

A Partial Translation of Nabíl Zarandí's Longest Poem

Produced by Adib Masumian

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Introduction by the Translator

From late December 2020 to about mid-May 2021, I devoted some time every now and then to translating a lengthy *mathnaví* (a poem consisting of rhyming couplets) by Nabíl Zarandí, also known as Nabíl-i-A'zam, author of the famous narrative history of the Bábí religion that Shoghi Effendi recast into English as *The Dawn-Breakers*. Ultimately, I turned my attention to other projects, and I do not expect to come back to this one. Hence, I am sharing what I was able to accomplish so that it will not be lost. Perhaps it will inspire others to continue this work or make a fresh start.

This poem by Zarandí was [originally printed in 1924](#) by Shaykh Muḥyi'd-Dín Ṣabrí (whose surnames also include Sanandají and Kání-Mishkání, respectively denoting the county and village in Iran from which he hailed), a Kurdish Bahá'í publisher based in Egypt who was converted to the Faith there by the erudite Bahá'í teacher and scholar Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání. Seventy years later, in 1995, the German publisher [Bahá'í-Verlag reprinted it](#) by offset, making it identical to the original printing with the addition of a brief prefatory note to introduce the poem. I am not sure when it was composed; Vahid Rafati [has written](#) that, in it, Zarandí “describes major historical events from the early days of the Babi movement to the year 1869,” so it may be reasonable to assume it was finished sometime during that year or shortly thereafter.

This poem probably spans somewhere around 10,000 to 11,000 words and comprises more than 800 verses. Of these, I have translated only the first 71 verses, amounting to roughly 8% of the poem or less, and corresponding to pages 7–11 (up to line 6 of the latter) of the original publication. The translation is mostly set to iambic pentameter with occasional trochees and an AABB rhyme scheme with occasional slant rhymes. For the extent of the original text that I have reproduced as a typescript below, I have added short vowel marks to facilitate reading, and also included some explanatory footnotes.

It should be noted that this version of the original text, printed first in Egypt and then in Germany, is not without errors. This can be determined not only by reading the poem itself, but also by comparing it with Abu'l-Qásim Afnán's reproductions of certain passages from it quoted in an article he wrote (cited below), in which he seems to have corrected some of these mistakes. I had hoped this indicated that an accurate version of this poem exists somewhere, perhaps known to the Bahá'í World Center, but in response to a query I sent them, [they wrote, on 19 February 2022](#), that the Research Department

has reported that it has studied the original manuscript copy of Nabíl's *mathnaví* published in 1924 and 1995 which is held in the Archives at the World Centre and can confirm that this manuscript is identical with these two published versions and contains the same features identified in your letter. To date, there is no other manuscript copy of this poem in the Archives.

Thus, anyone attempting to translate this poem in the future will need to be on the lookout for textual errors in the original and correct them as needed.

It is also worth noting that this *mathnaví* is just one of several that Zarandí is known to have composed, though it is apparently the lengthiest. Among his other *mathnavís* are an elegy for Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mírzá Mihdí (approximately 700 verses; see [Yádnámíy-i-Ishráq-Khávárí](#), chapter 5); a poetic description of the banishment of Bahá'u'lláh from Edirne to 'Akká (666 verses; see [Yádnámíy-i-Ishráq-Khávárí](#), chapter 4); a biography of Nabíl-i-Akbar, one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, told in verse (303 verses; see [Khúshih-há'í az Kharman-i-Adab va Hunar](#), vol. 13, pp. 107–119); and a poem known as “The Couplets of Reunion and Separation” (175 verses; see [Yádnámíy-i-Ishráq-Khávárí](#), chapter 6). To my knowledge, none of these *mathnavís* have been translated to any extent, but at least a few of Zarandí's other poems have been rendered to some degree. For instance, chapter 11 of E.G. Browne's [Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion](#) includes samples of Nabíl's poetry in English translation.

Those who are literate in Persian and interested in the poetry of Zarandí can find more of it in Ni'matu'lláh Dhuká'í Baydā'í, [Tadhkariy-i-Shu'aráy-i-Qarn-i-Avvál-i-Bahá'í](#), vol. 3, pp. 421–435; Vahid Rafati (ed.), [Yádnámíy-i-Ishráq-Khávárí](#), pp. 227–243; and Abu'l-Qásim Afnán, “[Murúrí bar Ash'ár-i-Nabíl-i-Zarandí](#),” published in [Khúshih-há'í az Kharman-i-Adab va Hunar](#), vol. 7, pp. 58–75.

—Adib Masumian
6 September 2025

In the Name of the Effulgent

بسم الہی

The line that sits atop this kingly tale

Adorns it with a glorious Name to hail

Therewith His light shall fill the skies once dim

And shine upon the hearts that yearn for Him

A fraction of His life, the Lord of being,

I'll unconceal into the realm of seeing

That they who'd gladly swim in seas of fire

With currency of soul become its buyer

Become all ears, O vast and lofty skies

Attune yourselves, O souls, in similar wise

اول عنوان این لوح شہی

زینت افزا گردد از اسم بھی

تا بهایش پُر کند آفاق را

نور بخشد قلبِ هر مشتاق را

شمه‌ئی از حال سلطان وجود

آرم از غیش بی‌بازار شهود

تا کہ سبّاحانِ بحرِ آذری

با نقودِ جان شوندش مشتری

ایّھا الآفاق یکجا گوش شو

ایّھا الانفس سراسر هوش شو

Be stupefied, O bird of spirit, too

Beloved's mention goes; be silent, you!

For that great King of life has taken leave

From hiddenness so Him we may perceive

The unseen Essence of our Lord divine

Apparent here in physical design

As men had idolized imagining

And raised against this point their caviling

God mercifully and of necessity

Made manifest Aḥmad,* the first to be

Thus from Aḥsá† did God that shaykh select

So to the peerless King he'd pay respect

عندلیبِ جانِ تو هم مدهوش باش

ذکرِ جانان می رود خاموش باش

چون عزیمت کرد سلطانِ وجود

کاید از غیبِ بقا سوی شهود

ذاتِ غیبِ لا یُرایِ کردگار

در غَمّامِ جسمِ گردد آشکار

چون خدایِ مردمان موهوم بود

زین بیان اعراضشان معلوم بود

لا جَرَمَ رحماً لَأنظارِ البشر

کرد احمد را نخست او جلوه گر

(شیخِ احسا را) خدا مبعوث کرد

تا شود ناطق بنعتِ شاهِ فرد

* Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá'í, founder of the Shaykhí school of Shí'ih Islám.

† The city in Bahrain where Shaykh Aḥmad was born.

Transcendent wisdoms well in hand, that friend
The shrouds that hinder men would slowly rend

تا بحکمت‌هایِ بالغِ آن صدیق
کم گمک احجاب را سازد رقیق

And when that shaykh asserted his new claims
He'd burn away their veils with equal flames

شیخِ احسائی چه در اظهار شد
قدرِ طاقتِ خارقِ استار است

He said, "This earth I see that's filled with vice
Will soon be like the highest paradise

گفت می‌بینم که این روی زمین
عن قریب آید چو فردوسِ برین

This heap of dust shall be a rosy bed
Then will the Spirit dwell in body's stead

عن قریب این خاکدان گلشن شود
روح اعظم را جسدِ مسکن شود

With joyful thoughts of God yourselves adorn
For now has come the time when God is born"

شاد گردید ای مهان با یادِ حق
که رسید اینک گهی میلادِ حق

And in the year of 1817*
The ancient radiant Face could well be seen

تا بسالِ غین و را و لام و جیم[†]
گشت رخشان نیرِ وجهِ قدیم

* The original Persian text says "the year of *ghayn* and *rá* and *lám* and *jím*." According to Abjad notation, these Arabic letters add up to 1233 AH (1817 CE), the year of Bahá'u'lláh's birth.

[†] Corrections present in [an article by Abu'l-Qásim Afnán](#) have been incorporated into the original text of this half-verse.

The moment when that guiding Sun did dawn

در گهی میلادِ آن شمسِ هدی

The crier all the world did call upon:

هاتفی بر جمله عالم زد ندا

مستعد باشید یارانِ مستعد

“Prepare yourselves, O friends, for now in sum

جاء یوم غیب لم یولد وُلد

The Unbegotten’s hidden Day has come”*

Now as this goodly verse has grown in girth

چون که این مصرعِ نیکو ممدود شد

It’s happened that we’ve reached His date of birth

از قضا تاریخِ آن مولود شد

The moment when that precious Pearl was born

در گه تولیدِ آن درّ ثمین

The atoms of the earth did wail and mourn

گشت نالان جمله ذراتِ زمین

“This is no time for tears!” proclaimed the sky

آسمان گفتا چه جای زاری است

“It’s time for joy; why do you weep and cry?”

وقت شادی نی که خونباری است

* Cf. Qur’án 112:3.

And in response did all the earth give vent:

“You know nothing of this, the soil’s torment

For if you knew how fate will sore afflict

This blessed Babe with tests we can’t depict

To death would all you seven heavens go

An instant would suffice to bring you low

How do you know what plights this purely-born

Will face from tyrants of the earth with scorn?

If you could plainly see those blows and hits

With fiery rain you’d shatter men to bits

And all of them you would annihilate

Alas, for such is not the way of fate”*

توده غبرا بدادش در جواب

تو نه‌ئی واقف ز اوضاعِ تراب

زان بلاهائی که این مولود را

گشت قسمت گر خبر بودی ترا

سبعه اطباقت دمی فانی شدی

منهدم گردیدی و دانی شدی

تو چه دانی کز ستمگرهایِ خاک

چه بلاها بیند این مولودِ پاک

گر بدیدی آن بلاها را عیان

نار باریدی بفرق خاکیان

تا نماندی یک تن از نوعِ بشر

لیک این حتم است در لوحِ قَدَر

* A more faithful alternative to the original: “But this is written in the scroll of fate.”

In short, when God set foot on worldly moss

With ecstasy the shaykh was at a loss

Although his stainless heart did radiate

He could not find the words to illustrate

When He Who never sleeps and never dies

Saw him bereft of speech to share the prize

Shíráz became illumined by His face

To earth a Gate was opened from that place

And two years after His own Lord was birthed

Was the Exalted One Himself unearthed

الغرض لاهوت در ناسوت شد

شیخ احسا والہ و مبہوت شد

قلب پاکش مشرق اجلال شد

لیک نطقش از تبیین لال شد

عجزِ او را چون ز تبلیغ پیام

دید حیّ لا یَموتِ لا ینام

نورِ وجہش جلوہ در شیراز کرد

زان بلد بابی بعالم باز کرد

بعدِ تولّدِ خدایِ خود دو سال

شد تولّدِ طلعتِ اعلایِ عال

در محرّم دُویُمش آمد بها

The second of Muḥarram* gave Bahá

* 2 Muḥarram 1333 AH, or 12 November 1817.

اولش ربّ علی در لام و ها

The first witnessed the Báb in *lám* and *há**

When famous men began to say His Name

گشت ظاهر سر قول مشتهر

The good of all mankind He did proclaim

آنگه ناطق شد بآن خیر البشر

Out from His mouth this rapturous utterance
poured:

در مقام انجذاب و وجد و حال

“‘Tis I, Who’s two years younger than My Lord!”

که منم کوچک تر از ربّم دو سال

And when that lofty Face emerged so bright

چون هویدا گشت آن وجه علی

Its splendor yielded forth a lucid Light

آمد از نور بهائی منجلی

Bahá bid welcome to the Báb at first

هم بها گفتش در اول تهنّت

And then with lordly training Him He nursed

هم بها کردش دمام تربیت

Yet most are heedless of this mystery

لیک هرکس واقف این راز نیست

Men’s ears care nothing for this melody

سمع امکان اهل این آواز نیست

* A reference to 1 Muḥarram 1335 AH, or 20 October 1819. According to Abjad notation, the Arabic letters *lám* and *há* add up to 35, an abbreviated form of the Islamic year in which the Báb was born.

From His Bahá, that radiant Moon would hear:

“O You, My winsome Herald, listen here!

From placeless hiddenness I’ve brought You out

Announcements of My Cause I’ve bid You shout

So that My mysteries You would reveal

My light once locked away You would unseal

Aḥmad, Kázim*—two witnesses of Mine

Their gladsome love for Me they both opine

From all humanity I raised those two

That they might write My mystery anew

So filled with fiery tumult was my Cause

It gave the both of them conspicuous pause

دمبدم بشنیدی آن بدرِ منیر

از بهای خود که ای زیبا بشیر

من ز غیبِ لامکان آوردمت

بهر امرِ خود مبشّر کردم

تا که اسرارِ مرا ظاهر کنی

تا که انوارِ مرا باهر کنی

« احمد و کاظم » شهیدینِ منند

هم حبیبینِ سعیدینِ منند

هر دو را مبعوث کردم در امم

تا زنند از سرّ مستورم رقم

بس که امرم بود پر شور و شرار

هر دو عجزِ خویش کردند آشکار

* Siyyid Kázim Rashtí, second leader of the Shaykhí school of Shí‘ih Islam.

I saw those two bewildered and perplexed

چونکه دیدم در تحیر آن دو را

So as the third to speak, I sent You next

طلعتِ ثالث نمودم تو را

I made them both announcers of Your creed

آن دو را کردم به امرِ تو بشیر

And made of You a sign to Me indeed

چون تو را بر ذاتِ خود کردم مُشیر

I've clothed You with My glorious robe, You see

هم قمیصِ اسمِ خود پوشاندمت

And given You to drink the draft of Me

هم ز جامِ ذاتِ خود نوشاندمت

I'm always by Your side; do not despair

غمِ مخور هر دم تو را یاری کنم

I'll guard You in the shelter of My care

در پناهِ خود نگهداری کنم

I'll show Your Cause to every hemisphere

امرِ تو در شش جهت ظاهر کنم

Within this world I'll make Your light appear

نورِ وجهت در جهان باهر کنم

I'll strive to spread Your Faith with so much heart

آنچنان در امرِ تو کوشم بجان

That none shall tell the two of Us apart

کت مرا خوانند خلق از بندگان

'Alí!* Since in My beauty You will die

You manifest My Self no less than I

ای علی چون در جمالِ فانی‌ئی

مَظهِرِ نفسِ منی جز من نه‌ئی

And if mankind should call Me by Your Name

Do not stay sad, for We Two are the same

گر مرا خوانند از تو مردمان

چونکه تو نفسِ منی در غم ممان

I'll make these words so known from place to place

No stranger will lay eyes upon My Face

این چنین مشهور سازم این سخن

تا که نامحرم نبیند رویِ من

The King am I, and You My Emblem grand

The Author I, and You My Pen in hand

من شهنشاهم مرئی تو عَلم

راقم من تو مرا در کفِ قلم

Through You I'll tell My tale for all to know

Through You I'll sound My Cause to high and low

شرحِ خود را از تو افشا می‌کنم

امرِ خود را از تو اعلا می‌کنم

Since You're a slain loving Soldier of Mine

You're still My Peer, although matchless am I"

چون تو کُشتی عاشق و سربازِ من

گرچه لاشبهم توئی انبازِ من

* Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad Shírází, the Báḅ.

And when our King* did reach the age of nine†

الغرض چون شاهِ ما نُه ساله شد

Ṭīhrán excelled a hundred Bengal climes‡

شهرِ طهران رشکِ صد بنگاله شد

The face of that sweet Boy gave off great flames

آتشِ رخسارِ آن شیرین پسر

That burst upon the souls of sighted frames

شعله زد بر جانِ اربابِ بصر

A shining spark appeared from that raw fire

ظاهر آمد برقی از آن نارِ خام

Intent on burning every veil entire

خواست تا سوزد حُجُبِها را تمام

The Hand of power seized Him and said, “Hold!

دستِ قدرتِ زود بگرفتش که ایست

Now’s not the time appointed and foretold”

حالِ وقتِ وعده و میقات نیست

شیخِ احسائی در آن فرخنده سال

The Aḥsá shaykh, in that auspicious year,

کرد از این عالم سوی حق ارتحال

Toward the Lord did wing his flight from here

* Bahá’u’lláh.

† In the year 1826.

‡ In classical Persian and Indo-Persian literature, Bengal was renowned for its extraordinary natural beauty, lush gardens, abundant waters, and general prosperity.

High rank and ample knowledge now Kázim's*
From whom a range of goodly virtues stemmed

کاظمش دارای جاه و علم شد
منبع فضل و کمال و حلم شد

The base oppressed that light of God so much
But none his rightful place did ever touch

بس جفا دید از خسان آن نور حق
لیک کس در ره نبرد از وی سبق

His cloud of learning showered its copious rain
To friends he made that lofty Face† so plain

ابر علم خویش را دُرّ پاش کرد
وجه اعلا[‡] را به یاران فاش کرد

He said while pointing to that priceless Jewel:
“‘Tis He, beloved by Lord of boundless rule!”

کرد اشارت سوی آن دُرّ ثمین
کاین بود محبوب ربّ العالمین

Yet nearly every gathered eye was veiled
But for a favored few, their sight had failed

لیک چشم حاضران محجوب بود
جز قلیلی کاندرا آن ها خوب بود

Seventeen years[§] that speaking light did spend
Preaching the righteous road to every friend

چونکه هفده سال آن نورِ کلیم
خواند یارِ آن را به نهجِ مستقیم

* Siyyid Kázim Rashtí.

† The Báb.

‡ It is possible that this should read اَعْلَى (a‘lá), meaning “most exalted,” and it has been translated as “lofty” accordingly.

§ The duration of Siyyid Kázim’s leadership of the Shaykhí school, lasting from the passing of Shaykh Aḥmad in 1826 up until his own death in 1843.

For those who'd tread his path, he made it straight

راه را به رهروانش راست کرد

Then he his death from God did supplicate

موت خود را از خدا درخواست کرد

Because he'd suffered from a people flawed

دیده بود از بسکه از خلقان عذاب

His prayer was answered at the court of God

شد دعایش در بر حق مستجاب

رو به عرشِ کبریا تعظیم کرد

He bowed before the throne, our final Goal

بعد از آن جان را به حقّ تسلیم کرد

Then to his Lord he offered up his soul