

THE MYSTERY OF MARTYRDOM

A transcript of audio-cassette from series

WINDOWS TO THE PAST

by Dr. Darius and Grace Shahrokh

Even though the pen shrinks and the tongue falters at recounting the barbaric acts committed by those who have disgraced the human race, yet these Windows must go on, and this one will reluctantly open to expose only a fraction of such atrocities as to stun the civilized world and let you ponder... why?

THE BAB, exemplifying the glory of martyrdom, became the target of 750 bullets at the age of thirty-one.

ABDU'L-VAHHAB, the glorious youth from Shiraz chained next to his beloved Baha'u'llah in the Siyah-Chal, MARTYRED BRUTALLY.
SIYYID ASHRAF, age 20, BEHEADED.

BADI', the seventeen year old Pride of Martyrs, MARTYRED BRUTALLY.

ABA BADI', the father of Badi', BEHEADED.

VARQA and his 12-year-old son Ruhu'llah, MARTYRED BRUTALLY.

MONA, the delightful 18-year-old girl from Shiraz, MARTYRED BY HANGING.

THIRTY THOUSAND BELIEVERS IN THE PAST CENTURY AND HALF, ALL MARTYRED FOR THEIR FAITH. (Abdu'l-Baha, by Balyuzi, p. 45)

The Bab's martyrdom should not and cannot be compared to that of the followers of the Cause. His Holiness was a Manifestation of God, and yet His longing to lay down His life in the path of His beloved, Baha'u'llah, was the ultimate in the realm of sacrifice, demonstrating that yearning between the lover and the beloved.

What was the common attribute shared by the rest? True recognition and unshakeable belief. As Baha'u'llah described them, they would rather lay down a thousand lives than breathe the word desired by their enemies. (Epistle to Son of the Wolf, p. 74) That word. That formidable word; recantation of their Faith.

These lovers of the light responded with their lives to these words of Baha'u'llah, "He should not hesitate to offer up his life for his Beloved, nor allow the censure of the people to turn him away from the truth." (Gleanings, pp.265-6)

Here it should be made clear that recantation or saying "I am not a Baha'i" is not optional for a Baha'i. It is definitely forbidden by Baha'u'llah in any shape or form. Whether it be for saving one's own life or when filling out a form in a country like Iran to gain an advantage or civil rights.

Shoghi Effendi clarifies the issue of obedience to authorities versus recantation in the following passages, "Baha'is must live a Baha'i life, fully and continuously, unless prevented by authorities. If local, state or federal authorities actively prohibit Baha'i life or some aspect of it, the Baha'is must submit to these requirements in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved such as denial of faith. This, Baha'is cannot do under any circumstances." (Lights of Guidance, 1983 ed. pp.336-7)

The history of the Bab and the life story of Varqa and his son are related in separate tapes. Respecting the sensitivity of the audience, we have selected milder examples for recounting. By no means is this presentation intended to incite animosity towards the enemies of the Faith. How frequently did the martyrs offer refreshments to those who came to arrest them, or presented gifts to their executioners as their last farewell.

ABDU'L-VAHHAB, The glorious youth from Shiraz.

His name should not be mistaken for Abdu'l-Baha as it is pronounced Abdu'l-Vahhab. He was a Muslim youth during the ministry of the Bab, but as a believer he was martyred in the blood-bath of 1852. His story has been told by Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, and Nabil, the historian, has recorded it.

We go back to the very early months of this Dispensation when after the completion of the eighteen Letters of the Living, the Bab instructed them to disperse and spread the Word. Then He took the last Letter of the Living, Qudus, with Him to Mecca for the

purpose of declaring His Cause publicly during a special pilgrimage.

The fourth Letter of the Living was Mulla Ali-i-Bastami, who was instructed to go to Iraq where he was arrested and martyred. He has the distinction of being the first martyr in this Dispensation. Mulla Ali, in obedience to his Lord, left Shiraz. He had gone only a short distance when a youth caught up with him. After introducing himself as Abdu'l-Vahhab, he tearfully implored that he be allowed to go with Mulla Ali. Trying to explain his plea, he said, "Last night in my dream I saw I was in my shop when I heard the crier calling the multitude about the appearance of Imam Ali (the first successor to Muhammad according to the Shi'ih sect). The crier announced that Imam Ali was pulling charters of liberty out of flames, handing them over to people. The crier emphatically stated these words, 'Hasten to Imam Ali for whoever receives the charter is saved.' Immediately in my dream I left my shop and ran to a street where I saw you distributing the charter. You whispered in the ears of those who received the charter some words that made the people flee in disbelief.

"After I woke up I sank into deep thoughts about that unusual dream. Then I came to my shop and to my amazement saw you passing by accompanied by a man. I immediately sprang up, and involuntarily began to follow you. To my great surprise, I found you standing on the same spot seen in my dream, engaged in teaching that man. You did not notice me but I stood close enough to hear that man protesting that it was easier for him to be devoured by the fire of hell than to accept your words. After that I followed you and here I am. I beg you to take me with you."

Mulla Ali urged the youth to return to his shop and gave him the assurance that with such purity of heart God would reveal the truth to him. The more Mulla Ali insisted, the louder grew the youth's lamentation and weeping. Mulla was left with no choice other than to take him along.

Now we go to the words of the father of Abdu'l-Vahhab whose name was Abdu'l-Majid. He became a believer and often was heard to relate this story with his eyes filled with tears, imploring God for forgiveness. He states, "I was among the favored officers in the government and no one dared to question my authority. When

I heard that my son had deserted the shop and left the city I was filled with anger and indignation. Then I heard he had passed through a certain gate, following a turbaned man. My anger mounting by the minute, I decided to take a club to chastise my son for his disgraceful conduct. I continued my search until I found them. Seized with savage fury, I inflicted unspeakable injuries upon Mulla Ali. With serenity he absorbed the blows and told me, 'Hold your hand because God is watching. I swear to God that I, in no way, am responsible for the conduct of your son. These tortures you are inflicting upon me are nothing compared to what I shall welcome because of the path I have chosen. You shall recognize my innocence and great will be your remorse.'" The father states, "I continued to beat him until I was exhausted. Leaving him lying there, I told my son to accompany me home. On the way, my son told me about his dream and the reason for his conduct. It shook me to the core. The memory of my cruelty haunted me to the extent that I decided to leave Shiraz and transfer my residence to Baghdad."

Now after some years, we find Abdu'l-Vahhab in a shop in the small city of Kazimayn adjacent to Baghdad. The year is 1851 when Baha'u'llah had temporarily gone to Iraq under the instruction of Taqi Khan, the prime minister of Iran, who had ordered the execution of the Bab the year before. It was inevitable that the youth encountered Baha'u'llah and became fervently attached to him. That was one year before Baha'u'llah's imprisonment in the Siyah-Chal of Tehran. Until His declaration in 1863, He was known as Jinab-i-Baha by the followers and as Mirza Husayn- Ali of Nur by the public.

Abdu'l-Vahhab's dearest wish was to follow Jinab-i-Baha, but He convinced Abdu'l-Vahhab to stay and attend his shop and even gave him some money to enlarge his trade. But that glorious youth traded the mortal world for eternal glory.

As you recall, that trip of Baha'u'llah lasted for about one year, and soon after His return to Tehran an attempt was made on the life of the king. As a result, all prominent Babis including Baha'u'llah were rounded up, killed, or cast into the notorious black pit. The terror in those days was beyond description. Just a mere accusation of being a Babi was enough for imprisonment and execution.

Abdu'l-Vahhab, trying to follow Baha'u'llah, arrived in Tehran, unaware of the situation and undaunted, began praising his Lord at the market place. He was arrested and thrown into the Siyah-Chal. The meaning of Siyah-Chal is the black pit because of its total darkness. To his delight, he found himself chained to Baha'ullah and therefore became His constant companion.

Baha'u'llah one day told Nabil, the historian, the following, "One night before break of day, Abdu'l-Vahhab being in the same chain asked whether We were awake or not. Then he related his dream that he found himself soaring into a space of infinite vastness and beauty. His flight in that immensity was so swift and effortless beyond compare. We told him, 'Today, it will be your turn to sacrifice yourself for this Cause. May you remain firm and steadfast. You shall find yourself soaring in the same limitless space.'

"That morning the jailer came and called Abdu'l-Vahhab. He sprang to his feet, embraced all the believers and pressed Us to his heart. That was when We noticed that the youth had no shoes so We gave him Our own shoes. The youth kissed Our knees and followed the jailer. Later on the executioner came to Us and praised the youth in glowing terms for the way he danced into the clutches of the multitude of crowd." The crowd cut him into pieces alive.

In those days each craft would be given a Babi to kill in whichever way they chose. Often they used their tools of trade. Even the students of college established by the prime minister Taqi Khan were given the opportunity for showing their dedication to Islam and the king by killing a Babi. Their only tool was their pen knives with which they killed a Babi to receive recognition by the fiendish clergy and authorities. To receive a higher mark, each group vied with the others in gruesome brutality. The word, blood-curdling, would be an understatement for defining their shameful acts.

What you just heard will not be complete without recounting how sixty years later Abdu'l-Baha related that story in the United States in 1912. Let Juliet Thompson complete the picture, "Suddenly Abdu'l-Baha's whole aspect changed. It was as though the spirit of the martyr had entered into Him...With His head thrillingly

erect, snapping His fingers high in the air, beating on the porch with His foot till we could scarcely endure the vibrations set up - such electric power radiated from Him, He sang the martyr's song, ecstatic and tragic beyond anything I had ever heard. Abdu'l-Baha said, 'This was what the Cause meant then! This was what it meant to live near Baha'u'llah!' ...Another realm opened to me - the realm of Divine Tragedy. 'And thus,' ended Abdu'l-Baha, 'singing and dancing, that hero went to his death, and a hundred executioners fell on him! And later his old parents came to Baha'u'llah, praising God that their son had given his life in the Path of God.' Abdu'l-Baha sank back in His chair. Tears welled in my eyes, blurring everything. When they cleared, I saw yet a stranger look on His face. His eyes were unmistakably fixed on the invisible. They were as brilliant as jewels and so filled with delight that they also made His vision real to us. A smile of exultation played on His lips. Very low, so that it sounded like an echo, He hummed the martyr's song. 'See the effect that the death of a martyr has on the world. It has changed my condition.'"(King of Glory, pp. 94-98)

SIYYID ASHRAF

Another loved one of Baha'u'llah whose story is so commingled with the story of his mother as if they were one soul in two bodies. Their dedication, steadfastness and sacrifice have been praised by Baha'u'llah. His mother's name was 'Anbar Khanum who is known in Baha'u'llah's writings as Umm-i-Ashraf, meaning the mother of Ashraf. She is another immortal heroine who has adorned the pages of history.

If you recall from the history, two decades earlier, the fierce and erudite Hujjat, a star of the Babi Dispensation, along with thousands of companions were massacred in Zanzan for defending the Faith. One of the martyrs was Aqa Mir Jalil, the father of Ashraf, who was an influential man.

Ashraf was born during that struggle. The cruelties his mother witnessed during that siege nor the struggle of raising Ashraf and two older daughters in that hostile environment failed to break the spirit of that unusual woman. As soon as the Message of Baha'u'llah reached Zanzan, she and her children embraced His Cause. As a youth, Ashraf traveled to Adrianople and attained the presence

of Baha'u'llah. After some time he went for the second time, taking one of his sisters and Haji Iman, a survivor of the Zanzan massacre. Haji Iman's name might sound familiar if you have listened to the story of Varqa. He was Varqa's father-in-law and was chained with Varqa in a Tehran prison.

Many non-Baha'i members of the family, particularly three paternal uncles, of Ashraf gave his mother a rough time. They constantly harrassed her as the force behind the enthusiasm of her husband and now the children. While Ashraf and company were in Adrianople the three uncles came and tongue-lashed Umm-i-Ashraf. When they began to suggest immoral intention on the part of her daughter who had accompanied Ashraf, Umm-i-Ashraf could no longer take it. She left the room, crying bitterly, raised her hands supplicating Baha'u'llah to send her children home. The next morning Baha'u'llah summoned Ashraf and companions and told them that the night before He heard the supplication of Umm-i-Ashraf asking for their return. Therefore, they were to leave at once. Then He showered His praise and bounties upon Umm-i-Ashraf.

Haji Iman has related that Ashraf was so transformed that while in a caravan on their way home, Ashraf used to chant poems and writings of Baha'u'llah which he had memorized. The caravan drivers would come to him and walk alongside just to listen to his exhilarating voice which made the entire caravan slow down.

On advice of Baha'u'llah, Haji Iman and the sister of Ashraf got married. Their daughter, Liqaiyih Khanum, became Varqa's wife. Listen to that touching story.

Siyyid Ashraf was directed by Baha'u'llah to especially teach the Babis who were confused by Mirza Yahya, Baha'u'llah's half-brother. In his contact with the Babis, Ashraf clarified the station of Baha'u'llah as the sun of truth, and Mirza Yahya as the dark cloud trying in vain to obscure it.

After his return, Ashraf became very close to a believer who was born blind, but Baha'u'llah gave him the title of Aba Basir, meaning seeing. He was a man of tremendous memory and erudition. At times, the students of theology would go to him with their questions. Aba Basir's father was also one of the martyrs of Zanzan episode.

A never-ending pattern of events ensued because of the antagonism of the clergy and cooperation of inept and equally depraved governor and officials. The clergy issued the death sentences of Siyyid Ashraf and Aba Basir and handed it to the governor for implementation. At a meeting of the clergy, Aba Basir was summoned for recantation. Instead, he eloquently proved the divine origin of the Cause of Baha'u'llah. He was taken to a public square in front of thousands who had gathered to see him die, and while kneeling in prayer he was beheaded.

Meanwhile, Ashraf was being tortured in prison and those friendly towards him tried to persuade him to recant. He was about twenty years old. When both friends and foe gave up their efforts to make him recant, it was decided to send for his mother hoping she might persuade him to do so. Badly beaten, he was taken to the square. As soon as Ashraf saw the lifeless body of Aba Basir, he ran towards it and held it in his arms. At this time, his mother arrived, finding her son covered with blood.

That steadfast heroine, Umm-i-Ashraf, stepped forward, threw her arms around her only son and kissed him on both cheeks. She wiped sweat and blood from his face and took his blood-stained skullcap for a souvenir. Then she cried out these heart-touching words, "I will disown you as my son if you incline your heart to such evil whispering and allow them to turn you away from the truth..." It makes one's heart ache and break.

One fair-minded divine, the Imam Jum'ih, who badly wished to save Siyyid Ashraf, took Ashraf into his arms and whispered a few words into his ears. Then the divine stood on a platform and falsely announced that Ashraf had recanted his faith. Ashraf raised his voice and denied the allegation.

Ashraf was beheaded as he held the lifeless body of Aba Basir. Umm-i-Ashraf, witnessing it all, made no lamentations, nor did she shed a single tear. With her last glance at the corpse of her son, she exclaimed, "I have now in mind the vow I made the day you were born. I rejoice that you, my only son, enabled me to redeem that pledge." She offered up her best possession in the path of God. What a sacrifice! Ashraf, so intoxicated with the love of Baha'u'llah, did not need the persuasion of his mother,

but it had to happen that way so such an ultimate sacrifice by a mother would leave a matchless legacy. Baha'u'llah revealed a tablet of visitation for Siyyid Ashraf, Aba Basir and another martyr of Zanzan. He has extolled the station of Ashraf and Umm-i-Ashraf in His other tablets.

You might wonder what makes a believer worthy to become the recipient of the glowing praises from Baha'u'llah. That blessed woman, Umm-i-Ashraf, was truly a tower of strength. She never lost faith, and in spite of all that happened to her, she praised the Lord to the end of her life for her lot in this mortal world. What she considered an honor, to us might appear to be suffering. For your information, she not only lost her husband and son, both as martyrs, but also lost her two grown-up daughters both dying in childbirth, but she never became bitter or complained. (Khushihhai az Kharman-i Adab Va Hunar, Vol. V, p. 27)

Her last offerings in the path of her Lord were Varqa and his twelve-year-old son Ruhu'llah. Varqa married her granddaughter, but Ruhu'llah was from Varqa's previous marriage. That charming youth, Ruhu'llah, would call her "mother." Then one day she found out that her son-in-law, Haji Iman, her grandson-in-law, Varqa, and Ruhu'llah were arrested and sent to Tehran in chains and stocks. Varqa and son were martyred brutally but Haji Iman miraculously survived to relate the heart-wrenching details of that atrocity.

Haji Iman was a living history, having survived the massacre of Zanzan and now more than forty-five years later, survived another close call. It seems some believers were destined to survive and tell the history first hand.

As was said earlier, Umm-i-Ashraf was a tower of strength and her unwavering belief in Baha'u'llah's exhortations proved her to be a true believer and that is pleasing to Baha'u'llah.

BADI AND ABA BADI

The seventeen-year-old Aqa Buzurg and his father, Abdu'l-Majid, were immortalized by Baha'u'llah with the titles of Badi, meaning new or wonderful, and Aba Badi, meaning the father of Badi.

When Mulla Husayn, the first believer in the Bab and the first Letter of the Living, was in his home province of Khurasan, he converted many Muslims, one of whom was Aba Badi. When Mulla Husayn, under the direction of the Bab, gathered a group of Babis to go to Mazindaran under the black standard to assist Quddus who was in captivity, Aba Badi joined him. No doubt you know that Quddus was the last and the eighteenth Letter of the Living, but in spiritual rank was only second to the Bab. The details of that exciting history of Mulla Husayn will be presented separately.

While on the move, Mulla Husayn gave two commands to more than two hundred horsemen accompanying him. One was telling those who were not ready for that dangerous mission that they should stay behind, and the other command was detachment from the material world. His order was that the men could only keep their swords and horses and discard anything precious in their possession. Aba Badi, whose father was the owner of a turquoise mine, had a small sack of the choicest turquoise, worth a fortune. He was the first to open the sack and spread the precious stones all over the road.

In May 1849 when these believers, who are known as the defenders of Fort Shaykh Tabarsi, after nearly seven months of seige were deceitfully invited to leave their fortress, nearly all of them were butchered brutally. Only a few escaped the slaughter. Aba Badi was one of them. Those few survivors related the story of events of those seven months exactly as they happened to Nabil, the historian. As you see, Aba Badi was an old acquaintance of Nabil.

On an assignment from Baha'u'llah who was in Adrianople, Nabil travelled throughout Iran and went to the home of his old friend, Aba Badi, in his home town of Nishapur. To Nabil's surprise, he found Aba Badi attended everything personally, instead of someone younger. In those days, women were not allowed to serve men visitors. Nabil asked Aba Badi whether he had a son old enough to assist him. The answer was yes, but that the teenage son was leading a wild life and quite unruly, rather a disappointment to the family. Nabil expressed his wish to meet the young lad. He

states that when the tall lad came in, he was anything but impressive, but appeared to have a pure heart. After a short visit, the lad left the room, and Nabil asked Aba Badi to have his son host Nabil and leave the affairs to God.

Nabil writes, "After we finished our supper, I recited a number of verses from a poem by Baha'u'llah called Qasidiy-i-Varqa'iyih in which He described His own sufferings while in seclusion in the mountains of Sulaymaniyyih. While listening attentively, a sudden and unexpected change in Badi dumbfounded his father. Badi's face became flushed and his eyes welled with tears. Then we could hear him crying loudly. Sleep escaped our eyes and all night we recited Baha'u'llah's holy writings. After the morning light broke, Badi went to fetch milk for our breakfast. His father told me, 'I have never heard my son cry. I thought nothing could move him. I am at a loss about the spell cast on him. I can't believe my eyes and ears.'"

The fire of the love of God was ignited in Badi's heart and no longer was he in command of himself. He acted and went where that invisible power guided him. Badi insisted upon accompanying Nabil on his return so he could attain the presence of Baha'u'llah, but Aba Badi did not favor the idea. He had asked a learned Baha'i to educate Badi well enough so he could read the Book of Certitude. However, Aba Badi promised that should his son keep his part of the agreement he would provide the means for such a glorious journey to Akka.

Before we go any further with the story of Badi, we must digress to the last part of Baha'u'llah's stay in Adrianople which, as you remember, lasted five years, ending with His exile to Akka in 1868.

After the most great separation, when Mirza Yahya and a handful of his followers became identified as Azalis, Baha'u'llah revealed his weightiest tablets of the Adrinaople period. These were addressed to the kings and emperors. You can learn about that separation from the talk on the Covenant. During this time, one day Baha'u'llah told the believers and the visitors in His presence that He had just revealed a tablet to Nasiri'd-Din Shah, the king of Persia, and asked "who will bell the cat?" This is a Persian

expression about who is willing to risk his life. There were many veteran believers who hoped to be chosen for delivering it to the king, but the messenger for such a weighty task had to be recreated. At that time, Badi was about sixteen years old, totally oblivious of his great destiny, thousands of miles away from Adrianople and was being a concern to his father.

We go back to Nabil. He writes, "I left Aba Badi and Badi and after some traveling when I arrived in Tehran, I heard that a believer who was on his way to Akka for a pilgrimage passed through Nishapur. When Aba Badi learned about his intention and that he had permission to take one other person with him, he provided his dear son with a horse and money hoping that they could catch up with me in Baghdad."

Badi accompanied that believer to Yazd, a southern city in Iran, where he gave everything to the companion traveler and parted ways. He set out on foot towards Baghdad. After his arrival in Baghdad, a tragic event took place. A dedicated believer, Abdu'l-Rasul, was living there whose daily task was to carry water in a sheepskin bag on his shoulder from the river to Baha'u'llah's house which now was occupied by Baha'is. One day Abdu'l-Rasul was ambushed by the enemies and, defenseless with the load of water on his shoulders, his abdomen was knifed open. With one arm he pressed against the wound and managed to carry the water to the house where he collapsed and died. Some of these acts reveal a faith and determination way beyond ordinary.

Badi, about seventeen years old, without hesitation stepped in and took over the task of the fallen water carrier. In spite of being attacked a few times and receiving injuries, he continued his service until the believers in Baghdad were rounded up and exiled to Mosul. With his free spirit, he escaped their net and traveled on foot to Mosul to resume the same task there. After a while he took to the road, all alone, towards Akka. He arrived in Akka in 1869 during Baha'u'llah's first year of imprisonment in a solitary cell behind bars. The guards of the city gate of Akka, though quite vigilant about stopping Baha'is from entering the city, did not suspect Badi since he was in the garb of a water carrier. Once inside the city, he was at a loss as how to inquire about the whereabouts of Baha'u'llah without being detected. When

he entered a mosque to pray, he saw a group of Persians and recognized Abdu'l-Baha, who was then twenty-five years old. Badi wrote a few words on a piece of paper and managed to pass it to Abdu'l-Baha.

Through Abdu'l-Baha's effort, the same night Badi entered the prison and attained the presence of his Lord. This honor was given to him once more. In those two meetings, that forsaken cell became the site where the Kingdom of Revelation was revealed to him. What a bounty! In those two exposures, Badi received the gift of second birth. Baha'u'llah, in a tablet, testifies that He took a handful of dust, mixed it with the water of might and power and breathed into it a new spirit and adorned it with the name Badi, meaning new or wonderful. (Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Vol. III, p. 179)

In a tablet to Aba Badi, Baha'u'llah states, "So great was the infusion of this might that single and alone Badi could have conquered the world." Baha'u'llah testifies that He disclosed to Badi's eyes the Kingdom of Revelation.

Now we understand why of all the martyrs, this seventeen-year-old youth was designated by Shoghi Effendi as one of the nineteen Apostles of Baha'u'llah, and his name placed second, the first being Mirza Musa, the faithful brother of Baha'u'llah. (Rev. of Baha'u'llah, Vol III, p. 181) When Badi learned that Baha'u'llah had revealed a tablet to the king of Persia and it was waiting to be taken to the king, he begged Baha'u'llah to be given the honor, knowing full well that he would have to lay down his life. Baha'u'llah accepted his offer and instructed him to go to Haifa where he would receive the tablet. There a believer delivered the tablet in a small case into his hands. He kissed the package and prostrated towards Akka. Delivered to him also was a sealed envelope addressed to him. He went at a little distance, sat facing Akka and read what Baha'u'llah had revealed for him. With ecstasy, he prostrated again towards Baha'u'llah's prison. It is reported that after Badi's martyrdom, this tablet was obtained by a Russian official who transferred it to St. Petersburg where it is preserved in a collection in the Institute of Oriental Languages. (King of Glory, p. 298)

When Baha'u'llah instructed Badi to go to Haifa to receive the tablet, He also told him not to associate with any believer on his way to Tehran. Badi began his long journey. With the package close to his heart, he traversed mountains and deserts on foot for four months. In one stage of his travel, a believer happened to be among the travellers. He has stated that all he learned from Badi was that he had been in the presence of Baha'u'llah and now was returning home. The traveller also related that every so often Badi would go a short distance from the road, prostrate towards Akka with these words of supplication, "O God! That which you have bestowed upon me through your bounty, do not take back through your justice; rather grant me strength to safeguard it." (King of Glory, p. 299)

Finally he arrived in Tehran in the summer of 1869. He fasted for three days while he made certain where the summer camp of the king was. He went straight there, dressed in white turban and robe, and sat all day on top of a large rock. On the fourth day, the king, looking through his binoculars, spotted him and guessed that he had a petition for justice. He sent his men to find out what he wanted. Badi told the men that he had a letter from a very important personage for the king and had to personally deliver it into his hands. The officers searched him for weapons and took him to the king. The courage of Badi and the officers not taking the package from him was very extraordinary. In those days average people were not supposed to look at the king. Whenever the king's entourage passed on a street, the forward section would shout, "Go dead and blind" meaning for people to stand still and lower their heads. That spiritual giant was not an ordinary person any longer.

He calmly handed the package to the king, and in a moving voice said this verse from Quran, "O king, I have come unto you from Sheba with a weighty message." He was arrested at once and the letter was sent to the divines for an answer. All that the divines came up with was to put to death the messenger and send the message to the officials in the Turkish empire for further tightening of restrictions on Baha'u'llah. How much tighter could it be than the solitary cell behind the bars in infested Akka.

The attendants took Badi away and began their interrogation, first

with promises and then by torture, alternating bastinado with branding his flesh with red hot iron. For three successive days these barbaric tortures continued. His photo on the insert, which also has adorned the cover of this tape, was taken during those days. His calm composure is astonishing. While the intense smell of burning flesh forced some torture-mongers to leave the tent, Badi was joyous and laughed under the impact of red hot iron which astonished the fiendish tormentors. Finally when they got no word out of him, they threatened him with death and demanded that he should state it was a petition from a prisoner instead of a weighty message. He did not breathe the word desired by them, so they laid his head on a plank and crushed it.

The detailed account of this blood-curdling atrocity was written by a Persian former prime minister forty-four years later when in 1913 he was in Paris for medical treatment. An American Baha'i in Paris, Laura Dreyfus-Barney, had given him a copy of Some Answered Questions. When he read the story of Badi, he was moved to write his recollections as he and his father had heard the story of the last days of Badi directly from Kazim Khan-i-Farrash-Bashi, who personally carried out the torture and execution. He relates that the Farrash-Bashi later went insane and had to be chained until he died.

For three years after Badi's martyrdom, Baha'u'llah praised him in various tablets in glowing terms. The one title that stands out is Fakhru'l-Shuhada, meaning the pride of martyrs. (King of Glory, pp. 300, 303-9)

Badi's father had no idea where his son was and what happened to him until he heard about it. In His tablets, Baha'u'llah addressed the father of Badi as Aba Badi, meaning the father of Badi.

Seven years after the martyrdom of Badi, in old age, Aba Badi travelled to Akka. He states, "One day I was in the presence of Baha'u'llah when He was talking about Badi and how he won the crown of martyrdom. My tears were flowing profusely, soaking my white beard. Then Baha'u'llah turned to me and said, 'Aba Badi! A person who has already spent three-quarters of his life should offer up the remainder in the path of God.' I asked, 'Is it possible that my beard which is now soaked with tears, may one day become red

with my blood?' Baha'u'llah answered, 'God willing.'" (Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Vol. II, pp. 129-36) The exhortation of Baha'u'llah to Aba Badi may apply to many of us to dedicate our remaining years to the service of the Cause.

Baha'u'llah sent the most precious gift with Aba Badi to the Baha'is of the province of Khurusan. It was the first copy of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Aba Badi used to attend many gatherings of the believers, igniting the fire of enthusiasm and firmness in their hearts. He often discussed the fulfillment of Baha'u'llah's prophecy concerning the downfall of the Sultan of the Turkish Empire. Soon, enemies of the Cause, including his own brother and sister, began their intrigues. Having been a survivor of Shaykh Tabarsi massacre, his son killed for taking the message to the king, and now openly teaching the Faith were enough reasons for the death sentence. When the agents of the chief clergy visited him to ascertain the truth of the allegations, he openly tried to teach them.

This was about one year after his return from Akka when he was eighty-five years old. At this time, the notorious divine stigmatized by Baha'u'llah as "The Wolf" arrived in Mashhad, the provincial capital. A petition was made to the governor for Aba Badi's execution, but the governor was fair-minded and did nothing about it. Frustrated, the clergy took their complaint to the king whose order was recantation or death. With such an order in hand, the Wolf was at the governor's mansion suggesting that Aba Badi should be dropped from a hot-air balloon which had just been brought to Mashhad. Suddenly the governor heard that his beloved daughter had just drowned in a pool. He left the meeting and that plan was abandoned. The governor's wife was convinced that this was a sign from God and rebuked her husband about entertaining such thoughts. The Wolf filed a second complaint and the king's order was the same.

The governor badly wanted to protect Aba Badi and at different times sent about twelve prominent people to persuade Aba Badi to recant, but they could not shake his resolve. Now the governor had no choice but to obey the king's decree. On the day of execution, Aba Badi was taken from prison to the site of execution amidst the hostile crowd eager to see one more Baha'i killed.

The executioner dressed in red with a dagger in hand was waiting for him, but the governor had not given up. His special envoy arrived at the scene hoping that fear would force Aba Badi to recant. Neither the insults of the crowd nor the appearance of the executioner with bare dagger in hand deterred Aba Badi. How could he refuse the crown of martyrdom within his reach.

With a powerful stroke of the dagger, he was ripped open from waist to throat. Then he was beheaded and his head placed on a slab of marble for public viewing. Thus ended the life of one who stood firm until the end with his blood-soaked beard testifying to the truth of the Cause. He did not waver even for one moment when the "swords of the enemies rained blows" upon him - that celebrated verse from the tablet of Ahmad.

This story will not be complete without a few more words about the shameful atrocities of the fanatics which have been a true disgrace to humanity. Aba Badi's headless body was dragged through the bazaars of the city, and when abandoned, many ruffians stayed around. The daughter of Aba Badi, and sister of Aba Badi, with tears streaming from her eyes and a baby in her arms, for hours with her husband followed the body and watched the horrible abuses inflicted upon it. She was hoping to be able to retrieve the body for burial, but the ruffians hurled stones at them, and they were forced to return home. Some believers, in disguise, later were able to take the body and bury it.

If you wonder why did Aba Badi request from Baha'u'llah to be honored with the crown of martyrdom, these words of Mr. Adib Taherzadeh in his books The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, will shed light, "These people who sought martyrdom must have attained the pinnacle of faith and assurance. They must have seen with their spiritual eyes a glimpse of the inner reality of their Lord, and have become magnetized by His glory. These souls, the moth-like lovers of His beauty, were so dazzled by the splendors of the light of His countenance that they wished to sacrifice themselves in His path." (Revelation of Baha'u'llah Vol IV p. 57)

MONA MAHMUDNIZHAD

Although one thinks or hopes that after the passage of a century, and the march of humanity towards civilization, fanatic barbarism would give way to moderation and tolerance, but not in a certain country. On that infamous June night in 1983 only thirteen years ago, under the cover of night, ten Baha'i women were hung, one at a time in front of those remaining. Their only crime was belief in Baha'u'llah. Seven of them were less than thirty years old. One of them asked to be hung last so she could be the moral support for the rest. She was the youngest, eighteen-year-old Mona Mahmudnizhad. She is but an example of hundreds of innocent Baha'is, who in the recent two decades, have become the target of the brutality of the fanatic Muslims of Iran.

It is quite inconceivable that one sect of Islam in only one country should display such continuous intolerance and hatred for a century and half since the birth of the Baha'i Faith. Today's torture-mongers of Iran are no different than their ancestors. What a stigma smearing the pages of history! It is awe-inspiring that the Almighty chose a Man from that nation to become the Redeemer of mankind as a whole. By itself, this is a proof that the Messengers of God have always appeared among the most depraved.

Mona was born in 1965 in Yemen where her parents had pioneered to teach the Faith. After a while, due to political changes, they were expelled and returned to Iran. As Mona was growing up, the family moved to different cities until they finally settled in Shiraz, the birth place of the Bab.

Before the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, Mona's father, Yadu'llah Mahmudnizhad, became the secretary of the local Assembly, and also was appointed as an Auxiliary Board member.

Documents discovered clearly indicate that the goal of the new regime was extermination of the Baha'i Faith in Iran and all around the world, regardless of what it took to achieve this. As mild as calling the Baha'is dirty infidels, confiscating and ransacking their homes, seizing their centers, cutting off civil rights, or as depraved as demolishing their holy places, desecrating their cemeteries, imprisonment, torture and murder. It is unbelievable

that the murderers are calloused enough to send a bill for the bullets to the family when the Baha'is were shot to death.

As these plans were gradually implemented, the crisis became worse by the hour. Mona had many disturbing thoughts about what was in store for her father and herself. She even saw a dream in which both of them were killed for being Baha'is. Execution of many prominent Baha'is, including members of the National Spiritual Assembly, as well as viciousness of tortures, such as tying a Baha'i woman to a door on top of firewood doused with kerosene and setting her on fire, was ominous news for the Mahmudnizhad family.

One night Baha'u'llah appeared in Mona's dream. He went to an adjacent room and brought a box containing a beautiful red cape. He opened the cape and said, "This is the cape of martyrdom in My path. Do you accept it?" Mona became speechless with happiness, but mustered enough strength to say, "Whatever pleases my Lord." Baha'u'llah put that cape back into the box, took it back, and returned with another box. The second box had a black cape. Baha'u'llah opened it and said, "This black cape symbolizes sorrow in my path. Do you accept it?" Mona answered, "How beautiful are the tears shed in your path." Baha'u'llah took it back and returned with a third box containing an elaborately beaded blue cape. He opened the cape and placed it on her shoulders saying, "This is the cape of service." Then He seated Himself and said, "Mona, come and have a picture taken of both of us." Mona, in her dream, saw a man behind an old-fashioned camera covered by a cloth. Baha'u'llah said to the photographer, "Mihdi, take our picture." The flash of the camera woke her up. She prayed to God to be able to finish the dream.

When she fell asleep, she found that Baha'u'llah had left the room, and the photographer was carrying away the tripod and camera on his shoulder. He turned around and told Mona to convey his love to his family. Mona had known a few Baha'is with the name of Mihdi but she did not recognize who he was. He, realizing that, told Mona, "I am Mihdi Anvari." Mona instantly recognized him as one of the Baha'is of Shiraz who had been recently martyred. What a breath-taking dream for this young girl.

Her poetry and chanting voice were unusually beautiful. She also

taught Baha'i children as they were not allowed to attend public school. Unfortunately, her extraordinary qualities were detected by the mullas. Mulla is the term for Muslim clergy.

The months after Mona's dream were tense for the Baha'is all over Iran as arrests and executions were escalating. With the ruling of the clergy and thugs as revolutionary guards, they never knew what the next minute would bring. At 7:30 P.M. on the 23rd of October, 1982, the door bell rang. Mona was studying English and her father was writing letters. Her father opened the door to four armed revolutionary guards who demanded entry and search of their apartment. While one guard pointed his gun at the family sitting in a corner, the others ransacked their home, gathering a load of papers, tapes and other material. They ordered Mona and her father to accompany them to the headquarters. Mona's mother pleaded with them why were they taking Mona as she was only a youth. One of them showed her poetry to the mother, saying, "These could set the world on fire. She has the potential of becoming a very effective Baha'i teacher."

The heart-wrenching details of Mona's imprisonment are in a booklet called The Story of Mona and also in a book, Olya's Story, which you are encouraged to read. Olya Roohizadegan is a Baha'i woman who was imprisoned with Mona, but who was miraculously released, and kept her commitment to tell the world about the bravery of the Baha'i women who were killed and their shameful treatment in the prison. Because of time constraint, only a few examples will be shared. Each prisoner was given only two thin blankets, one for the floor and one as a cover. Concrete floors of the prison in those winter months of her captivity were very cold. At one time, three Baha'is were given one plate of soup without a spoon as the whole meal. The shameful physical abuses of older women and men are beyond the scope of this talk. Their psychological tortures by cursing, foul language, ridicule and endless hours of interrogation would be enough to break the spirit of an ordinary person. Each Baha'i would be subjected to a four-stage interrogation for the purpose of extracting information and continuously pressuring the believer to recant.

Just one example will suffice. A masked guard would enter the crowded cell, blindfold a prisoner, in this case, Mona, and order

her to follow. To lead her through the long and narrow corridors, Mona had to hold one end of a rolled newspaper held by the guard. This was so the superstitious and ignorant guard would not become defiled by touching the hand of that saintly girl.

After entering the interrogation room, she sensed there were other prisoners in the room, whether Muslims or Baha'is, she couldn't tell. Then she was ordered to sit on the floor, facing the wall. The blindfold would be removed only when she had to write the answers. Writing was necessary for documentation as many of the interrogators were illiterate, while their Baha'i victims were all well-educated. Many times loud laughter, verbal abuse and the screams from the torture rooms would become nerve-shattering.

As for the length of interrogation, which was basically the same questions over and over, they would start at 10:00 A.M. and continue, not to 10:00 at night, not to midnight, but to 4:00 A.M. the next morning. Their false hope was that with sleep deprivation, their victims would lose their will and recant so they could show them on television to dispirit all Baha'is. To the mullas and the mob in control this was and is Islamic justice.

Only twice during her imprisonment was Mona allowed to see her father who had been badly tortured. In their last visit, they knew what was in store for them. Her father, that gentle and kind man, told her, "These days of separation will soon be over. My beautiful Mona, do you remember how, whenever we moved, I always went first and prepared the house for the family? This time also I will go first and prepare a home for you in the world beyond and will be there to welcome you."

It is very hard to hold back the tears.

One morning Mona refused food and drink. She fasted for thirty hours. It was nine days before Naw-Ruz, and, outside the prison, people were preparing the festivities of the new year, but on that March 12, 1983, her father and another Baha'i woman were executed by hanging. The families outside the prison heard about it on mid-day news. This was a recurrent pattern. Executions would take place near festive holidays, and families were not privately notified. They did not have to tell Mona about her father's death in their infrequent visits. She knew it intuitively.

Both she and her father, in the limited visits of the family through a thick glass conversing on telephone, would encourage them to be steadfast and never cry, which would give pleasure and satisfaction to the guards and mullas. Mona's mother, who was also imprisoned for a few months and released five days before the execution of Mona, relates the following.

"When I tried to comfort Mona that she would not be killed, she responded by saying, 'Mother! If I knew that because of my execution the youth of the world would arise to serve humanity, I would beg Baha'u'llah to give me one hundred thousand lives to sacrifice in His path.'" The mother states, "I felt so small before the greatness of her soul, as if she were the mother and I were the child."

And now with only her one life, she has accomplished what she wished.

All interrogations were finished. The Baha'is were informed that they would be given one last chance to recant their faith. After that announcement, Mona saw her last dream. She saw Abdu'l-Baha entering their cell. She knelt before Him. He held her hands and said, "Mona, what is your heart's desire?" She answered, "Steadfastness." The Master asked for the second time and she answered, "Steadfastness for all the friends." He asked for the third time, and received the same answer. Then Abdu'l-Baha said, "It is granted. It is granted." (The Story of Mona, p. 25; Olya's Story, p. 221)

The next morning on June 12, she shared her wonderful dream with those Baha'i prisoners within her reach. That was an uplift which those innocent victims treasured. They all came out of the last abuse by the mullas beaming with joy. They were the winners waiting for their reward, the crown of martyrdom.

Four days later, six Baha'i men were hanged. Three of them were the husbands and a son of three of the women who awaited their turn. Then in the evening of that dreaded night of June 18, 1983, under cover of darkness, the ten women were taken by bus to a field outside Shiraz. Mona was the last one to be hung as she had requested. As a tower of strength, she was the moral support for

the ones forced to witness the gruesome scene. As the last one, that beautiful youth from Shiraz refused to be blindfolded. She stepped forward, took the noose, kissed it and placed it around her own tender neck. Another stain on the pages of history.

We know these details because the driver of the bus later told a relative of one of the women. He reported that they were all in very high spirits, singing songs as if they were going to a festive occasion. Indeed, they sang the songs of the martyr when approaching the sacred altar of sacrifice. Possibly it was the songs which more than a century before, the glorious youth, Abdu'l-Vahhab from Shiraz, sang as he stepped out of the Siyah-Chal of Tehran, dancing to his martyrdom. We might never comprehend the mystery of that exultation in the soul of a martyr in their final moments.

These lines from an ode composed by Baha'u'llah while in seclusion in the mountains clarify the conditions for those who wish to partake of His glory.

If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court,
But if sacrifice be thy heart's desire,
come and let others come with thee.
For such is the way of Faith,
if in thy heart thou seekest reunion with Baha.
Shouldst thou refuse to tread this path,
why trouble us; Begone!

(Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Vol II, p. 54)

So inseparable is sacrifice from Faith.

Baha'i writings assure us that tremendous power is released when a believer sacrifices something in the path of God. A sacrifice, whether that of time, comfort or material, for the promotion of the Cause, or when persecuted for their faith, undoubtedly brings victory to the Cause, provided one's motives are pure and sincere. But to lay down one's life in the path of God, when circumstances demand, is the ultimate in the realm of sacrifice. Abdu'l-Baha states that not until the seed breaks its shell and sacrifices itself can it produce a mighty tree.

Two elements are primarily responsible for the growth and spread

of the Faith. One is the revitalizing energies of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, which are like the life-giving rays of the sun. The other is the blood of the martyrs which waters the tree of His Cause. Shoghi Effendi has attributed all the great victories of the Cause in the Western world to the mysterious forces released by the sacrifice of countless martyrs in Iran. He states that Baha'u'llah has exalted the death of His own son, the Purest Branch, to the rank of those great acts of atonement associated with Abraham's intended sacrifice of His son, with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. (Rev. of Baha'u'llah, Vol III, p. 211)

In one tablet, Baha'u'llah sympathizes with His loved ones and assures them that their sacrifices are not in vain. "Ye have tolerated the censure of the enemies for the sake of My love and have steadfastly endured in My Path the grievous cruelties which the ungodly have inflicted upon you. Unto this I Myself bear witness, and I am the All-Knowing. How vast the number of places that have been ennobled with your blood for the sake of God. How numerous the cities wherein the voice of your lamentation hath been raised and the wailing of your anguish uplifted. How many the prisons into which ye have been cast by the hosts of tyranny. Know ye of a certainty that He will render you victorious, will exalt you among the peoples of the world, and will demonstrate your high rank before the gaze of all nations. Surely He will not suffer the reward of His favored ones to be lost." (Tablets of Baha'u'llah pp. 246-7)

The mystery of martyrdom has a realm of its own. Baha'i writings will help us to comprehend various aspects of it according to each individual's depth and understanding. However, Baha'u'llah has made one thing clear. He has exhorted His followers not to seek martyrdom. He has, instead, decreed that they should live to teach the Faith and has exalted the station of teaching to that of martyrdom. (Rev. of Baha'u'llah, Vol II, p. 94 and Vol. III, p. 213)

Before giving you a quotation from Baha'u'llah on the future of the oppressors of this Cause, let this prayer from the exalted Bab, who exemplified the ultimate sacrifice, adorn this presentation:

O Lord! Provide for the speedy growth of the Tree of Thy divine Unity; water it then, O Lord, with the flowing waters of Thy good-pleasure and cause it, before the revelations of Thy divine assurance, to yield such fruits as Thou desirest for Thy glorification and exaltation, Thy praise and thanksgiving, and to magnify Thy Name, to laud the oneness of Thine Essence and to offer adoration unto Thee, inasmuch as all this lieth within Thy grasp and in that of none other. Great is the blessedness of those whose blood Thou hast chosen wherewith to water the Tree of Thine affirmation, and thus to exalt Thy holy and immutable Word. (Baha'i Prayers, 1982, p. 198)

These ominous words of Baha'u'llah, which bring chills to the spine, precisely reveal the judgment on the oppressors of His Cause.

Abase Thou, O my Lord, Thine enemies, and lay hold on them with Thy power and might, and let them be stricken by the blast of Thy wrath.
Make them taste, O my God, of Thine awful majesty and vengeance... Thou art, verily, the One Whose power is immense, Whose vengeance is terrible.
No God is there beside Thee, the Almighty, the Most Powerful.
(Prayers and Meditations, p. 121)

THE MYSTERY OF MARTYRDOM

A transcript of audio-cassette from series

WINDOWS TO THE PAST

by Dr. Darius and Grace Shahrokh

Even though the pen shrinks and the tongue falters at recounting the barbaric acts committed by those who have disgraced the human race, yet these Windows must go on, and this one will reluctantly open to expose only a fraction of such atrocities as to stun the civilized world and let you ponder... why?

THE BAB, exemplifying the glory of martyrdom, became the target of 750 bullets at the age of thirty-one.

ABDU'L-VAHHAB, the glorious youth from Shiraz chained next to his beloved Baha'u'llah in the Siyah-Chal, MARTYRED BRUTALLY.
SIYYID ASHRAF, age 20, BEHEADED.

BADI', the seventeen year old Pride of Martyrs, MARTYRED BRUTALLY.

ABA BADI', the father of Badi', BEHEADED.

VARQA and his 12-year-old son Ruhu'llah, MARTYRED BRUTALLY.

MONA, the delightful 18-year-old girl from Shiraz,

MARTYRED BY HANGING.

THIRTY THOUSAND BELIEVERS IN THE PAST CENTURY AND HALF, ALL MARTYRED FOR THEIR FAITH.

(Abdu'l-Baha, by Balyuzi, p. 45)

The Bab's martyrdom should not and cannot be compared to that of the followers of the Cause. His Holiness was a Manifestation of God, and yet His longing to lay down His life in the path of His beloved, Baha'u'llah, was the ultimate in the realm of sacrifice, demonstrating that yearning between the lover and the beloved.

What was the common attribute shared by the rest? True recognition and unshakeable belief. As Baha'u'llah described them, they would rather lay down a thousand lives than breathe the word desired by their enemies. (Epistle to Son of the Wolf, p. 74) That word. That formidable word; recantation of their Faith.

These lovers of the light responded with their lives to these words of Baha'u'llah, "He should not hesitate to offer up his life for his Beloved, nor allow the censure of the people to turn him away from the truth." (Gleanings, pp.265-6)

Here it should be made clear that recantation or saying "I am not a Baha'i" is not optional for a Baha'i. It is definitely forbidden by Baha'u'llah in any shape or form. Whether it be for saving one's own life or when filling out a form in a country like Iran to gain an advantage or civil rights.

Shoghi Effendi clarifies the issue of obedience to authorities versus recantation in the following passages, "Baha'is must live a Baha'i life, fully and continuously, unless prevented by authorities. If local, state or federal authorities actively prohibit Baha'i life or some aspect of it, the Baha'is must submit to these requirements in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved such as denial of faith. This, Baha'is cannot do under any circumstances." (Lights of Guidance, 1983 ed. pp.336-7)

The history of the Bab and the life story of Varqa and his son are related in separate tapes. Respecting the sensitivity of the audience, we have selected milder examples for recounting. By no means is this presentation intended to incite animosity towards the enemies of the Faith. How frequently did the martyrs offer refreshments to those who came to arrest them, or presented gifts to their executioners as their last farewell.

ABDU'L-VAHHAB, The glorious youth from Shiraz.

His name should not be mistaken for Abdu'l-Baha as it is pronounced Abdu'l-Vahhab. He was a Muslim youth during the ministry of the Bab, but as a believer he was martyred in the blood-bath of 1852. His story has been told by Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, and Nabil, the historian, has recorded it.

We go back to the very early months of this Dispensation when after the completion of the eighteen Letters of the Living, the Bab instructed them to disperse and spread the Word. Then He took the last Letter of the Living, Quddus, with Him to Mecca for the

purpose of declaring His Cause publicly during a special pilgrimage.

The fourth Letter of the Living was Mulla Ali-i-Bastami, who was instructed to go to Iraq where he was arrested and martyred. He has the distinction of being the first martyr in this Dispensation. Mulla Ali, in obedience to his Lord, left Shiraz. He had gone only a short distance when a youth caught up with him. After introducing himself as Abdu'l-Vahhab, he tearfully implored that he be allowed to go with Mulla Ali. Trying to explain his plea, he said, "Last night in my dream I saw I was in my shop when I heard the crier calling the multitude about the appearance of Imam Ali (the first successor to Muhammad according to the Shi'ih sect). The crier announced that Imam Ali was pulling charters of liberty out of flames, handing them over to people. The crier emphatically stated these words, 'Hasten to Imam Ali for whoever receives the charter is saved.' Immediately in my dream I left my shop and ran to a street where I saw you distributing the charter. You whispered in the ears of those who received the charter some words that made the people flee in disbelief.

"After I woke up I sank into deep thoughts about that unusual dream. Then I came to my shop and to my amazement saw you passing by accompanied by a man. I immediately sprang up, and involuntarily began to follow you. To my great surprise, I found you standing on the same spot seen in my dream, engaged in teaching that man. You did not notice me but I stood close enough to hear that man protesting that it was easier for him to be devoured by the fire of hell than to accept your words. After that I followed you and here I am. I beg you to take me with you."

Mulla Ali urged the youth to return to his shop and gave him the assurance that with such purity of heart God would reveal the truth to him. The more Mulla Ali insisted, the louder grew the youth's lamentation and weeping. Mulla was left with no choice other than to take him along.

Now we go to the words of the father of Abdu'l-Vahhab whose name was Abdu'l-Majid. He became a believer and often was heard to relate this story with his eyes filled with tears, imploring God for forgiveness. He states, "I was among the favored officers in the government and no one dared to question my authority. When

I heard that my son had deserted the shop and left the city I was filled with anger and indignation. Then I heard he had passed through a certain gate, following a turbaned man. My anger mounting by the minute, I decided to take a club to chastise my son for his disgraceful conduct. I continued my search until I found them. Seized with savage fury, I inflicted unspeakable injuries upon Mulla Ali. With serenity he absorbed the blows and told me, 'Hold your hand because God is watching. I swear to God that I, in no way, am responsible for the conduct of your son. These tortures you are inflicting upon me are nothing compared to what I shall welcome because of the path I have chosen. You shall recognize my innocence and great will be your remorse.'" The father states, "I continued to beat him until I was exhausted. Leaving him lying there, I told my son to accompany me home. On the way, my son told me about his dream and the reason for his conduct. It shook me to the core. The memory of my cruelty haunted me to the extent that I decided to leave Shiraz and transfer my residence to Baghdad."

Now after some years, we find Abdu'l-Vahhab in a shop in the small city of Kazimayn adjacent to Baghdad. The year is 1851 when Baha'u'llah had temporarily gone to Iraq under the instruction of Taqi Khan, the prime minister of Iran, who had ordered the execution of the Bab the year before. It was inevitable that the youth encountered Baha'u'llah and became fervently attached to him. That was one year before Baha'u'llah's imprisonment in the Siyah-Chal of Tehran. Until His declaration in 1863, He was known as Jinab-i-Baha by the followers and as Mirza Husayn- Ali of Nur by the public.

Abdu'l-Vahhab's dearest wish was to follow Jinab-i-Baha, but He convinced Abdu'l-Vahhab to stay and attend his shop and even gave him some money to enlarge his trade. But that glorious youth traded the mortal world for eternal glory.

As you recall, that trip of Baha'u'llah lasted for about one year, and soon after His return to Tehran an attempt was made on the life of the king. As a result, all prominent Babis including Baha'u'llah were rounded up, killed, or cast into the notorious black pit. The terror in those days was beyond description. Just a mere accusation of being a Babi was enough for imprisonment and execution.

Abdu'l-Vahhab, trying to follow Baha'u'llah, arrived in Tehran, unaware of the situation and undaunted, began praising his Lord at the market place. He was arrested and thrown into the Siyah-Chal. The meaning of Siyah-Chal is the black pit because of its total darkness. To his delight, he found himself chained to Baha'ullah and therefore became His constant companion.

Baha'u'llah one day told Nabil, the historian, the following, "One night before break of day, Abdu'l-Vahhab being in the same chain asked whether We were awake or not. Then he related his dream that he found himself soaring into a space of infinite vastness and beauty. His flight in that immensity was so swift and effortless beyond compare. We told him, 'Today, it will be your turn to sacrifice yourself for this Cause. May you remain firm and steadfast. You shall find yourself soaring in the same limitless space.'

"That morning the jailer came and called Abdu'l-Vahhab. He sprang to his feet, embraced all the believers and pressed Us to his heart. That was when We noticed that the youth had no shoes so We gave him Our own shoes. The youth kissed Our knees and followed the jailer. Later on the executioner came to Us and praised the youth in glowing terms for the way he danced into the clutches of the multitude of crowd." The crowd cut him into pieces alive.

In those days each craft would be given a Babi to kill in whichever way they chose. Often they used their tools of trade. Even the students of college established by the prime minister Taqi Khan were given the opportunity for showing their dedication to Islam and the king by killing a Babi. Their only tool was their pen knives with which they killed a Babi to receive recognition by the fiendish clergy and authorities. To receive a higher mark, each group vied with the others in gruesome brutality. The word, blood-curdling, would be an understatement for defining their shameful acts.

What you just heard will not be complete without recounting how sixty years later Abdu'l-Baha related that story in the United States in 1912. Let Juliet Thompson complete the picture, "Suddenly Abdu'l-Baha's whole aspect changed. It was as though the spirit of the martyr had entered into Him...With His head thrillingly

erect, snapping His fingers high in the air, beating on the porch with His foot till we could scarcely endure the vibrations set up - such electric power radiated from Him, He sang the martyr's song, ecstatic and tragic beyond anything I had ever heard. Abdu'l-Baha said, 'This was what the Cause meant then! This was what it meant to live near Baha'u'llah!' ...Another realm opened to me - the realm of Divine Tragedy. 'And thus,' ended Abdu'l-Baha, 'singing and dancing, that hero went to his death, and a hundred executioners fell on him! And later his old parents came to Baha'u'llah, praising God that their son had given his life in the Path of God.' Abdu'l-Baha sank back in His chair. Tears welled in my eyes, blurring everything. When they cleared, I saw yet a stranger look on His face. His eyes were unmistakably fixed on the invisible. They were as brilliant as jewels and so filled with delight that they also made His vision real to us. A smile of exultation played on His lips. Very low, so that it sounded like an echo, He hummed the martyr's song. 'See the effect that the death of a martyr has on the world. It has changed my condition.'"(King of Glory, pp. 94-98)

SIYYID ASHRAF

Another loved one of Baha'u'llah whose story is so commingled with the story of his mother as if they were one soul in two bodies. Their dedication, steadfastness and sacrifice have been praised by Baha'u'llah. His mother's name was 'Anbar Khanum who is known in Baha'u'llah's writings as Umm-i-Ashraf, meaning the mother of Ashraf. She is another immortal heroine who has adorned the pages of history.

If you recall from the history, two decades earlier, the fierce and erudite Hujjat, a star of the Babi Dispensation, along with thousands of companions were massacred in Zanzan for defending the Faith. One of the martyrs was Aqa Mir Jalil, the father of Ashraf, who was an influential man.

Ashraf was born during that struggle. The cruelties his mother witnessed during that siege nor the struggle of raising Ashraf and two older daughters in that hostile environment failed to break the spirit of that unusual woman. As soon as the Message of Baha'u'llah reached Zanzan, she and her children embraced His Cause. As a youth, Ashraf traveled to Adrianople and attained the presence

of Baha'u'llah. After some time he went for the second time, taking one of his sisters and Haji Iman, a survivor of the Zanjan massacre. Haji Iman's name might sound familiar if you have listened to the story of Varqa. He was Varqa's father-in-law and was chained with Varqa in a Tehran prison.

Many non-Baha'i members of the family, particularly three paternal uncles, of Ashraf gave his mother a rough time. They constantly harrassed her as the force behind the enthusiasm of her husband and now the children. While Ashraf and company were in Adrianople the three uncles came and tongue-lashed Umm-i-Ashraf. When they began to suggest immoral intention on the part of her daughter who had accompanied Ashraf, Umm-i-Ashraf could no longer take it. She left the room, crying bitterly, raised her hands supplicating Baha'u'llah to send her children home. The next morning Baha'u'llah summoned Ashraf and companions and told them that the night before He heard the supplication of Umm-i-Ashraf asking for their return. Therefore, they were to leave at once. Then He showered His praise and bounties upon Umm-i-Ashraf.

Haji Iman has related that Ashraf was so transformed that while in a caravan on their way home, Ashraf used to chant poems and writings of Baha'u'llah which he had memorized. The caravan drivers would come to him and walk alongside just to listen to his exhilarating voice which made the entire caravan slow down.

On advice of Baha'u'llah, Haji Iman and the sister of Ashraf got married. Their daughter, Liqaiyih Khanum, became Varqa's wife. Listen to that touching story.

Siiyyid Ashraf was directed by Baha'u'llah to especially teach the Babis who were confused by Mirza Yahya, Baha'u'llah's half-brother. In his contact with the Babis, Ashraf clarified the station of Baha'u'llah as the sun of truth, and Mirza Yahya as the dark cloud trying in vain to obscure it.

After his return, Ashraf became very close to a believer who was born blind, but Baha'u'llah gave him the title of Aba Basir, meaning seeing. He was a man of tremendous memory and erudition. At times, the students of theology would go to him with their questions. Aba Basir's father was also one of the martyrs of Zanjan episode.

A never-ending pattern of events ensued because of the antagonism of the clergy and cooperation of inept and equally depraved governor and officials. The clergy issued the death sentences of Siyyid Ashraf and Aba Basir and handed it to the governor for implementation. At a meeting of the clergy, Aba Basir was summoned for recantation. Instead, he eloquently proved the divine origin of the Cause of Baha'u'llah. He was taken to a public square in front of thousands who had gathered to see him die, and while kneeling in prayer he was beheaded.

Meanwhile, Ashraf was being tortured in prison and those friendly towards him tried to persuade him to recant. He was about twenty years old. When both friends and foe gave up their efforts to make him recant, it was decided to send for his mother hoping she might persuade him to do so. Badly beaten, he was taken to the square. As soon as Ashraf saw the lifeless body of Aba Basir, he ran towards it and held it in his arms. At this time, his mother arrived, finding her son covered with blood.

That steadfast heroine, Umm-i-Ashraf, stepped forward, threw her arms around her only son and kissed him on both cheeks. She wiped sweat and blood from his face and took his blood-stained skullcap for a souvenir. Then she cried out these heart-touching words, "I will disown you as my son if you incline your heart to such evil whispering and allow them to turn you away from the truth..." It makes one's heart ache and break.

One fair-minded divine, the Imam Jum'ih, who badly wished to save Siyyid Ashraf, took Ashraf into his arms and whispered a few words into his ears. Then the divine stood on a platform and falsely announced that Ashraf had recanted his faith. Ashraf raised his voice and denied the allegation.

Ashraf was beheaded as he held the lifeless body of Aba Basir. Umm-i-Ashraf, witnessing it all, made no lamentations, nor did she shed a single tear. With her last glance at the corpse of her son, she exclaimed, "I have now in mind the vow I made the day you were born. I rejoice that you, my only son, enabled me to redeem that pledge." She offered up her best possession in the path of God. What a sacrifice! Ashraf, so intoxicated with the love of Baha'u'llah, did not need the persuasion of his mother,

but it had to happen that way so such an ultimate sacrifice by a mother would leave a matchless legacy. Baha'u'llah revealed a tablet of visitation for Siyyid Ashraf, Aba Basir and another martyr of Zanjan. He has extolled the station of Ashraf and Umm-i-Ashraf in His other tablets.

You might wonder what makes a believer worthy to become the recipient of the glowing praises from Baha'u'llah. That blessed woman, Umm-i-Ashraf, was truly a tower of strength. She never lost faith, and in spite of all that happened to her, she praised the Lord to the end of her life for her lot in this mortal world. What she considered an honor, to us might appear to be suffering. For your information, she not only lost her husband and son, both as martyrs, but also lost her two grown-up daughters both dying in childbirth, but she never became bitter or complained. (Khushihhai az Kharman-i Adab Va Hunar, Vol. V, p. 27)

Her last offerings in the path of her Lord were Varqa and his twelve-year-old son Ruhu'llah. Varqa married her granddaughter, but Ruhu'llah was from Varqa's previous marriage. That charming youth, Ruhu'llah, would call her "mother." Then one day she found out that her son-in-law, Haji Iman, her grandson-in-law, Varqa, and Ruhu'llah were arrested and sent to Tehran in chains and stocks. Varqa and son were martyred brutally but Haji Iman miraculously survived to relate the heart-wrenching details of that atrocity.

Haji Iman was a living history, having survived the massacre of Zanjan and now more than forty-five years later, survived another close call. It seems some believers were destined to survive and tell the history first hand.

As was said earlier, Umm-i-Ashraf was a tower of strength and her unwavering belief in Baha'u'llah's exhortations proved her to be a true believer and that is pleasing to Baha'u'llah.

BADI AND ABA BADI

The seventeen-year-old Aqa Buzurg and his father, Abdu'l-Majid, were immortalized by Baha'u'llah with the titles of Badi, meaning new or wonderful, and Aba Badi, meaning the father of Badi.

When Mulla Husayn, the first believer in the Bab and the first Letter of the Living, was in his home province of Khurasan, he converted many Muslims, one of whom was Aba Badi. When Mulla Husayn, under the direction of the Bab, gathered a group of Babis to go to Mazindaran under the black standard to assist Quddus who was in captivity, Aba Badi joined him. No doubt you know that Quddus was the last and the eighteenth Letter of the Living, but in spiritual rank was only second to the Bab. The details of that exciting history of Mulla Husayn will be presented separately.

While on the move, Mulla Husayn gave two commands to more than two hundred horsemen accompanying him. One was telling those who were not ready for that dangerous mission that they should stay behind, and the other command was detachment from the material world. His order was that the men could only keep their swords and horses and discard anything precious in their possession. Aba Badi, whose father was the owner of a turquoise mine, had a small sack of the choicest turquoise, worth a fortune. He was the first to open the sack and spread the precious stones all over the road.

In May 1849 when these believers, who are known as the defenders of Fort Shaykh Tabarsi, after nearly seven months of seige were deceitfully invited to leave their fortress, nearly all of them were butchered brutally. Only a few escaped the slaughter. Aba Badi was one of them. Those few survivors related the story of events of those seven months exactly as they happened to Nabil, the historian. As you see, Aba Badi was an old acquaintance of Nabil.

On an assignment from Baha'u'llah who was in Adrianople, Nabil travelled throughout Iran and went to the home of his old friend, Aba Badi, in his home town of Nishapur. To Nabil's surprise, he found Aba Badi attended everything personally, instead of someone younger. In those days, women were not allowed to serve men visitors. Nabil asked Aba Badi whether he had a son old enough to assist him. The answer was yes, but that the teenage son was leading a wild life and quite unruly, rather a disappointment to the family. Nabil expressed his wish to meet the young lad. He

states that when the tall lad came in, he was anything but impressive, but appeared to have a pure heart. After a short visit, the lad left the room, and Nabil asked Aba Badi to have his son host Nabil and leave the affairs to God.

Nabil writes, "After we finished our supper, I recited a number of verses from a poem by Baha'u'llah called Qasidiy-i-Varqa'iyih in which He described His own sufferings while in seclusion in the mountains of Sulaymaniyyih. While listening attentively, a sudden and unexpected change in Badi dumbfounded his father. Badi's face became flushed and his eyes welled with tears. Then we could hear him crying loudly. Sleep escaped our eyes and all night we recited Baha'u'llah's holy writings. After the morning light broke, Badi went to fetch milk for our breakfast. His father told me, 'I have never heard my son cry. I thought nothing could move him. I am at a loss about the spell cast on him. I can't believe my eyes and ears.'"

The fire of the love of God was ignited in Badi's heart and no longer was he in command of himself. He acted and went where that invisible power guided him. Badi insisted upon accompanying Nabil on his return so he could attain the presence of Baha'u'llah, but Aba Badi did not favor the idea. He had asked a learned Baha'i to educate Badi well enough so he could read the Book of Certitude. However, Aba Badi promised that should his son keep his part of the agreement he would provide the means for such a glorious journey to Akka.

Before we go any further with the story of Badi, we must digress to the last part of Baha'u'llah's stay in Adrianople which, as you remember, lasted five years, ending with His exile to Akka in 1868.

After the most great separation, when Mirza Yahya and a handful of his followers became identified as Azalis, Baha'u'llah revealed his weightiest tablets of the Adrianople period. These were addressed to the kings and emperors. You can learn about that separation from the talk on the Covenant. During this time, one day Baha'u'llah told the believers and the visitors in His presence that He had just revealed a tablet to Nasiri'd-Din Shah, the king of Persia, and asked "who will bell the cat?" This is a Persian

expression about who is willing to risk his life. There were many veteran believers who hoped to be chosen for delivering it to the king, but the messenger for such a weighty task had to be recreated. At that time, Badi was about sixteen years old, totally oblivious of his great destiny, thousands of miles away from Adrianople and was being a concern to his father.

We go back to Nabil. He writes, "I left Aba Badi and Badi and after some traveling when I arrived in Tehran, I heard that a believer who was on his way to Akka for a pilgrimage passed through Nishapur. When Aba Badi learned about his intention and that he had permission to take one other person with him, he provided his dear son with a horse and money hoping that they could catch up with me in Baghdad."

Badi accompanied that believer to Yazd, a southern city in Iran, where he gave everything to the companion traveler and parted ways. He set out on foot towards Baghdad. After his arrival in Baghdad, a tragic event took place. A dedicated believer, Abdu'l-Rasul, was living there whose daily task was to carry water in a sheepskin bag on his shoulder from the river to Baha'u'llah's house which now was occupied by Baha'is. One day Abdu'l-Rasul was ambushed by the enemies and, defenseless with the load of water on his shoulders, his abdomen was knifed open. With one arm he pressed against the wound and managed to carry the water to the house where he collapsed and died. Some of these acts reveal a faith and determination way beyond ordinary.

Badi, about seventeen years old, without hesitation stepped in and took over the task of the fallen water carrier. In spite of being attacked a few times and receiving injuries, he continued his service until the believers in Baghdad were rounded up and exiled to Mosul. With his free spirit, he escaped their net and traveled on foot to Mosul to resume the same task there. After a while he took to the road, all alone, towards Akka. He arrived in Akka in 1869 during Baha'u'llah's first year of imprisonment in a solitary cell behind bars. The guards of the city gate of Akka, though quite vigilant about stopping Baha'is from entering the city, did not suspect Badi since he was in the garb of a water carrier. Once inside the city, he was at a loss as how to inquire about the whereabouts of Baha'u'llah without being detected. When

he entered a mosque to pray, he saw a group of Persians and recognized Abdu'l-Baha, who was then twenty-five years old. Badi wrote a few words on a piece of paper and managed to pass it to Abdu'l-Baha.

Through Abdu'l-Baha's effort, the same night Badi entered the prison and attained the presence of his Lord. This honor was given to him once more. In those two meetings, that forsaken cell became the site where the Kingdom of Revelation was revealed to him. What a bounty! In those two exposures, Badi received the gift of second birth. Baha'u'llah, in a tablet, testifies that He took a handful of dust, mixed it with the water of might and power and breathed into it a new spirit and adorned it with the name Badi, meaning new or wonderful. (Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Vol. III, p. 179)

In a tablet to Aba Badi, Baha'u'llah states, "So great was the infusion of this might that single and alone Badi could have conquered the world." Baha'u'llah testifies that He disclosed to Badi's eyes the Kingdom of Revelation.

Now we understand why of all the martyrs, this seventeen-year-old youth was designated by Shoghi Effendi as one of the nineteen Apostles of Baha'u'llah, and his name placed second, the first being Mirza Musa, the faithful brother of Baha'u'llah. (Rev. of Baha'u'llah, Vol III, p. 181) When Badi learned that Baha'u'llah had revealed a tablet to the king of Persia and it was waiting to be taken to the king, he begged Baha'u'llah to be given the honor, knowing full well that he would have to lay down his life. Baha'u'llah accepted his offer and instructed him to go to Haifa where he would receive the tablet. There a believer delivered the tablet in a small case into his hands. He kissed the package and prostrated towards Akka. Delivered to him also was a sealed envelope addressed to him. He went at a little distance, sat facing Akka and read what Baha'u'llah had revealed for him. With ecstasy, he prostrated again towards Baha'u'llah's prison. It is reported that after Badi's martyrdom, this tablet was obtained by a Russian official who transferred it to St. Petersburg where it is preserved in a collection in the Institute of Oriental Languages. (King of Glory, p. 298)

When Baha'u'llah instructed Badi to go to Haifa to receive the tablet, He also told him not to associate with any believer on his way to Tehran. Badi began his long journey. With the package close to his heart, he traversed mountains and deserts on foot for four months. In one stage of his travel, a believer happened to be among the travellers. He has stated that all he learned from Badi was that he had been in the presence of Baha'u'llah and now was returning home. The traveller also related that every so often Badi would go a short distance from the road, prostrate towards Akka with these words of supplication, "O God! That which you have bestowed upon me through your bounty, do not take back through your justice; rather grant me strength to safeguard it." (King of Glory, p. 299)

Finally he arrived in Tehran in the summer of 1869. He fasted for three days while he made certain where the summer camp of the king was. He went straight there, dressed in white turban and robe, and sat all day on top of a large rock. On the fourth day, the king, looking through his binoculars, spotted him and guessed that he had a petition for justice. He sent his men to find out what he wanted. Badi told the men that he had a letter from a very important personage for the king and had to personally deliver it into his hands. The officers searched him for weapons and took him to the king. The courage of Badi and the officers not taking the package from him was very extraordinary. In those days average people were not supposed to look at the king. Whenever the king's entourage passed on a street, the forward section would shout, "Go dead and blind" meaning for people to stand still and lower their heads. That spiritual giant was not an ordinary person any longer.

He calmly handed the package to the king, and in a moving voice said this verse from Quran, "O king, I have come unto you from Sheba with a weighty message." He was arrested at once and the letter was sent to the divines for an answer. All that the divines came up with was to put to death the messenger and send the message to the officials in the Turkish empire for further tightening of restrictions on Baha'u'llah. How much tighter could it be than the solitary cell behind the bars in infested Akka.

The attendants took Badi away and began their interrogation, first

with promises and then by torture, alternating bastinado with branding his flesh with red hot iron. For three successive days these barbaric tortures continued. His photo on the insert, which also has adorned the cover of this tape, was taken during those days. His calm composure is astonishing. While the intense smell of burning flesh forced some torture-mongers to leave the tent, Badi was joyous and laughed under the impact of red hot iron which astonished the fiendish tormentors. Finally when they got no word out of him, they threatened him with death and demanded that he should state it was a petition from a prisoner instead of a weighty message. He did not breathe the word desired by them, so they laid his head on a plank and crushed it.

The detailed account of this blood-curdling atrocity was written by a Persian former prime minister forty-four years later when in 1913 he was in Paris for medical treatment. An American Baha'i in Paris, Laura Dreyfus-Barney, had given him a copy of Some Answered Questions. When he read the story of Badi, he was moved to write his recollections as he and his father had heard the story of the last days of Badi directly from Kazim Khan-i-Farrash-Bashi, who personally carried out the torture and execution. He relates that the Farrash-Bashi later went insane and had to be chained until he died.

For three years after Badi's martyrdom, Baha'u'llah praised him in various tablets in glowing terms. The one title that stands out is Fakhru'l-Shuhada, meaning the pride of martyrs. (King of Glory, pp. 300, 303-9)

Badi's father had no idea where his son was and what happened to him until he heard about it. In His tablets, Baha'u'llah addressed the father of Badi as Aba Badi, meaning the father of Badi.

Seven years after the martyrdom of Badi, in old age, Aba Badi travelled to Akka. He states, "One day I was in the presence of Baha'u'llah when He was talking about Badi and how he won the crown of martyrdom. My tears were flowing profusely, soaking my white beard. Then Baha'u'llah turned to me and said, 'Aba Badi! A person who has already spent three-quarters of his life should offer up the remainder in the path of God.' I asked, 'Is it possible that my beard which is now soaked with tears, may one day become red

with my blood?' Baha'u'llah answered, 'God willing.'" (Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Vol. II, pp. 129-36) The exhortation of Baha'u'llah to Aba Badi may apply to many of us to dedicate our remaining years to the service of the Cause.

Baha'u'llah sent the most precious gift with Aba Badi to the Baha'is of the province of Khurusan. It was the first copy of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Aba Badi used to attend many gatherings of the believers, igniting the fire of enthusiasm and firmness in their hearts. He often discussed the fulfillment of Baha'u'llah's prophecy concerning the downfall of the Sultan of the Turkish Empire. Soon, enemies of the Cause, including his own brother and sister, began their intrigues. Having been a survivor of Shaykh Tabarsi massacre, his son killed for taking the message to the king, and now openly teaching the Faith were enough reasons for the death sentence. When the agents of the chief clergy visited him to ascertain the truth of the allegations, he openly tried to teach them.

This was about one year after his return from Akka when he was eighty-five years old. At this time, the notorious divine stigmatized by Baha'u'llah as "The Wolf" arrived in Mashhad, the provincial capital. A petition was made to the governor for Aba Badi's execution, but the governor was fair-minded and did nothing about it. Frustrated, the clergy took their complaint to the king whose order was recantation or death. With such an order in hand, the Wolf was at the governor's mansion suggesting that Aba Badi should be dropped from a hot-air balloon which had just been brought to Mashhad. Suddenly the governor heard that his beloved daughter had just drowned in a pool. He left the meeting and that plan was abandoned. The governor's wife was convinced that this was a sign from God and rebuked her husband about entertaining such thoughts. The Wolf filed a second complaint and the king's order was the same.

The governor badly wanted to protect Aba Badi and at different times sent about twelve prominent people to persuade Aba Badi to recant, but they could not shake his resolve. Now the governor had no choice but to obey the king's decree. On the day of execution, Aba Badi was taken from prison to the site of execution amidst the hostile crowd eager to see one more Baha'i killed.

The executioner dressed in red with a dagger in hand was waiting for him, but the governor had not given up. His special envoy arrived at the scene hoping that fear would force Aba Badi to recant. Neither the insults of the crowd nor the appearance of the executioner with bare dagger in hand deterred Aba Badi. How could he refuse the crown of martyrdom within his reach.

With a powerful stroke of the dagger, he was ripped open from waist to throat. Then he was beheaded and his head placed on a slab of marble for public viewing. Thus ended the life of one who stood firm until the end with his blood-soaked beard testifying to the truth of the Cause. He did not waver even for one moment when the "swords of the enemies rained blows" upon him - that celebrated verse from the tablet of Ahmad.

This story will not be complete without a few more words about the shameful atrocities of the fanatics which have been a true disgrace to humanity. Aba Badi's headless body was dragged through the bazaars of the city, and when abandoned, many ruffians stayed around. The daughter of Aba Badi, and sister of Aba Badi, with tears streaming from her eyes and a baby in her arms, for hours with her husband followed the body and watched the horrible abuses inflicted upon it. She was hoping to be able to retrieve the body for burial, but the ruffians hurled stones at them, and they were forced to return home. Some believers, in disguise, later were able to take the body and bury it.

If you wonder why did Aba Badi request from Baha'u'llah to be honored with the crown of martyrdom, these words of Mr. Adib Taherzadeh in his books The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, will shed light, "These people who sought martyrdom must have attained the pinnacle of faith and assurance. They must have seen with their spiritual eyes a glimpse of the inner reality of their Lord, and have become magnetized by His glory. These souls, the moth-like lovers of His beauty, were so dazzled by the splendors of the light of His countenance that they wished to sacrifice themselves in His path." (Revelation of Baha'u'llah Vol IV p. 57)

MONA MAHMUDNIZHAD

Although one thinks or hopes that after the passage of a century, and the march of humanity towards civilization, fanatic barbarism would give way to moderation and tolerance, but not in a certain country. On that infamous June night in 1983 only thirteen years ago, under the cover of night, ten Baha'i women were hung, one at a time in front of those remaining. Their only crime was belief in Baha'u'llah. Seven of them were less than thirty years old. One of them asked to be hung last so she could be the moral support for the rest. She was the youngest, eighteen-year-old Mona Mahmudnizhad. She is but an example of hundreds of innocent Baha'is, who in the recent two decades, have become the target of the brutality of the fanatic Muslims of Iran.

It is quite inconceivable that one sect of Islam in only one country should display such continuous intolerance and hatred for a century and half since the birth of the Baha'i Faith. Today's torture-mongers of Iran are no different than their ancestors. What a stigma smearing the pages of history! It is awe-inspiring that the Almighty chose a Man from that nation to become the Redeemer of mankind as a whole. By itself, this is a proof that the Messengers of God have always appeared among the most depraved.

Mona was born in 1965 in Yemen where her parents had pioneered to teach the Faith. After a while, due to political changes, they were expelled and returned to Iran. As Mona was growing up, the family moved to different cities until they finally settled in Shiraz, the birth place of the Bab.

Before the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, Mona's father, Yadu'llah Mahmudnizhad, became the secretary of the local Assembly, and also was appointed as an Auxiliary Board member.

Documents discovered clearly indicate that the goal of the new regime was extermination of the Baha'i Faith in Iran and all around the world, regardless of what it took to achieve this. As mild as calling the Baha'is dirty infidels, confiscating and ransacking their homes, seizing their centers, cutting off civil rights, or as depraved as demolishing their holy places, desecrating their cemeteries, imprisonment, torture and murder. It is unbelievable

that the murderers are calloused enough to send a bill for the bullets to the family when the Baha'is were shot to death.

As these plans were gradually implemented, the crisis became worse by the hour. Mona had many disturbing thoughts about what was in store for her father and herself. She even saw a dream in which both of them were killed for being Baha'is. Execution of many prominent Baha'is, including members of the National Spiritual Assembly, as well as viciousness of tortures, such as tying a Baha'i women to a door on top of firewood doused with kerosene and setting her on fire, was ominous news for the Mahmudnizhad family.

One night Baha'u'llah appeared in Mona's dream. He went to an adjacent room and brought a box containing a beautiful red cape. He opened the cape and said, "This is the cape of martyrdom in My path. Do you accept it?" Mona became speechless with happiness, but mustered enough strength to say, "Whatever pleases my Lord." Baha'u'llah put that cape back into the box, took it back, and returned with another box. The second box had a black cape. Baha'u'llah opened it and said, "This black cape symbolizes sorrow in my path. Do you accept it?" Mona answered, "How beautiful are the tears shed in your path." Baha'u'llah took it back and returned with a third box containing an elaborately beaded blue cape. He opened the cape and placed it on her shoulders saying, "This is the cape of service." Then He seated Himself and said, "Mona, come and have a picture taken of both of us." Mona, in her dream, saw a man behind an old-fashioned camera covered by a cloth. Baha'u'llah said to the photographer, "Mihdi, take our picture." The flash of the camera woke her up. She prayed to God to be able to finish the dream.

When she fell asleep, she found that Baha'u'llah had left the room, and the photographer was carrying away the tripod and camera on his shoulder. He turned around and told Mona to convey his love to his family. Mona had known a few Baha'is with the name of Mihdi but she did not recognize who he was. He, realizing that, told Mona, "I am Mihdi Anvari." Mona instantly recognized him as one of the Baha'is of Shiraz who had been recently martyred. What a breath-taking dream for this young girl.

Her poetry and chanting voice were unusually beautiful. She also

taught Baha'i children as they were not allowed to attend public school. Unfortunately, her extraordinary qualities were detected by the mullas. Mulla is the term for Muslim clergy.

The months after Mona's dream were tense for the Baha'is all over Iran as arrests and executions were escalating. With the ruling of the clergy and thugs as revolutionary guards, they never knew what the next minute would bring. At 7:30 P.M. on the 23rd of October, 1982, the door bell rang. Mona was studying English and her father was writing letters. Her father opened the door to four armed revolutionary guards who demanded entry and search of their apartment. While one guard pointed his gun at the family sitting in a corner, the others ransacked their home, gathering a load of papers, tapes and other material. They ordered Mona and her father to accompany them to the headquarters. Mona's mother pleaded with them why were they taking Mona as she was only a youth. One of them showed her poetry to the mother, saying, "These could set the world on fire. She has the potential of becoming a very effective Baha'i teacher."

The heart-wrenching details of Mona's imprisonment are in a booklet called The Story of Mona and also in a book, Olya's Story, which you are encouraged to read. Olya Roohizadegan is a Baha'i woman who was imprisoned with Mona, but who was miraculously released, and kept her commitment to tell the world about the bravery of the Baha'i women who were killed and their shameful treatment in the prison. Because of time constraint, only a few examples will be shared. Each prisoner was given only two thin blankets, one for the floor and one as a cover. Concrete floors of the prison in those winter months of her captivity were very cold. At one time, three Baha'is were given one plate of soup without a spoon as the whole meal. The shameful physical abuses of older women and men are beyond the scope of this talk. Their psychological tortures by cursing, foul language, ridicule and endless hours of interrogation would be enough to break the spirit of an ordinary person. Each Baha'i would be subjected to a four-stage interrogation for the purpose of extracting information and continuously pressuring the believer to recant.

Just one example will suffice. A masked guard would enter the crowded cell, blindfold a prisoner, in this case, Mona, and order

her to follow. To lead her through the long and narrow corridors, Mona had to hold one end of a rolled newspaper held by the guard. This was so the superstitious and ignorant guard would not become defiled by touching the hand of that saintly girl.

After entering the interrogation room, she sensed there were other prisoners in the room, whether Muslims or Baha'is, she couldn't tell. Then she was ordered to sit on the floor, facing the wall. The blindfold would be removed only when she had to write the answers. Writing was necessary for documentation as many of the interrogators were illiterate, while their Baha'i victims were all well-educated. Many times loud laughter, verbal abuse and the screams from the torture rooms would become nerve-shattering.

As for the length of interrogation, which was basically the same questions over and over, they would start at 10:00 A.M. and continue, not to 10:00 at night, not to midnight, but to 4:00 A.M. the next morning. Their false hope was that with sleep deprivation, their victims would lose their will and recant so they could show them on television to dispirit all Baha'is. To the mullas and the mob in control this was and is Islamic justice.

Only twice during her imprisonment was Mona allowed to see her father who had been badly tortured. In their last visit, they knew what was in store for them. Her father, that gentle and kind man, told her, "These days of separation will soon be over. My beautiful Mona, do you remember how, whenever we moved, I always went first and prepared the house for the family? This time also I will go first and prepare a home for you in the world beyond and will be there to welcome you."

It is very hard to hold back the tears.

One morning Mona refused food and drink. She fasted for thirty hours. It was nine days before Naw-Ruz, and, outside the prison, people were preparing the festivities of the new year, but on that March 12, 1983, her father and another Baha'i woman were executed by hanging. The families outside the prison heard about it on mid-day news. This was a recurrent pattern. Executions would take place near festive holidays, and families were not privately notified. They did not have to tell Mona about her father's death in their infrequent visits. She knew it intuitively.

Both she and her father, in the limited visits of the family through a thick glass conversing on telephone, would encourage them to be steadfast and never cry, which would give pleasure and satisfaction to the guards and mullas. Mona's mother, who was also imprisoned for a few months and released five days before the execution of Mona, relates the following.

"When I tried to comfort Mona that she would not be killed, she responded by saying, 'Mother! If I knew that because of my execution the youth of the world would arise to serve humanity, I would beg Baha'u'llah to give me one hundred thousand lives to sacrifice in His path.'" The mother states, "I felt so small before the greatness of her soul, as if she were the mother and I were the child."

And now with only her one life, she has accomplished what she wished.

All interrogations were finished. The Baha'is were informed that they would be given one last chance to recant their faith. After that announcement, Mona saw her last dream. She saw Abdu'l-Baha entering their cell. She knelt before Him. He held her hands and said, "Mona, what is your heart's desire?" She answered, "Steadfastness." The Master asked for the second time and she answered, "Steadfastness for all the friends." He asked for the third time, and received the same answer. Then Abdu'l-Baha said, "It is granted. It is granted." (The Story of Mona, p. 25; Olya's Story, p. 221)

The next morning on June 12, she shared her wonderful dream with those Baha'i prisoners within her reach. That was an uplift which those innocent victims treasured. They all came out of the last abuse by the mullas beaming with joy. They were the winners waiting for their reward, the crown of martyrdom.

Four days later, six Baha'i men were hanged. Three of them were the husbands and a son of three of the women who awaited their turn. Then in the evening of that dreaded night of June 18, 1983, under cover of darkness, the ten women were taken by bus to a field outside Shiraz. Mona was the last one to be hung as she had requested. As a tower of strength, she was the moral support for

the ones forced to witness the gruesome scene. As the last one, that beautiful youth from Shiraz refused to be blindfolded. She stepped forward, took the noose, kissed it and placed it around her own tender neck. Another stain on the pages of history.

We know these details because the driver of the bus later told a relative of one of the women. He reported that they were all in very high spirits, singing songs as if they were going to a festive occasion. Indeed, they sang the songs of the martyr when approaching the sacred altar of sacrifice. Possibly it was the songs which more than a century before, the glorious youth, Abdu'l-Vahhab from Shiraz, sang as he stepped out of the Siyah-Chal of Tehran, dancing to his martyrdom. We might never comprehend the mystery of that exultation in the soul of a martyr in their final moments.

These lines from an ode composed by Baha'u'llah while in seclusion in the mountains clarify the conditions for those who wish to partake of His glory.

If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court,
But if sacrifice be thy heart's desire,
come and let others come with thee.
For such is the way of Faith,
if in thy heart thou seekest reunion with Baha.
Shouldst thou refuse to tread this path,
why trouble us; Begone!

(Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Vol II, p. 54)

So inseparable is sacrifice from Faith.

Baha'i writings assure us that tremendous power is released when a believer sacrifices something in the path of God. A sacrifice, whether that of time, comfort or material, for the promotion of the Cause, or when persecuted for their faith, undoubtedly brings victory to the Cause, provided one's motives are pure and sincere. But to lay down one's life in the path of God, when circumstances demand, is the ultimate in the realm of sacrifice. Abdu'l-Baha states that not until the seed breaks its shell and sacrifices itself can it produce a mighty tree.

Two elements are primarily responsible for the growth and spread

of the Faith. One is the revitalizing energies of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, which are like the life-giving rays of the sun. The other is the blood of the martyrs which waters the tree of His Cause. Shoghi Effendi has attributed all the great victories of the Cause in the Western world to the mysterious forces released by the sacrifice of countless martyrs in Iran. He states that Baha'u'llah has exalted the death of His own son, the Purest Branch, to the rank of those great acts of atonement associated with Abraham's intended sacrifice of His son, with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. (Rev. of Baha'u'llah, Vol III, p. 211)

In one tablet, Baha'u'llah sympathizes with His loved ones and assures them that their sacrifices are not in vain. "Ye have tolerated the censure of the enemies for the sake of My love and have steadfastly endured in My Path the grievous cruelties which the ungodly have inflicted upon you. Unto this I Myself bear witness, and I am the All-Knowing. How vast the number of places that have been ennobled with your blood for the sake of God. How numerous the cities wherein the voice of your lamentation hath been raised and the wailing of your anguish uplifted. How many the prisons into which ye have been cast by the hosts of tyranny. Know ye of a certainty that He will render you victorious, will exalt you among the peoples of the world, and will demonstrate your high rank before the gaze of all nations. Surely He will not suffer the reward of His favored ones to be lost." (Tablets of Baha'u'llah pp. 246-7)

The mystery of martyrdom has a realm of its own. Baha'i writings will help us to comprehend various aspects of it according to each individual's depth and understanding. However, Baha'u'llah has made one thing clear. He has exhorted His followers not to seek martyrdom. He has, instead, decreed that they should live to teach the Faith and has exalted the station of teaching to that of martyrdom. (Rev. of Baha'u'llah, Vol II, p. 94 and Vol. III, p. 213)

Before giving you a quotation from Baha'u'llah on the future of the oppressors of this Cause, let this prayer from the exalted Bab, who exemplified the ultimate sacrifice, adorn this presentation:

O Lord! Provide for the speedy growth of the Tree of Thy divine Unity; water it then, O Lord, with the flowing waters of Thy good-pleasure and cause it, before the revelations of Thy divine assurance, to yield such fruits as Thou desirest for Thy glorification and exaltation, Thy praise and thanksgiving, and to magnify Thy Name, to laud the oneness of Thine Essence and to offer adoration unto Thee, inasmuch as all this lieth within Thy grasp and in that of none other. Great is the blessedness of those whose blood Thou hast chosen wherewith to water the Tree of Thine affirmation, and thus to exalt Thy holy and immutable Word. (Baha'i Prayers, 1982, p. 198)

These ominous words of Baha'u'llah, which bring chills to the spine, precisely reveal the judgment on the oppressors of His Cause.

Abase Thou, O my Lord, Thine enemies, and lay hold on them with Thy power and might, and let them be stricken by the blast of Thy wrath.

Make them taste, O my God, of Thine awful majesty and vengeance... Thou art, verily, the One Whose power is immense, Whose vengeance is terrible.

No God is there beside Thee, the Almighty, the Most Powerful. (Prayers and Meditations, p. 121)