-name boy frolics forth
from a white clay dome in a village of
white clay domes baking under a blazing sky

frolics beyond white village walls to the green
oasis he calls heaven, that islet between
two streams where two tall broad-spreading
mulberries shade him as he sits catching
the ripe berries falling into his cupped hands

crushing the fruit between tongue and palate
he lets sweet juice assuage his thirst —
why is it that only these berries assuage his thirst?

perhaps because this is Allah's garden

he's seen Allah strolling here
followed by angels good and bad

the auntie he stays with says “good is always
accompanied by bad and i've seen enough
evil in my life to know”

the boy thinks that one day when he's brave

and strong he'll fall in with the angels
accompanying Allah

surely he'll be good enough, nourished by
berries grown in Allah's garden, and already
he is bad enough —
don't all the villagers call him that bad boy?

he rinses his hands and face in the stream
and recites the Bismullah “In Allah's name
most gracious most merciful”

they'd be surprised in the village at that
bad boy proclaiming the most holy verse

he must go pull a cat's tail or tip over
a water jug so no one will suspect

but wait here is Allah walking in that way

he has as if wrenching his foot from a stone
the boy understands that earth wants to keep Allah
keep him disguised as a man with blue-black hair
long black beard tall kolah hat crowning his brow

Allah chants richly resonantly his voice

a deep tolling bell ringing vibrating on the azure air

a small scurrying angel like a beetle bustles after him

scrawling fast beetle scratches on a paper held

in a trembling palm and letting the paper fall

whipping another paper from his capacious sleeve

as the fallen one flutters away joins its fellows

fluttering and lifting in desert wind

No-name dashes after the papers collects them

surveys them with his quick bright eyes

the looping twirling ink strokes look like no other

writing he's ever seen and he thinks

it's no wonder i couldn't comprehend what

Allah was chanting and maybe the angel

doesn't either but only pretends

Allah sits silent beneath the mulberries

his fathomless eyes fixed on some eternity that

only he knows while the angel with lowered gaze

kneels hands crossed over his heart

the boy approaches proffering papers

“i would have gathered them” the angel mutters

then Allah's hand settles on No-name's shoulder

No-name looks up and Allah smiles like the sun

his face veiled by brightness his unseen hand

tenderer than a mother's lifting the boy's chin

Allah speaks

he names the boy

calls him Mu'allim Teacher and a fountain

of meaning quenching all thirst washes

through the child in benediction

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Poet Robert E. Kogan wrote of his transformation in *When I First Found Bahá'u'lláh*

When I first found Bahá'u'lláh

My soul began to sing —

Nightingale in Paradise —

The promise of the spring.

My soul began to sing —

The winter passed me by

The promise of the spring

Made my spirit fly.

The winter passed me by

The spring winds came to me

Made my spirits fly

My eyes could finally see.

The spring winds came to me

I felt His loving grace —

My eyes could finally see

The beauty of His face.

I felt His loving grace

And when He looked at me

The beauty of His face

Was all that I could see.

And when He looked at me

I could not help but cry

For all that I could see —

Was love within His eye.

That poem is reminiscent of a Roger White sketch titled *Lullaby*. A Persian nanny is trying to put the children to bed, but they refuse to go to sleep without a story. Some of her comments hearken to lines in Kogan's poem. Let's present *Lullaby* and follow it by repeating the last two stanzas of the poem.

First, though, let's learn what inspired White to write this piece.

From Shimiran to Tihrán, Bahá'u'lláh was several times stripped of His garments, and was overwhelmed with abuse and ridicule. On foot and exposed to the fierce rays of the midsummer sun, He was compelled to cover, barefooted and bareheaded, the whole distance from Shimiran to the dungeon. . . All along the route, He was pelted and vilified by the crowds whom His enemies had succeeded in convincing that He was the sworn enemy of their sovereign and the wrecker of his realm. Words fail me to portray the horror of the treatment which was meted out to Him as He was being taken to the Siyah-Chal of Tihrán.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 606)

Among the crowd, which hurled abuse at Bahá'u'lláh and pelted Him with stones, was an old woman. She stepped forward with a stone in her hand to strike at Him. Although frenzied with rage, her steps were too weak for the pace of the procession. 'Give me a chance to fling my stone in His face', she pleaded with the guard. Bahá'u'lláh turned to them and said, 'Suffer not this woman to be disappointed. Deny her not what she regards as a meritorious act in the sight of God.' Such was the measure of His compassion. (H.M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*, p. 77)

Are you infants that you will not sleep without my tales!

I swear you turn my poor head grey;

I have been far too soft with you.

If your mother knew we spoke like this
your poor old nurse would pay, my little tyrants.
Would you have your *nanú* disgraced that way?
Ah, but what harm — we are children only once
and that is brief enough.

Let me close the lattice against the laughter
from the banquet. —

The nightingales are still tonight. —

So, you would have the story of the secret stone —
do you not tire of that old tale yet?

I fear to give you morbid dreams.

But yes, we all love secrets
and it satisfies me well to tell it;

I do not have an endless store, for all my years.

It was long ago, in Tihrán, in the time of your father's father,
cousin of the Kalántar.

I came as a young girl into the service of his wife.

My people were honest and my home decent.

I was clean in my ways, swift and soundless
on my feet and quick to learn.

Fate was often cruel in those harsh days
but I found a good life and pleased my mistress.

My hands could move gently as brown doves

across her silks, and I was skillful with the comb.

The day when one of high birth, a man of Núr,
was taken to the Síyáh-Chál in chains,
the household was abuzz. A festival was made of it,
the servants watching from the roof
as he was led through the rabble of the streets.
I was glad enough of the event—not every day
one of my station can see a nobleman in such a plight,
and we had few entertainments.

A strange sight indeed — like seeing a white rose
in a swarm of gnats. He walked in dream-like majesty
as though he did not hear the curses and abuse —
his head bared, his feet unshod,
his garment soiled with refuse pelted by the mob.
In excitement I seized up a white pebble — sharp it was —
and raised my hand to hurl it.
And then he looked up at me, as though the better
to receive its full force.
I froze. It was his eyes, I think.
I turned and fled, sobbing and shaking.
Afterwards I was much teased by the others
for being an hysterical girl. In shame I hid the pebble.

And that was all.

Later he was exiled, I heard,
but what became of him I cannot say.

Some said he was an enemy of God,
and some a holy man.

I do not know about such things —
it was enough to have seen that face.

Perhaps I should have cast it, but my hand was stayed.

I took it as an omen.

I keep the stone in this small pouch about my throat —
you may touch it if you promise you will sleep —
see how smooth it is worn.

It grows, I think, more white each year.

The silly amulet of an old fool, I suppose,
but when I am ill or sad, it comforts me.

Did I not close the window?

I smell the heavy breath of roses!

So there you have it;

it was his eyes, you see.

It was as though they gazed beyond us to another world.

Now will you sleep my little ones?

(Another Song, Another Season, pp. 94–96)

Once again, those two stanzas:

I felt His loving grace

And when He looked at me

The beauty of His face

Was all that I could see.

And when He looked at me

I could not help but cry

For all that I could see—

Was love within His eye.

The beauty of His face wasn't all that was beautiful. His every word, every action, brought glorious wonder to the world, thus He is referred to as the Ancient Beauty and the Blessed Beauty. The latter is the title of another song composed by Chris Ruhe. [play]

Using musical metaphors, Reginald King composed, *Virtuoso* (to Bahá'u'lláh)

**Myself is set atune
To your thoughts, words, desires,
As a harp, with strings aquiver,
Trembles to vibrate
Into a thousand notes of music.
Life is a vast, high raftered room
In which the harp stood silent
Through the years until
You came and touched it —
It responded, recognizing
The Master Musician —
Who understood.**

(Bahá'í World, vol. IX, 1940-1944)

Roger White expressed his awe and adoration in the sonnet he titled *Ink*:

**What is the ink with which I best could write
The covenant that's imaged by Your name?
So one who finds me broken, failed, exclaim:
This is his love! Would trace of lees invite
That recognition, or might blood proclaim
The louder Who held fast my heart in claim?**

How shall I tell my love? It is not stone
That's ablest to endure time's leveling hand
Mindlessly erasing man's anguished tale.
Historians invent from knucklebone
Of lords and slaves bright brave legends and brand
Them true—but altering myths don't long prevail.

Songs fade away. A poem's a fragile thing.
Were faith sure signature to name You King?

(Witness of Pebbles, p. 55)

Target, by Jeffrey Jentz, looks at Bahá'u'lláh as a spiritual archer:

**Tell me true, have you ever known Bahá'u'lláh
To miss?**

He raises a walnut bow nineteen times as heavy as Rama's.
Then, unerringly, he shoots a single arrow
Straight at the red-and-black target.

**Piercing planets, trees, priests, factories, banks
And kings—and all their schemes and specters.**

Do you still doubt this?

Look again: the arrow lies quivering in your

Heart.

(The Purple Rose, p. 71)

What happens to the heart which is blessed to be the recipient of quivering arrow? Sometimes it leads them to pen a poem. Here's another poem where Jaine Toth ponders what Ridván is.

Ridván is

a place

a garden

a Holy Season

a state of mind

a state of being

a feeling.

Supplicate the concourse on high

Empty the mind

Open the heart

Welcome the connection

Feel the inspiration

Create

Be enveloped in Ridván

Ridván is a state of the heart!

This account, written by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, encapsulates the atmosphere that surrounded the Blessed Beauty as He set out for the long and arduous trek toward Constantinople.

“The departure of Bahá'u'lláh from the Garden of Ridván, at noon, on. . .May 3, 1863, witnessed scenes of tumultuous enthusiasm no less spectacular, and even more touching, than those which greeted Him when leaving His Most Great House in Baghdád.

"The great tumult," wrote an eyewitness, "associated in our minds with the Day of Gathering, the Day of Judgment, we beheld on that occasion. Believers and unbelievers alike sobbed and lamented. The chiefs and notables who had congregated were struck with wonder. Emotions were stirred to such depths as no tongue can describe, nor could any observer escape their contagion."

Mounted on His steed, a red roan stallion of the finest breed, the best His lovers could purchase for Him, and leaving behind Him a bowing multitude of fervent admirers, He rode forth on the first stage of a journey that was to carry Him to the city of Constantinople.” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 155)

Moved by this account, musician Larry Magee wrote the song, *Red Roan Stallion*
[play]

Let's close with this poem, whose author we were unable to determine, which incorporates lines from the Bahá'í Gospel song, *We Have Come to Sing Praises to Our Lord*.

**For generations gospel singers sang of Jesus
lifted His praises loud and clear**

We have come to sing praises to our Lord.

**clapped their hands, stamped their feet
grasped for God's stars as their faces glowed**

We have come to sing praises to our Lord.

**till the pleased Concertmaster
taught them His new name.**

Alláh'u'Abhá, Yá'Bahá'u'l-Abhá.

We have come to sing praises to our Lord.

[Repeat musical verses inviting audience to sing along]