

Some Bahá'í Stories

Bahá'u'lláh Departs in Exile

On the appointed afternoon, in the nineteenth year of the Faith, the 22 April 1863, Bahá'u'lláh emerged from the inner room of the House, and set out with Abdu'l-Bahá toward the Garden that lay over the River, ten minutes from the City gate. On His head He now wore conspicuously a taj, a tall, beautifully-adorned felt hat that He from that moment on would wear throughout His ministry.

People of every rank, nationality and walk of life gathered from all quarters of the City and thronged the approaches of His house: men and women of every age, friends and strangers from every social class, the poor, the orphaned and the outcast, merchants, notables, clerics and officials, the vast majority unconnected to the Faith of the Báb, the Bahá'í ladies congregating together in the courtyard; all waited, amazed, heartbroken and apprehensive.

As Bahá'u'lláh stepped outside, a rush of people poured forward from all directions, humbling themselves before Him, weeping greatly. Bahá'u'lláh stood for some time amidst the weeping and the lamenting hearts, speaking words of comfort, and promising to receive each of them later in the Garden. When He had walked some way toward the gate, amid the crowds, a child of just a few years rushed forward and clung to His robes, weeping aloud, and begging in his tender voice that He not leave. They were lamenting the departure of One Who, for a decade, had imparted to them the warmth of His love, and the radiance of His spirit, Who had been the refuge and guide for all.

As He descended the steps from the courtyard into the narrow street, just before it joins the main road, the entire

area was thronging with people, both believers and others, and all movement was impossible. Friends could not be distinguished from strangers, and the sound of lamentation and grief rose up everywhere from all alike. Suckling babies were cast under Bahá'u'lláh's feet. He raised those infants tenderly, one by one, blessing them, and gently and lovingly replaced them in their sorrowing mothers' arms, charging them to bring up those dear flowers of humanity to serve God in steadfast faith and truth. Men threw themselves in His path, hoping that His feet might touch them and bless them as He passed. It took Him some minutes to place each foot upon the ground. One man had an only child, which had come to him late in his life, and he stripped the clothes from the child's body and placing it at Bahá'u'lláh feet, he cried, "Naked I give you my child, my precious child, to do with as you will: only promise not to leave us in distress! Without you, we cannot live."

Everyone was crying, pressing in to approach Bahá'u'lláh, to hear His words, touch Him or receive a comforting glance, howling and weeping at their loss, seeing no more value in life. Bahá'u'lláh bade each person farewell, caressing and soothing everyone.

Such grief they had, that all those who were to accompany Bahá'u'lláh sorrowed along with those to be left behind.

The streets and housetops all along His way were crowded with Bahá'u'lláh's friends; such a commotion, Baghdad had rarely seen. Upon the way, and with an open hand, Bahá'u'lláh provided to the poor He had so faithfully befriended, uttering words of comfort to the disconsolate as they pleaded with Him on every side, until, at long last, Bahá'u'lláh managed to reach the banks of the River Tigris. As He prepared to cross, He entrusted the city of Baghdad to His devoted friends, that through their deeds

and conduct, the flame of love would continue to glow within the hearts of its people.

Bahá'u'lláh boarded a small boat waiting for Him; the people pressed all around Him, wishing to be in His Presence for as long as they could.

The boat pushed off, and ferried Bahá'u'lláh across the water, in company with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and three others, and the companions on the bank all watched with sorrowing hearts as He receded into the distance.

Bahá'u'lláh set foot on the opposite bank and crossed into the Garden, just as the call of 'God is the Greatest' resounded throughout the district...

The Báb's Childhood Spirit

The Báb was still eight, when He journeyed out amidst a group, for a certain holy shrine. It was an arduous route, that tested even the strongest men. They arrived, completely exhausted, and offered the late afternoon and evening prayers, ate dinner, and went straight to bed.

At about midnight, His uncle awoke, and discovered the Báb was not in bed; deeply perturbed, he was overtaken with anxiety that He might have fallen from the mountain.

Searching around extensively, he eventually heard a voice coming from the lower extremities of the mountain, raised in prayers of glorification to the Lord. Following the melody of the chanting, the uncle found his Child, standing alone and in private, in consummate rapture, voicing prayers and supplications to the One Who transcends all mention, on the cold and deserted mountainside, at that late hour of the night.

Martyrdom of the Báb

'Tomorrow,' said the Báb to His companions, 'will be the day of My martyrdom. Would that one of you might

now arise, and with his own hands end My life; I prefer to be slain by the hand of a friend, than by that of the enemy.'

Tears rained from their eyes; they all made their excuses, and remained silent. This same Anis sprang suddenly to his feet and announced he would obey the Báb's desire. The companions prevented him from achieving what they considered an unfaithful act; yet the Báb smiled approvingly and applauded Anis' devotion, and then requested His companions disown Him, so that they would be able to convey to the rest of His followers everything they knew. Anis however fell at the Báb's feet and entreated Him to be allowed to lay down his life with Him. The Báb offered Anis reasons that could dissuade him from such a course, but Anis persisted with his pleas. "This same youth," the Báb consented, "will suffer with Me in martyrdom: Him will I choose to share with Me its crown. Truly, Anis will be with Us in Paradise."

Early in the morning, the Prime Minister's brother ordered his Chief Aide to conduct the Báb into the presence of the city's religious leaders and gain the necessary authorisation for the execution. The Aide interrupted the Báb just as he was engaged in a confidential conversation with his secretary. The Báb turned to this intruder, and warned him severely; "Not until I have told him all that I wish to say, can any earthly power silence Me. I shall not be deterred from fulfilling, to the last word, My intention." Staggered at such a bold assertion from a prisoner, the Aide conducted the Báb's secretary away without a word of reply.

Outside, the whole city was astir with expectation. Under close guard, the prisoners were led out with great iron chains firmly bound round necks and arms; barefoot and without cloak, clad only in under-coats and night-caps, the Báb had been deprived of the green turban that signified an ancestry that

would have kept away the hand of execution. They were conducted into the city, by a long cord from the iron collars clamped around their necks. Every street and lane was teeming with crowds of expectant onlookers climbed up on each others' shoulders to see the One of whom they had heard so much talk about; many were moved by the pale gentle face, white delicate hands, and simple but spotless raiment of the sufferer, whilst a large number, urged on by the implacable clergy, subjected them relentlessly to their coarse taunts and blows as they cast stones and mud at the helpless captives, breaking out through the ranks to strike them hard in the face and head, shouting with delight at every missile and shard that struck them, the Báb even paraded upon an ass. For hours the prisoners were dragged in violent turmoil and abuse through the endless streets and bazaars of Tabriz.

Anis, the Báb's secretary and the Báb were taken in turn to several of the houses of the leading clergy, who attempted to induce them to deny their Faith or taste death, with insults, blows, and brutalities bursting out with extreme violence. Anis refused to their face to renounce the Báb, just as firmly as the Báb unswervingly upheld His declaration. The clergy utterly refused to engage the Báb face to face, many pretending illness and cowardly sending out an attendant with the authorisation for His execution. Having promptly secured the necessary documentation, the formality produced a great effect upon the hostile teeming crowds, who presumed an even greater guilt than they had supposed until then, and the prisoners were dragged back again through the violence of the streets. The Báb's secretary, his powers of endurance utterly exhausted, falling to the ground fainting with fatigue and pain, yet dragged again to his feet like a drunk man and shaken hard, followed the Báb's instructions for conveying to the faithful His last writings and injunctions, and

declared that he was not of them. They demanded he face the Báb and gain his freedom and forgivess by cursing Him. Satisfying this heartbreaking request, they then demanded that if he spit in the Báb's face, he would in that instance be set at liberty. Though in heart abhorring it, yet in fulfilment of the Báb's command, He spat upon the face of His Beloved. Hearing and seeing these acts, the crowd abandoned him, as they continued with the parade until they at last reached the Small Barracks.

With the secretary confined now within a cell and hoping that Anis might follow him in denying the Báb, the executioners made another attempt to seduce Anis. His young wife and little children were brought before him, that the rain of their tears and entreaties might conquer his resolution; but Anis remained steadfast, declaring his faith in the most forthright manner, asking of them only that he might be killed before his Master.

The colonel, finding himself increasingly affected by the behaviour of the Báb, was seized with great fear that his action might bring upon him the wrath of God. "Enable me to free myself from the obligation to shed your blood," he requested the Báb. But the Báb bade him carry out his instructions, and assured him, "the Almighty is surely most able to deliver you from your perplexity."

Exhausted and weary of finding their efforts fruitless, the Báb was brought out through the first door that led to the square, and reaching the roof of the cistern, He stopped for a moment before a number of nobles and prominent persons present there. All begged the Báb to renounce His claims and not spill His blood in such a famous city. The Báb paid no attention, and remained wholly calm, showing no signs of fear, anxiety, or confusion. The Governor's Chief Aide came to the commander and showed him the order for the execution of the Báb and

his comrade, but the officer refused to obey an order from outside his ministry. The head of the gate keepers went out to the colonel of the Christian regiment, and he appointed a detachment of the regiment to carry out the order.

Opposite the cells on one side of the Square, also known as the 'Square of the Lord of the Age', spikes were driven in, and Anis and then the Báb were suspended by separate heavy ropes from the stone gutters erected under the eaves of the cells. The Báb remained silent, the beautiful features of His pale handsome face framed by a black beard and small mustache, his appearance and refined manners, his white, delicate and well-shaped hands, his simple but very neat garments - everything about him awakened sympathy and compassion. They were placed so that they were looking into the stone, but Anis begged to be turned to face the soldiers so that he could see the bullets flying toward him. The officer granted his request. He then asked his face be placed right down upon the Báb's feet, but the officer rejected this; as was his request to be positioned to shield the Báb from the bullets aimed only at him. In the end, they bound their shoulders firmly so that the head of the young man was on the Báb's breast, both suspended three metres from the ground. His relations and friends cried out that he was mad, and therefore unlawful to receive the death-penalty; but Anis responded, "I am in my right mind: perfect in service, and in sacrifice." Anis calmly read aloud excerpts from the prayers of his master; the Báb continued in His calmness and silence. As soon as they were fastened, soldiers from the seven-hundred-and-fifty-strong regiment were ranged with their guns into three files. The surroundings and housetops billowed with a crowd of about ten thousand impatient spectators. One of the Báb's followers was amongst the people with his sword on, foolishly waiting for an

opportunity to attempt a rescue, but he found himself suddenly overcome with drowsiness, and was forced to sit down, weak and insensible.

The Colonel gave the order, and the soldiers raised their guns as for salute. The people fell silent, as though everyone had stopped breathing. Hearts pounded, joints shook, one could hear the hum like the hum of fly's wings. At the second command such silence descended upon the people so that it seemed a bird was sitting on their heads. One could hear the beat of hearts and pulses. At that moment the Colonel glanced toward the chief of the governor's gate keepers who held in his hand the order for execution, and then received the signal to carry it out. The Colonel signaled the head of the squadron and ordered the first file to fire. As the firing-party made themselves ready, Anis, whose name was Muhammad 'Alí, was heard to say to the Báb, "Master, are You content with me?" The Báb replied to him in Arabic, "Verily, Muhammad 'Alí is with Us in Paradise!" Immediately He had spoken these words, the crash of musketry rang out as the soldiers discharged their guns in a vast hail of bullets at Anis; the faithful disciple fell to the bullets in the presence of His Master, his pure and victorious spirit, freed from the prison of the earth and the cage of the body, soaring high into the worlds of God.

The next file received the orders to fire, and discharged their guns in a hail of bullets whistling at the Báb. A mighty smoke was produced, and for a moment the rolling cloud of smoke hid the bodies of the prisoners from the crowds of onlookers as they watched that sad and moving scene. The bullets cut the Báb free without touching Him, releasing Him to the ground without a scratch, and He made his way back into the cell from which He had been suspended, to finish His conversation with His secretary. As the smoke and dust cleared, the astounded multitude beheld a scene their eyes could scarcely believe. There was

Anis, and the Báb was gone. Uproar arose on all sides, a great clamour of wonder, admiration and awe broke forth amongst the bewildered people, as they proclaimed He had disappeared, perhaps flown through the air, or even ascended up into the skies.

The authorities perceived with fear the populace ready to veer around in favour of one who but an hour ago they had been jeering and pelting with stones. The colonel ordered the soldiers to form together a wedge, and they stopped the people's rush.

A frenzied search of the vicinity followed, and a soldier discovered the Báb seated in the same room where He had been lodged the night before, engaged in completing His interrupted conversation with His secretary. An expression of unruffled calm was upon His face, unscathed from the shower of bullets which the regiment had directed against Him. The soldier made a cut at the Báb with his sword, and the others, seeing the pool of red blood flowing from their unresisting victim, lost their fear and they hastened to complete their work of death. "I have finished My conversation with My secretary," the Báb told the Chief Aide: "now you may proceed to fulfil your intention."

The Chief Aide, recalling His Prisoner's bold assertion previously made, was too much shaken to resume what he had already attempted. Refusing to accomplish his duty, he abandoned the scene in terror and resigned his post. The Colonel of the Regiment, stunned by the force of this tremendous revelation and recalling the reassuring words the Báb had made him, ordered his men to leave the barracks immediately, and refused ever again to associate himself or his regiment with any act that would involve the least injury to the Báb, swearing he had performed his order, and would never resume the task though it should entail the loss of his own life.

No sooner had they departed, than the Colonel of the Bodyguard stepped forth and volunteered to continue the order for execution. The Báb was dragged forcefully from the recess and being hit on the back of His head, shown before the crowd. An intense clamor arose at this moment as the onlookers saw the Báb free from His bonds and advancing towards them. The soldiers held up to the people's gaze the broken ropes. They again tied the Báb suspended to that fatal post, whilst the regiment formed in lines ready to open their fire. It was now two hours after the execution had begun. This time, the Báb was not silent.

"Had you believed in Me, O wayward generation," were the last words of the Báb in Persian to the gazing multitude, as the regiment prepared to fire the final volley, "every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and willingly would sacrifice himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you."

Suddenly the orders were given to fire, and that holy Spirit, yielding from its gentle frame, ascended to the Supreme Horizon. Their breasts were riddled and limbs completely dissected by the bullets, their bodies shattered and blended into one mass of mingled flesh and bone; yet their faces remained untouched, a smile still lingering upon the Báb's face, and the arms and head of His companion holding Him in an embrace.

The crowd, vividly impressed by the spectacle they had so strangely witnessed, dispersed slowly, hardly convinced that the Báb was a criminal.

As the shots were fired, a gale of exceptional severity rose up and swept over the whole city, and a whirlwind of dust of incredible density obscured the light of the sun and blinded the eyes of the people. The entire city remained enveloped in that darkness from noon right until the black of night took over.

Abdu'l-Bahá and the Trousers

Before I leave the recital of the Dublin experience I will relate an incident to which I was not a witness but was told me by one who saw it.

It seems that she was occupying a room in the Inn at the same time that Abdu'l-Bahá was there. She was dressing and happening to glance out of the window she saw Abdu'l-Bahá pacing up and down dictating to His secretary. An old man, wretchedly clothed, passed the Inn as she watched. Abdu'l-Bahá sent His secretary to call him back.

The Master stepped up to him and took his hand, smiling into his face as though greeting a welcome friend. The man was very ragged and dirty. His trousers particularly were filthy and barely covered his limbs. Abdu'l-Bahá talked with him a few moments. His face a smiling benediction. He seemed to be trying to cheer the old man and finally there did appear the trace of a smile, but it was rather bleak. Abdu'l-Bahá's eyes swept the pitiable figure, and then He laughed gently: He said something to the effect that the old man's trousers were not very serviceable and that we must remedy that lack.

It was very early in the morning and the street deserted. My friend, watching, saw Abdu'l-Bahá step into the shadow of the porch and He seemed to be fumbling under His 'aba at the waist. Then He stooped. His trousers dropped to the ground. He gathered his robe about Him and turning handed the trousers to the old man. "May God go with you," He said, and turned to the secretary as if nothing unusual had happened. I wonder what that man thought as he went his way. I like to think that this glimpse into a world in which someone cared enough for him to give him his own garb rather than that he should need, marked an epoch in his life, and transformed the "brass of this world into gold by the alchemy of the spirit," as Bahá'u'lláh says.

During the prison life in 'Akká Abdu'l-Bahá often gave His bed to those who had none, and He always refused to own more than one coat.

"Why should I have two," He said, "when there are so many who have none?"

I mention these things in this connection to show that Abdu'l-Bahá did not tell others the way of Life without walking therein Himself. In this incident I saw reflected indeed His advice to me in the parlor of the Inn that memorable Sunday.