

*Tahirih, Letter of the Living  
and  
Khadijih Bagum, wife of the Báb*

Tahirih was born in 1817, the same year that Baha'u'llah was born. Her given name was Fatimih, but she was rarely called by that name. She was called Ummay-Salmay. Later she was called Zarrin-Taj which means the Golden Crown. As we see in the course of history, when she corresponded with Siyyid Kazim, he addressed her as Qurratu'l-Ayn which means 'Solace of the Eye.' Later in Badasht, Baha'u'llah bestowed upon her the title of Tahirih which means the 'Pure One.'

Abdu'l-Baha placed her station in the level of Sarah, the Virgin Mary and Fatimih. Western literature called her the Persian Joan of Arc, a prodigy of science as well as beauty.

Professor Edward G. Browne, the orientalist from England, said the appearance of a heroine such as Tahirih in that time in Iran was not only a prodigy, but rather a miracle, and if the Babi Faith did not have any other claim to greatness, producing a heroine like Tahirih would have been sufficient. The mother of the president of Austria said, "I shall do for the women of Austria what Tahirih gave her life to do for the women of Persia."

She was born in the city of Qazvin which took pride in that it had more than one hundred of the most learned clergy within its gates. She was born to a very wealthy and learned family. Her father, Haji Mulla Salih, was not only a very high-positioned clergyman, but also was very wealthy. As a matter of fact, he

gave to her as a gift a village which she called Behjat-Abad which means the abode of happiness. The father had one older brother, Mulla Muhammad-Taqi. We shall refer to him as Taqi. He was a bitter enemy of Siyyid Kazim and Shaykh Ahmad, the two luminaries who came before the appearance of the Bab. He was also an enemy of the Bab. The father had one younger brother whose name was Mulla Ali who was very friendly toward Tahirih and later he became a Babi.

At age thirteen, the parents married her to her cousin, the son of Mulla Taqi. The husband's name was Mulla Muhammad. As you know, the marriages in that culture were pre-arranged, and cousins would marry each other. She had three children from that marriage, two sons and one daughter. None of them became Babis or believers. After her martyrdom, all of them ran away from the house because the father was ill-treating them. The daughter at the age of twenty-two died, one year after the martyrdom of Tahirih.

Tahiriah received her education through attending the courses given by her father and her uncle. Many times in lectures, attended by about two hundred students, she would be attending, but being female she would sit behind curtains. It was not unusual for her to voice her disagreement with her father or her uncle by bringing convincing proofs. Soon she became known among the students as a very learned person. As a matter of fact, her older brother, who later succeeded the father, said that the boys of the family never dared to talk when Tahirih was present because she could easily discover their mistakes and would make them realize their weakness. They preferred silence in her presence. She out-distanced her brothers in progress, but being a woman she was not given any degree and had no place in the ecclesiastic hierarchy. So many times her father stated how he wished she were a boy who could succeed him and bring more prestige to the family.

One day in the library of her cousin she discovered some books written by Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim. After reading a few pages she became highly interested in these books and asked the cousin if she could borrow them to take them home for studying. The cousin, of course, refused to do so and he said that these books were written by very progressive thinkers, Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim whose doctrines and tenets are highly opposed by her

father and uncle. Their doctrines being, one, that the resurrection is not that of rising of the body, but spiritual in nature; the second doctrine, that the Promised One, the Qa'im, would be born of a mother, and he would not be coming out of one thousand years of hiding as Muslims believed and expected. And also that the appearance of the Qa'im was near. The third doctrine was that God shall continue to send educators to mankind. This was somewhat different from what Muslims believed; that Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets and after Him no other Messenger of God would appear. Well, after arguing with the cousin, she won and he gave her the book.

Even though she was married, she spent most of her time at home. She was very close to her mother, and would spend long hours in her father's library. When her father noticed that she was reading the writings of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim they had many heated arguments and he raised violent objection toward her doing this.

She started a correspondence with Siyyid Kazim, but, as we know, Shaykh Ahmad was no longer living at that time. The first letter she wrote to Siyyid Kazim was when he was teaching in Karbila, the holy city of Islam, which has the largest theological schools. She wrote a letter of apology and supported the cause and the thoughts of Shaykh Ahmad, the previous teacher. Siyyid Kazim replied to her, addressing her, "Ya Qurratu'l-Ayn-i-Va Ruhu'l-Fu'adi." That means 'O Solace of My Eyes and the Joy of My Heart.' From then on she was called Qurratu'l-Ayn because that was the name that Siyyid Kazim called her in the letter. Their correspondence was done through her Uncle Ali. At that time women were quite restricted.

As the opposition of the father and the uncle became more, she pretended that she was going to Karbila and Najaf, the two holy cities, for pilgrimage. This was quite pleasing to the family. They thought she would become more religious and would start to forget about her thoughts on the doctrines of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim. With the help of her Uncle Ali, she and her sister, Marzieh, and Uncle Ali went to Karbila. Unfortunately, she arrived ten days too late. Siyyid Kazim had already died on December 31, 1843, the year before the Declaration of the Bab. So she became the guest of Siyyid Kazim's wife and stayed with her for the next

three years. She joined the company of those students of Siyyid Kazim who remained. The rest had dispersed to find the Qa'im.

Soon she became known in Karbila for her knowledge and ability to debate and convince even the best of the clergy. She had the whole library in her head and quoted pages of books without mistake to support her reasons. She was eagerly expecting the coming of the Promised One, but, being a woman, she had restrictions on traveling. She prayed and meditated constantly until one night in a dream she saw a young Siyyid, wearing a black cloak and green turban, appearing in heaven. This means he was suspended in the air, reciting certain verses, one of which she wrote down in her book. She woke up exhilarated and wrote the verse down.

As soon as she heard about the intended departure of her sister Marzieh's husband, Muhammad-'Ali, from Karbila to go in search of the Qa'im, she sent a message to him. The message said she was sure that he would meet the Promised One in the course of his journey. She said, "When you meet Him, on my behalf tell him, 'The effulgence of Thy face flashed forth, and the rays of Thy visage arose high; then speak the word, Am I not your Lord? Thou art, thou art', we will all reply." She also gave him a sealed letter to deliver to the Qa'im. Muhammad-'Ali eventually met the Bab in Shiraz, and when the Bab received her letter and heard the poetry, He accepted her as a Letter of the Living. She was the only woman, the seventeenth Letter of the Living, right before the last one, Quddus. This was about August in 1844.

Not long after she heard about having been accepted, Mulla Ali-i-Bastami, the fourth Letter of the Living, arrived in Karbila. He was the first Babi who was martyred. She saw a copy of Ahsanu'l-Qisas (The Best of Stories) which is also known as Qayyumu'l-Asma, or the commentary on Surih of Joseph. It has one hundred eleven chapters, the first of which was revealed to Mulla Husayn on the night of the Declaration of the Bab. To her intense delight, she discovered that the same verse that she had heard in her dream was in that manuscript. Later she translated into Persian the whole Qayyumu'l-Asma which was in Arabic. Now with her immovable conviction and bewitching eloquence, she began to teach the new Faith. She converted the wife of Siyyid Kazim. Her active teaching caused a turmoil, but the shock came when she

was found to not put on her mourning attire at the beginning of the mourning month of Muharram which coincides with the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, but instead, with her sister, put on festive attire, and celebrated the birth of the Bab which is the first day of that month.

Now she has been in Karbala for three years when a delegation of Shi'ih, Sunni, Christian and Jewish came and tried to dissuade her from speaking the new Message in the center of Islam, but her reasoning and force of argument confounded them. So they complained to the authorities in Karbala who for three months put her house under surveillance, so that no one could come or go until they could hear what to do from the governor in Baghdad. When no word came, she told the authorities that she and a few companions would leave for Baghdad. This coincided with the time when the Bab was instructing the believers to go towards Khurasan. She was stoned as she left Karbala. Among her companions were the mother and sister of Mulla Husayn.

In Baghdad she was the guest of the grandfather of Dr. Zia Baghdadi, who in the early 20th century, was a great Baha'i teacher in Chicago. She lectured from behind the curtain. Soon her students from Karbala moved there and added to her audience. Here she challenged the clergy, through the governor, to come for a public debate about their questions of her ideas. Of course, they knew better and did not accept, but became upset and asked the governor to transfer her and the other ladies to the house of the Mufti (the canon) of Baghdad. This was in 1847.

She spent three months there. The Mufti soon was captivated. He saw a dream that the Shi'ih ulama came to the Shrine of Imam Husayn and opened the grave so the body was visible. When they wanted to take it out, the Mufti threw himself on it. He asked Tahirih to interpret this dream. He told her that he shared her belief, but was afraid of the sword of the Sultan. It was there where Dr. Lutfullah Hakim's grandfather, a physician to Muhammad Shah, was on pilgrimage, and heard about Tahirih's lectures and with curiosity attended a few lectures, accepted its truth and taught large number of Jews in Persia.

Tahirih fasted frequently in those days. One day a message came

from the capital (Istanbul) that Tahirih was free, but must leave the country. She was about thirty years old. With about thirty people, Arab and Persian believers, she left Baghdad for Khaniqayn which is at the border of Persia. Dr. Baghdadi's grandfather paid for all of their expenses and accompanied her. Upon their entry back to Iran, in the small town of Karand, her eloquence and charm impressed the chiefs of that area who offered to place 12,000 armed men under her command to follow her wherever she went. She blessed them and said to stay at their homes. The people were Aliyu'llahis, a sect of Islam who equate Ali with God. Five years later, in the heart of winter, when Baha'u'llah was on His way to exile in Baghdad, He received a very warm hospitality there.

In the next city of Kermanshah, she had an enthusiastic reception and interview with princes, ulama, and government officials. She had the Bab's commentary of the Surih of Kawthar, which had been revealed by the Bab for Vahid, translated and read in public. The governor and his family became believers. She challenged the chief clergy to debate. People became anxious about it which upset the clergy even more. He could not directly agitate the people to kill her because of his fear of the governor, but he sent a message to Tahirih's father asking him to send relatives to remove her. Four ruffians from her hometown came, and with the help of a local officer attacked her companion's place, beat the people and looted their property. The governor caught them and restored the property. In the town of Sahnih she and her companions stayed two days in that village. Here, chiefs of tribes went in advance, and welcomed her and her companions.

In the city of Hamadan, she stayed two months. Again, the governor and notables came and visited her. However, one of the leading ulama became very opposed to her, but again his hands were tied because of fear of the governor. Upon hearing of his evil attitude, she sent him a long letter explaining the Faith of the Bab. She sent it with a believer who arrived when this clergy had other clergymen at his house discussing how to handle Tahirih. The messenger was like a red flag to a bull. They fell upon him and beat him until he was unconscious. When his body was returned to Tahirih, she was with a few princesses who feared her grief over this, but were astonished at her composure. She went to him and said, "Mulla Ibrahim, peace upon you that you have suffered

in the path of your beloved." He opened his eyes, and asked what he could do next. It was not too long after this, that he shed his blood in the path of the Bab.

Tahirih was planning to go to Tehran to try to meet Muhammad Shah, and tell him about the teachings of the Bab, but under instruction from her father, her two brothers arrived in Hamadan to welcome her back to Qazvin, urging her to return home. This trip took one week and was in very bad weather. She reluctantly consented, but told most of the companions to return to their homes. With her were her sister's husband, the Letter of the Living, and a young man engaged to her daughter, Mulla Ibrahim, and Shaykh Salih.

Now back in Qazvin, she went to her father's home and the two Babis stayed in a caravanserai. The first night of her arrival, there was a family council of the father, Uncle Taqi, and her husband. After a heated argument and the men insulting everything and everyone she believed in, Uncle Taqi, in a rage, struck her several times. She said the fatal words, "O uncle, I see your mouth fill with blood." The next day her husband sent a few ladies to ask her to go to his house. She said, "It has been three years since our separation. Had you shown any interest and followed me to Karbila, surely I could have awakened you. I have cast you out of my life forever." Her father tried to reconcile them but got nowhere. A few weeks later, he divorced her.

During the first few days, she used to go to her sister's home who was a believer. There, Tahirih would meet the wives of prominent people who were anxious to savor every word. Her brother-in-law, the Letter of the Living, was later martyred at the fortress of Shaykh Tabarsi.

At this time a man from Shiraz, an admirer of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim, was passing through Qazvin. He was not a Babi, but was on his way to the fortress of Mah-Ku to investigate the faith of the Bab. This was in the latter part of 1847. When he arrived, he saw in the marketplace that a man, barefoot, with his turban tied around his neck, was being dragged while onlookers were pelting and cursing him. He inquired about his guilt and was told that he publicly praised Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim, and that the clergy, Tahirih's uncle Taqi, pronounced him a heretic

and decreed his expulsion from town. In his amazement, he went to Taqi's school, and found Taqi openly insulting the memory of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim. He wanted to punch him in the mouth in front of everyone, but kept his peace and instead went and bought a dagger and waited for the right opportunity.

Learning that Taqi was the Imam-Jum'ih who led the mass prayer on Friday, and usually went at dawn to the mosque to say his private prayer, he went on Thursday night, and hid in the mosque. At dawn when Taqi came and prayed, he stabbed him in the mouth and vitals and escaped. As soon as Taqi's son saw his father dead, with blood in his mouth, Tahirih became the prime suspect masterminding the assassination. Many Babis were arrested, but Tahirih's father would not let them take her out of his house. Upon the insistence of her ex-husband, she and her maid were taken for interrogation. She denied having had any part in it. To put psychological pressure on her, branding with hot irons was ordered, and they pushed the hands of her maid under a sliding door for branding. Tahirih felt desperate so she faced Mah-Ku and implored the Bab. All of a sudden, shouts were heard that the assassin was found. The man from Shiraz, seeing so many innocent people being arrested, made a deal with authorities that they should release all the innocent if with proof he would give them the murderer. When they promised, he said it was himself, and explained the whole story. This admission was in front of the judge and the ex-husband, the son of Taqi, who did not accept the story. The murderer said, "I hid the dagger under a certain bridge." When it was found, they arrested him, but did not keep their promise to release the rest.

He and four Babis were sent to Tehran. Shaykh Salih, the Arab companion, was martyred upon arrival in Tehran. He was the first to shed his blood on Persian soil; 20,000 followed. When Baha'u'llah heard about a few Babis in jail He visited them, and gave them some money. Everyone heard about it. The murderer saw that they did not keep their promise to release others, so at night he escaped, and went to the home of Rida Khan-i-Sardar, a Babi who was an officer in the Royal Army. He stayed hidden, but later went to Fort Shaykh Tabarsi and was martyred. Baha'u'llah was accused by the ex-husband of Tahirih of helping the murderer to escape, and was put in the same prison for a few days. They did not know that he was masterminding the rescue of Tahirih.

Through intrigues of the ex-husband, who now had replaced his father as the Imam-Jum'ih (prayer leader), the three innocent Babis were returned and martyred in Qazvin. This emboldened the ex-husband who now was going after Tahirih herself. Tahirih, through her intuition sensed the forthcoming rescue, wrote him a letter stating the futility of his efforts, and declared, "My God will rescue me from your clutches within nine days. If not, you can do with me whatever you wish." He was hesitant to show this letter to others and to accept such a bold challenge, but some heard about it.

The evening of the day when Taqi was murdered, a Babi, Muhammad Hadi Farhadi, left Qazvin for Tehran and attained the presence of Baha'u'llah, giving news of the events. Later he was summoned by Baha'u'llah and instructed to return to Qazvin and rescue Tahirih, as planned by Baha'u'llah. He was given a sealed letter from Baha'u'llah that he should deliver to Tahirih through his wife Khatun-Jan. She should go in disguise of a beggar and wait at the entrance of Tahirih's house. No one was allowed to enter Tahirih's home. The letter was delivered, and shortly Tahirih came out, and followed her to a carpenter's house which no one suspected as her hiding place. At night when the city gates were closed, they went over the wall and reached a slaughter house outside the town where, under the direction of Baha'u'llah, an attendant with three horses was ready. They did not take the usual road to Tehran and eventually safely reached Baha'u'llah's home. This sudden disappearance proved the supernatural power of the Faith, and her older brother the same day acknowledged the truth of the Faith, but did not follow it.

Tahirih, by the same intuition that caused her to recognize the Bab, also recognized the station of Baha'u'llah. For the next five or six months she was the guest of Baha'u'llah. She was very fond of Abdu'l-Baha, who was only four years old. One day she was with Abdu'l-Baha when the famous and erudite Vahid came to visit her. He waited a long time and friends said, "Shouldn't you leave the child and go and visit Vahid?" She looked at Abdu'l-Baha and said, "Shall I leave thee, the Protector of the Cause, for seeing one of the followers of the Cause?" No one understood her. Abdu'l-Baha relates that once he was sitting on Tahirih's lap while she was conversing with Vahid through a

curtain. Men and women in that culture visited with a curtain separating them. Vahid was reciting and elaborating on some Islamic traditions. She interrupted him by saying, "Oh Yahya! (which was his given name.) Today is not the time for reciting the traditions. Bring forth an act if you have the knowledge." And we saw how valiantly he gave his life in the struggle of Nayriz.

Tahirih, who had never seen the Bab, wanted to go to Mah-Ku, but Baha'u'llah advised her that it was impossible. As we recall, in the early part of April 1848 after spending Naw-Ruz with Mulla Husayn, the Bab was transferred from Mah-Ku to Chihriq. It is very possible that Mulla Husayn and Tahirih met in the house of Baha'u'llah while Mulla Husayn was on his way to Mah-Ku, or on his return when he again went through Tehran.

In about May or June 1848, Baha'u'llah advised Mirza Musa, His brother, to take Tahirih secretly through the city gate as enemies were still looking for her, and head for Khurasan where Quddus and Mulla Husayn were. This was done successfully. After about seven miles they reached an orchard at the foot of the mountains with a vacant building. The caretaker accepted to let Tahirih and her maid use it and guarded them. Mirza Musa returned to Baha'u'llah who said that a house was providentially prepared for her reception. She stayed there seven days.

Baha'u'llah instructed Mirza Musa to make arrangements for His own departure for Khurasan, and headed for Shah-rud where Tahirih joined Him. Both started for Badasht. Badasht was a summer resort full of gardens for the nobility. Quddus joined them there. Many believers, at the bidding of the Bab, were at Badasht waiting to join Baha'u'llah on His intended trip to Khurasan. Eighty-one believers were the guests of Baha'u'llah, who rented three gardens for Tahirih, Quddus, and Himself. That conference lasted twenty-two days, and every day Baha'u'llah revealed a tablet. Also, He conferred new titles on everyone, such as Tahirih, Quddus, and for Himself, Baha.

Here was where Tahirih came out without the veil over her face, with Quddus having his sword ready for the fatal blow, and poor Abdu'l-Khaliq so shaken that he cut his own throat and left the company with a few others. Tahirih's appearance was like a thunder-

bolt. She kept her serenity, and with an eloquent and matchless speech said, "I am the 'Blast of the Trumpet.' I am the 'Call of the Bugle.' I am the 'Word' which the Qa'im is to utter, the Word which shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth. This day is the day on which the fetters of the past are burst asunder." She concluded her speech with a verse from the Qur'an, "Verily, amid gardens and rivers shall the pious dwell in the seat of truth in the presence of the potent King." She glanced at Baha'u'llah and Quddus, not clearly revealing Baha'u'llah.

The followers were divided between Quddus and Tahirih, the eighteenth and seventeenth Letters of the Living, who on a few occasions denounced each other, but Baha'u'llah masterly healed the wound and brought reconciliation. Her insight was owed to her months of staying close to Baha'u'llah.

On those days the Bab was brought from the prison-fortress of Chihriq to Tabriz for examination, and for the first time He said He was the Qa'im which meant the abrogation of Islamic laws and traditions. The same purpose was achieved at a distance at Badasht under the direction of Baha'u'llah. You see, the Persian Bayan was just completed by the Bab, and new laws revealed, so the old were abrogated. When after the conference a few rigid followers reported to the Bab about Tahirih's poor discretion in showing her face, and not respecting the established Islamic traditions, He replied, "What am I to say regarding her whom the Tongue of Power and Glory names Tahirih (meaning the Pure One)?"

At the end of the conference, Quddus and Tahirih shared the same howdah (a covered couch mounted on a pack-animal). Baha'u'llah and the rest of the companions all headed towards Niyala which is near Mazindaran. In the early dawn they woke up by stones being hurled at them. Most of the followers fled and joined Mulla Husayn on the way to Shaykh Tabarsi. Baha'u'llah put His garment on Quddus, and sent him to a safe place, and put the only other man remaining, who had drawn his sword, to protect Tahirih. Baha'u'llah negotiated with the inhabitants who gave them back some of their looted property. Baha'u'llah and Tahirih headed towards Nur, Baha'u'llah's hometown. The attack in Niyala occurred in mid-July 1848, and, as we remember, it was about July 21 when Mulla Husayn and two hundred two believers left Mashhad heading towards Manzindaran and ended in Shaykh Tabarsi.

On the way towards Nur, Baha'u'llah put Abu Turab in charge of Tahirih and made side trips. It was in Bandar-i-Gaz when the edict for His arrest and execution came, and the same day came the news of the death of the Shah. Tahirih was intercepted, and was sent to Tehran and imprisoned in the house of Mahmud Khan-i-Kalantar (kalantar means the mayor). Meanwhile, Quddus was captured and imprisoned in Sari in the house of the chief clergy. Tahirih was kept in that house for four years.

Once she was brought to the presence of the eighteen-year-old king, Nasiri'd-Din Shah, who liked her appearance. She was thirty-two years old. Later the Shah wrote her a letter urging her to deny the Bab and become a Muslim. If she would, he wrote, he would marry her, and make her the guardian of the ladies of his household. She answered it, "Kingdom, wealth, and ruling yours, being detached like a dervish is mine. If that is good, let it be yours. If this is bad, I long for it, let it be mine." When he read the answer, he praised her, and said, "So far the history has not shown a woman like this."

At first, she was placed in an upstairs room which only could be reached by a ladder. Soon the wife of the kalantar was captivated by her spirit, and restrictions were eased off. The princesses and wives of notables came to listen to her. Her new faith and emancipation of women were exciting to hear. In the wedding celebration of the marriage of the son of the kalantar, the women asked for her, and as soon as she came, the magic of her words brought people away from music and dancing.

In 1852, the prime minister, Mirza Taqi-Khan-i-Amir Kabir, who two years earlier had ordered the execution of the Bab, appointed a few of the clergy and his deputies to interrogate her. They made seven interviews with her, and found her impossible to bend. She ended her interrogation by telling them, "You can kill me as son as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women." The prime minister had no intention to learn the truth. These seven conferences, or trials, were to appease the notable women. The deputies signed the death sentence.

August 15, 1852, the infamous day when three Babis tried to kill the Shah, Baha'u'llah and all the well-known Babis were thrown

trials

into the dungeon, or the Siyah-Chal, of Tehran. Eighty were put to death in the most cruel ways. Tahirih was still in the house of the kalantar.

One morning she summoned the wife of the kalantar to her room. Kalantar's wife found Tahirih dressed in a white silk dress and scented with attar of rose, a heavenly perfume. The wife of kalantar later related this story, "I showed my surprise about the unusual sight. She said, 'I have bathed and am preparing to meet my beloved. I wish to free you from the care and anxiety of my imprisonment.'" She said, "I broke into tears but Tahirih said, 'Do not weep, the time of your lamentation has not yet come. The time of my martyrdom is fast approaching. My last wishes are that you send your son with me to make sure they don't force me to divest myself from this attire, and my body should be thrown into a pit and covered with earth and stones. Also please lock the door, and do not let anyone disturb my devotion. This day I shall fast until I am face-to-face with my Beloved. Three days after my death a woman will come to visit you. Give her this package."

Four hours after sunset the attendants came and asked for her. She states, "As I went to her room she had her veil on and was pacing in the room. She kissed me and handed me a key to her chest and said, 'Whenever you open this chest and see the little things I left for you remember me and rejoice in my gladness.' She left with the guards and my son. My heart broke to see her disappear into the dark. Three hours later my son returned with his face drenched with tears. He gave the following account, "As we reached the garden of Ilkhani, she dismounted her horse and approached me and said, 'They apparently want to strangle me. Long ago I had set aside this silk scarf which I hoped to be used to take my life,' and she handed it to me. I found the Sardar (chief officer) drunk. I gave the scarf and the message. He called a servant in and after a few compliments, he gave him gold coins and said, 'Take this scarf and go and choke this Babi woman who is causing so much trouble. She is in the servant's quarters.' I followed the servant. When he entered the room, I stood at the door. When he got close to her she looked at him and said a few words. This servant took the scarf back to Sardar and refused to do it. Sardar asked for coffee to sober up. Then he asked

for one of his low-life servants who had been demoted to the lowest job. This evil-looking man came, and the Sardar made him drunk and gave him the scarf. As this servant approached Tahirih he quickly wrapped the scarf around her neck and killed her. Then, as she requested, her body was lowered into a well and covered with stones and dirt." The kalantar's wife stated, "Three days later, as foretold by Tahirih, a woman came and took the package."

Nine years later the kalantar, by the order of the king, was strangulated by twisting a rope around his neck, and his body was hung in a thoroughfare for the public to view. This was the lamentation which Tahirih was alluding to when talking to the wife of the kalantar - remember, she told her, "Do not weep. The time of your lamentation has not yet come."

This was the power of intuition of Tahirih which enabled her not only to recognize the Bab without ever seeing Him, but also to recognize Baha'u'llah's station well before His receiving His Mission in the Siyah-Chal of Tehran.

In that stormy month of August in 1852, in the dead of night they strangulated the beautiful and talented poetess of Qazvin and cast her body, clad in a wedding dress, into a pit without a trace. She was thirty-six years old. Her career was as dazzling as it was brief, and as tragic as it was eventful. What other woman except Tahirih in those days had the courage, erudition, and eloquence to address and confound the ulama at the center of Islam who ranked women slightly higher than animal, and considered them not even having a soul.

At her final hours she told them, "You can kill me as soon as you wish, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women." How true! Unlike her fellow-disciples, her fame spread far and wide in the capitals of western Europe. Her sacrifices and influence mean more to women than of Joan of Arc. Her admirers are many throughout the continents. They are eager to know more about her, memorize her poetry, or set them to music, but more than all, to emulate her. May the future historians do justice to her accomplishments and influence.

Some of her poetry has been translated. Many of her heart-touching

odes are recited by her fanatic countrymen of today without knowing who is the composer and not realizing that the Lord mentioned in those lines signify no one else but Baha'u'llah. Indeed, the title of Zarrin-Taj, or Crown of Gold, was below the station of this immortal heroine whom history will remember as Tahirih, the title conferred upon her by the Blessed Beauty.

Let us rejoice in that her longing for eternal reunion with the object of her love, whom she never met in her lifetime, was finally fulfilled.

three years old. When Khadijih Bagum matched the dream and what was happening, she became quite elated. With the respect that everyone in the family gave to the Bab, she felt quite proud of her coming marriage.

Some two months later the marriage took place in Uncle Ali's house, and the ceremony was officiated by the Imam-Jum'ih Shaykh Abu Turab, who later we find was the hand of providence for the protection of the Bab. This was about August of 1842, and they lived in the Bab's own house with His mother and two black servants, Mubarak and Fiddih. The great joy of those days was beyond words, but not long after her marriage she had a frightening dream.

One night she saw in her dream a fearsome lion standing in their courtyard, and she had her arms around the lion's neck. The lion dragged her two and a half times around the perimeter of the courtyard when she woke up. Trembling with fright, she told the Bab about her dream, and He told her it meant that their life together would not last more than two and a half years, which made her quite distressed, but He comforted her, and said she should accept any adversity in the path of God.

Before long it was realized that she was pregnant, and when the due date came, she had a very long and hard labor. When the Bab's mother went to Him and said Khadijih Bagum was at the point of death, He took a mirror that was close to Him and wrote a prayer on it, and told His mother to hold the mirror in front of His wife. That was done and the child was delivered, but the baby's life was very short, possibly stillborn. The Bab's mother was quite sad and angry. She told the Bab that if He had such powers, why didn't He make any attempt to save the life of His son and spare them so much grief. He smiled and replied that He was not destined to have any child. This made her even more upset, but He said no more. The child was named Ahmad and in Qayyumu'l-Asma, the Bab's mighty book, the Bab speaks of Ahmad and states that he is in paradise with Fatimih. He was buried at the foot of a cypress tree in Bibidukhtaran.

During those days the Bab did not have a definite occupation. He did lots of writing, and any time company would come He would cover His papers with a cloth. At times He used to go to Uncle

Ali's trading house, and some afternoons He would go for a walk in the fields outside the city and come home at sunset.

One day in the afternoon He came home earlier than usual, and said that this night He had a particular task to attend, and asked that the dinner be served earlier. Fiddih, the maid-servant, did so, and after supper, He retired for the night. An hour later when the house was quiet, He rose from His bed and left the room. This event was sometime before His Declaration.

"At first it did not alarm me," she recounted, "but when it went more than an hour, I became concerned and went to look for Him. He was nowhere to be found." She continued, "I checked the house door and it was locked from inside, and as I walked on the western side of the courtyard I saw that the upper chamber was well-lighted. This surprised me because He never went into that room at that time of the night unless He had guests, and He would usually tell me when a guest was expected. With great trepidation, I climbed the steps and there I saw Him standing with His hands raised towards heaven, and chanting prayers in the most melodious voice and tears streaming from His eyes. His face was so luminous as if rays of light were radiating from it. He looked so majestic. Fear seized me, and I was transfixed on the spot, trembling uncontrollably. I could not go forward or backward. He made a gesture with His hands for me to go back. I returned to my bed and could not fall asleep, and in those short bouts of sleep, I would see that scene in the upper chamber. I kept asking myself what grave event had happened to evoke tears and supplications of such intensity. Then I heard the call of the muezzin for dawn prayer."

"As usual, breakfast was served in His mother's room, and I saw Him going there. I went to that room, but His mother was not there. As soon as I laid my eyes upon His face, the majesty of the night before appeared to me and I began to tremble. He asked me to sit and gave me what was left of the tea in His cup. His kindness gave me strength and courage. He asked what was troubling me, and I boldly told Him, 'It is the change in you. We grew up together and have been married for nearly two years, and now I see a different person in you. You have been transformed!' He smiled and said, 'Although I did not wish for you to see me in that state, God had ordained otherwise. He wished you to see me

in that state, so with absolute certitude you recognize my station as the Qa'im. This light radiates from my heart and my being.' I prostrated before Him, and from then on I was there in total evanescence only to serve Him."

She discovered the light of the Bab before it shone on the world, and in rank in the Babi Dispensation, she is second only to Tahirih.

When the Letters of the Living were completed, the Bab left Shiraz for pilgrimage to Mecca. From the port of Bushihr, He wrote a letter to His wife, and the letter opened with these words, "My sweet love, may God preserve you." The return of the Bab to Shiraz signalled the beginning of severe persecutions. She told of the night that police suddenly raided their house and took all the books and writings, abducted the Bab, and Uncle Ali was beaten up and left behind. They took the Bab to the house of the police chief and demanded money which He did not have, so they took the cashmere shawl which He had around His waist. It was close to dawn when He returned home. God knows how much His mother and she worried that night.

Not too long after that night, He was arrested again and detained in the house of the police chief, and the news spread that they would put Him to death in that house. Uncle Ali was recovering from the beating. Nobody dared to go to see her. Only her sister, Zahra, would come to the nearest mosque, change her veil to a patche, old veil of a beggar woman, and then in disguise would go and visit Khadijih Bagum.

Then the clergy wrote and signed His death sentence, and had it confirmed by the governor-general, Husayn Khan. When they took it to the Imam-Jum'ih for finalization, (the person who did the wedding ceremony) not only did he not sign it, but scolded them and kicked them out. However, in order to solve the dilemma, he agreed to summon the Bab to the mosque for recantation.

The next event was the final attack of the police chief, abducting the Bab. That night cholera broke out in the city. In the morning Uncle Ali took the Bab's clothes to Him where He was held in the house of the police chief. His wife and mother never saw Him again,

and had not even a chance to say farewell. The mad governor who had left the city to escape cholera, under pressure from the police chief, gave his approval for the release of the Bab. The Bab left for Isfahan, but they did not know it.

Khadijih Bagum relates, "At that time we moved to Uncle Ali's house, and hoped to hear some news about the Bab. The frustrated governor sent attendants to our house to find Him, but we had no idea of His whereabouts. Then the attendants went to arrest Mirza Abul-Qasim, my brother, who was ill in bed, and carried him on their shoulders to the governor's house. After severe verbal abuse and beating he was told to produce the Bab within two weeks or pay a fine of 15,000 tumans, a substantial sum. They brought him back on their shoulders and dumped him on the hard ground of the courtyard.

With the beating he received his eyes were swollen shut with severe pain, and tears streamed from them constantly. After fifteen days the attendants came again and took him away to the governor's house. While this evil man was demanding 15,000 tumans from him, a letter came from the governor of Isfahan, Manuchihr Khan, stating that the Bab was his honored guest, and no member of His family should be abused or harrassed in any way. Thereupon, the fine was reduced to 1,500 tumans.

After the departure of the Bab for Isfahan, the family was in great distress, and day-to-day expected new abuse, particularly by the frustrated governor. If it was not verbal or physical, it was psychological abuse. The people of Shiraz were warned by the criers that if a single page of the writings of the Bab was found in their possession they would be severely punished. In their panic to escape the wrath of the merciless governor, people dashed to the house of Mirza Abu'l-Qasim with bundles of writings of the Bab, all written by His own hand, threw them into the courtyard, and dashed away hoping no one had seen them with the incriminating material. Siyyid Ali, the uncle of the Bab, advised the family to wash away the ink and bury the paper.

What a deprivation for mankind! Don't you wish that you could have even a single word in His own handwriting! I guess it had to happen that way. You see, this was not the only time that large

number of the Bab's writings were destroyed. While in Mah-Ku He revealed nine complete and separate commentaries on the whole Qur'an which were sent to a believer in Tabriz for safekeeping, but their whereabouts are not known. The Bab has comforted us by stating in the Bayan that a thousand perusals of His book, the Bayan, does not equal perusal of a single verse revealed by Baha'u'llah, and we have 15,000 written documents of Baha'u'llah all preserved in the Archives at the World Center.

Khadijih Bagum states that her brother, Siyyid Hasan, who later became a Baha'i with the title of Afnan-i-Kabir from Baha'u'llah, was in Isfahan but did not write a single line about the Bab. At times he was hostile towards the Bab. A few times they received a letter from the Bab, Himself. Months before His leaving for Isfahan, the Bab had changed the title of His house to the name of His mother and wife, and also gave the prayer of Remover of Difficulties to His wife, so that any time she became grief-stricken, she should chant it, and He would appear in her dream and comfort her.

Later on Uncle Ali left for Yazd. His son, Javad, and the son of another uncle of the Bab often came to visit and help Khadijih Bagum and the mother of the Bab. Then fragmentary pieces of news came that the Bab was transferred to Tehran, and then to the mountains of Adhirbayjan. The Bab's mother appealed to her brother, Siyyid Ali who was a Babi, to do something about the Bab's hardship. That is the time when he closed his business, left for the prison-fortress of Chihriq where the Bab was kept, and ended in Tehran where he met a martyr's death by being brutally beheaded.

The news of the martyrdom of Uncle Ali and later of the Bab in 1850 was kept from the women of the household. Rumors of this were severely denied by the men until Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, brother of Khadijih Bagum, found it very difficult to stay in Shiraz so he took Uncle Ali's eighteen-year-old and only son with him on a pilgrimage to Mecca. On the way back Javad fell ill and died in Jiddih. The uncle went alone to visit the shrines of Karbila and Najaf. It was more than a year after the martyrdom of the Bab when Mirza Abu'l-Qasim returned home with the sad news of Javad's death and of the martyrdom of Javad's father and the Bab. They mourned for all three of them.

The mother of the Bab, who could no longer tolerate the grief and particularly the tongue-lashing of a brother-in-law, took off for Karbila. She was not a believer until Baha'u'llah, a decade later from Baghdad, sent some believers who knew her to see her, and she became a Baha'i before her death and recognized the station of her Son.

Khadijih Bagum lived with her sister, the wife of Uncle Ali, who needed more comforting having lost both her husband and only son within one year. The news of the martyrdom of the Bab and Uncle Ali were kept from the servant Fiddih. She was told they had gone to Bombay for trading. When later Baha'u'llah ordered the repair of the House of the Bab so Khadijih Bagum could go to live there again, Fiddih was overjoyed, stating that the Master must be on His way back as the reason for the house being repaired.

Years passed and in her story Khadijih Bagum stated, "My sister's son, Aqa Mirza Aqa, whom I had converted, grew up and wrote for me to Baha'u'llah in Baghdad, and I was honored with an answer from the Blessed Beauty. Then it happened that Nabil, the historian, came to Shiraz, announcing that Baha'u'llah was the One promised by the Bab. As soon as I heard this I experienced the same feeling as I had in the upper room before the Bab's Declaration. I prostrated and offered my total submission and dedication to Baha'u'llah."

"The years went by and a letter came from my brother in Isfahan who now was a Baha'i. Baha'u'llah gave him the title of Afnan-i-Kabir. The letter stated that Shaykh Salman, the celebrated courier of Baha'u'llah who had come to Shiraz many times with tablets and gifts from Baha'u'llah, was on his way to Akka and was also taking Munirih Khanum and her brother to attain the presence of Baha'u'llah in Akka. On their way they stayed with me for two weeks. My nephew, Ali, was also visiting. Those were my happiest days since the Bab was taken from me."

Munirih Khanum, who became the wife of Abdu'l-Baha, took three requests from Khadijih Bagum to Baha'u'llah. One was that the Bab's house be repaired so she could live there again. Second, was to ask for the hand of Baha'u'llah's daughter, Furuqiyih Khanum, in marriage for her nephew, Ali, and lastly, to have permission

to attain the presence of Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah granted all three of her wishes.

The nephew, Ali, had promised Khadijih Bagum that if he was accepted as Baha'u'llah's son-in-law he would take her with him to Akka. However, that fickle man made excuses and broke his promise, going alone to Akka. This broke the heart of Khadijih Bagum who knew that it had been her last chance to go to the presence of Baha'u'llah. She became ill and two months later on September 15, 1882, passed away, forty years after her marriage to the Bab. Her faithful maid, Fiddih, died two hours later.

Khadijih Bagum was honored by Baha'u'llah with a tablet in which He stated that, because of her, all who died on the day of her death were forgiven. She was buried that night within the Shrine of Shah-Chiraq, an Islamic shrine, with the help of the caretaker of that shrine who was a Baha'i.

Friends, the words tragic and sad fail to express the agonies suffered by Khadijih Bagum. How grateful we should be for her being a part of our glorious history. In that short span of their marriage she brought joy and comfort to the Bab. She converted her nephew on whom Baha'u'llah conferred the title of Nuru'd-Din, and later honored him with the Tablet of the World, or Lawh-i-Dunya.

Of her precious legacies, the greatest is Shoghi Effendi, being the great-grandson of her illustrious brother, Mirza Abu'l-Qasim. Also the late Hand of the Cause H. M. Balyuzi was a second cousin of Shoghi Effendi, both Afnan from the same brother. How could we end her story without appreciating the potent prayer, "Is there any Remover of Difficulties..." which the Blessed Bab revealed for her agonies, and now the world has the opportunity and bounty to supplicate through it.

TAHIRIH  
&  
KHADIJIH BAGUM

A transcript for audio-cassette from series  
WINDOWS TO THE PAST  
by Darius K. Shahrokh, M.D.

From these Windows to the Past another window is opening to the moving lives of Tahirih, (Qurratu'l- Ayn), the greatest heroine in the Babi Dispensation, and Khadijih Bagum, the wife of the Bab.

Tahirih was born in 1817, the same year that Baha'u'llah was born. Her given name was Fatimih, but she was rarely called by that name. She was called Ummay-Salmay. Later she was called Zarrin-Taj which means the Golden Crown. As we see in the course of history, when she corresponded with Siyyid Kazim, he addressed her as Qurratu'l- Ayn which means 301: