

Martyrdom of the Báb ¹

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VOICE 1 – BLACK

VOICE 2 – RED

VOICE 3 – BLUE

VOICE 4 - GREEN

On a sweltering July morning, 175 years ago today, the Persian clerics and the government officials who did their bidding, made a feeble attempt to eradicate the ever-growing embrace of the religion of Alí-Muhammad, the young man referred to as the Báb, which means the Gate.

Neither their passionate denouncements from their pulpits, warning to beware of The Báb and His teachings, nor the atrocities perpetrated on His followers, stemmed the spread of this Faith which they feared could undermine their own authority.

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

Though they had previously avoided condemning Him to death since He was a Siyyid — a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad — they finally decided that the only way to end the increasing number of new Bábí adherents would be to kill Him and thereby eliminate His influence. They ordered His execution.

Let's visit some steps on the journey that brought the blessed Báb to this shameful end. This end was shameful — not to the Captive — but to His oppressors. The martyrdom was merely the end of His physical life. The clergy sought to extinguish His Faith. Instead that dastardly act resulted in the candle of His life and teachings igniting a flame whose spread could not be contained. They just didn't realize that you can't extinguish the Light of God that shines through His Messengers. Indeed, the Báb, was more than a man.

Imagining the grief of Khadíjih-Bagum, the wife of The Báb, on having her husband torn from her and knowing she'd probably never see Him again, poet Roger White wrote The Song of Khadíjih-Bagum¹

“All in green went my Love riding, My heart sank fully sore, To know the One Whose stirrup I kissed, I would see no more, no more see Him Whom

I adore.

“To know Him clad in rope and chain, And hung above the throng —
The world's One Light by evil quenched, And I be left but long, but long
left sorrow as my song.

“All in green went my Love riding, His counsel my sole balm:
*‘Be patient under God’s decree / This parting speeds the dawn / the dawn / speeds
never-fading dawn.’ ‘*

The authorities, at the instigation of the clergy, subjected the Báb to various imprisonments and even resorted to torture, but it was all for naught. He was confined several times, twice in formidable fortresses.

First in the Castle of Mah-Kú, an almost inaccessible prison at the summit of a mountain in the province of Ádhirbáyján from which He wrote to the Sháh declaring His Station in no uncertain terms.

It said, in part, *“I am the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things...”*²

Musing on those words, Roger White wrote Inscription for the Head of a Pin⁴, prefacing it with this quote from Marzieh Gail: “To Persian mystics all writing emanates from a single calligraphic dot on the page. The Báb is the

Primal Point, 'from which have been generated all created things.'"³

One dot: From this all else begot.

Take pains: This sign all else contains.

Grave well: This mark worlds will tell.

Eloquent pin! One dot—infinity within.

Later the beleaguered Báb endured an even more rigorous incarceration in the castle of Chihríq, which he later referred to as “the grievous mountain.”

The ardent yearning of many of his followers to be near to their heart’s desire, led them to risk their own arrest and imprisonment by trying to visit Him, or at least just be in same vicinity as Him.

England Dan and John Ford Coley wrote a song for them, titled *The Prisoner*. [play song]

Brought in for interrogation before an Islamic court in the city of Tabríz, the intention was to humiliate Him and expose Him as a charlatan. Instead, the Messenger of God stood before them and proclaimed with power and

majesty,

"I am, I am the Promised One! I am the One Whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at Whose mention you have risen, Whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of Whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily, I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word, and to pledge allegiance to My person." ⁵

Momentarily stunned into silence, one Mullá regained his equilibrium and proceeded to verbally attack the Prisoner. In an insolent tone, he accused the Báb of being a contemptible and perverse follower of Satan.

Unlike His almost apoplectic accusers, the gentle Báb remained serene and polite yet forceful as He assured them that He stood by His prior statement.

The eyes of the Persians weren't the only ones following the situation. People of other nations, and their representatives visiting or resident in Persia at the time, were paying close attention, monitoring the situation and forwarding dispatches to their home countries. Religious scholars and historians also kept a close eye on the events as they unfolded.

As the Báb was a Siyyid, a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, it was unlawful for him to receive a death sentence, but they felt that was the only recourse to quash the phenomenal growth of this Faith at which they were failing even as they increased the persecutions and unspeakable tortures brought upon those who dared join the Bábí movement.

They called in a British physician to determine whether the Báb was in fact mentally unstable, hoping they'd get a solid excuse from an impartial observer, probably to help assuage their guilt. Following the session, Dr. Cormick sent his thoughts to a fellow countryman serving in a similar capacity in another part of Persia.

Roger White, with a touch of artistic license, took the content of that correspondence and imagined the good doctor pondering the morning's interview while he dressed for dinner that evening in a sketch he called Dr. Cormick Decides⁶

Well, not an auspicious beginning to this day, the tea undrinkable, and Ahmad in a sulk for one of those mysterious reasons no mere Englishman could understand — an advantage we unfeeling barbarians have, I suppose, over these excessively sensitive Persians.

“And the beastly report to be written of that curious interview. I have

little heart for that. How to find the balance between my observations and what the ears of power might hope to hear about the poor wretch, or to know the disposition of my Persian colleagues and what might sway them from detachment to a devious or dictated course? They could be agents of an ill-wisher. At best they are Western only when it serves them to be.

“Sane or mad, the authorities will bring about this death if that be their wish. Exercises in futility weary me; the examination I suspect, was merely a token nod towards justice, some aspect of the unfathomable and interminable face-saving ceremony. Can one ever understand their ways?

“As for my part, what can I say? I found myself admittedly disposed most kindly toward the Báb — his courtesy and dignity of bearing struck me much. Attractive, mild of manner and melodious of voice — nothing offensive there. I might remark upon his delicacy of stature and his tender youth — but what relevance has that?

“No surprise that he, knowing the purpose of our attendance upon him, should have been loth to answer our questions, merely regarding us with a gentle look, continuing with his chanting — hymns or devotionals, I suppose.

“And this the one who claims to be the Mahdi of the Mussulmen! What to make of it all?

“I shall weight my report in his favour, no doubt; it would please me well to think his life were spared. ‘Frankly,’ I shall say, ‘I am impelled in

the circumstances to recommend the utmost leniency in this difficult matter...' The words will come as I apply myself to it.

"I cannot take sides in these affairs, of course, and it would appear to be of appalling significance that this young man should have subverted the religion of the realm and convulsed the populace with his cry: 'I am the Promised One.' The Promised One indeed! Well, no doubt he believes it.

"An infernal nuisance, the whole affair. And what to make of his assertion that Europe will espouse his cause — the intensity with which he regarded me as he said it? Extraordinary, really. Most extraordinary.

"I suppose my part in it is over and I shan't see him again.

"One wonders what might become of such a fellow? Perhaps, of course, it's just another tempest in a teapot. Ah well, with the Persians, it is always something.

"Today — yes — I think, today, the grey cravat."

In the end, their exasperation led them to sentence the guiltless Siyyid to be executed by firing squad the following day. As they led Him back to the barracks, an 18-year-old believer flung himself at the feet of the One he believed in with heart and soul and begged to join Him in martyrdom. The guards arrested young Anís and placed them in the cell together.

Sam Khan, head of the regiment assigned to carry out the execution, felt

uncomfortable with this assignment. William Sears describes this episode in his book, *Release the Sun*.

“Sam Khan found himself increasingly affected by the behavior of his Captive. He had placed a guard of ten soldiers about the Báb's cell door and carefully supervised it himself. Throughout every step Khan felt an increasing attraction to this unusual Prisoner. He was in constant fear that his action in taking such a holy life might bring upon him the wrath of God. Finally, unable to bear this worry any longer, he approached the Báb and spoke to Him privately.

"I profess the Christian Faith,' he said, 'and entertain no ill-will against you. If your Cause be the Cause of Truth, then enable me to free myself from the obligation to shed your blood.'

“The Báb comforted him with these words: ‘Follow your instructions and if your intention be sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you from your perplexity.’”⁷

The reluctant officer took his leave, and readied His men, 750 soldiers in all, into three rows.

When the soldiers entered the cell they found their guiltless Prisoner in the

midst of dictation — His secretary dutifully writing down every word. Intent on completing this mission, the Báb told them, *"Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall they be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling, to the last word, My intention."*⁸

Undeterred, they forced Him from the cell, but not before stripping off His green turban and sash. The authorities feared the sight of those revered symbols of His holy lineage, worn by none except a Siyyid, might cause a good deal of consternation among the vast assemblage of onlookers who likely would deem this a sacrilege.

European observers to this travesty of justice estimated the number of onlookers at approximately 10,000 souls. They filled the streets, watching from doors, windows and rooftops, anxious to see this One so fervently adored by some and vilified by others.

Oh, yes, on seeing One about to be executed garbed in those revered green garments, they'd have seen it for what it was, a holy outrage. Difficulties would have been inevitable.

The Báb and the faithful Anís, those two young and innocent young men, were bound with ropes and suspended together from an iron stake driven

into the barracks wall, the head of that dear youth at rest on the breast of his Beloved. The crowd strained to get a glimpse.

John S. Hatcher envisions the scene in this excerpt from his poem, *In His Name: The Concealer*⁹

They perch on rooftops, peer from windows; fathers hoist their sons high to see what tricks the condemned Siyyid-i-Báb might do this time to escape the imperial farmán. Columned soldiers take aim at the blissful youth, Anís, Anesthetized by love strapped like a foetus to the Prophet's heart.

Roger White took the story of Anis and condensed it into a poem titled The Conjuror. He describes what the interests of most teens are and how opposite were the wants and needs of this youth, so filled with spirit. How his parents lamented him holing up in his room, wrapt in prayer and dreams of the One Who had claimed his heart. Here is an excerpt:

“And for all our wisdom would not have known how idle was our hope, Anís, who in that tearful hour moping alone among the unaccusing dustmotes in your shuttered room conjured God's very face, were pledged to lay your cheek's childbloom upon His target breast, your atoms elevated to eternally commingle with Dust of dust.”

In his poignant description of that fateful day, titled July 9, Ian Kluge imagines someone guiding a couple around as he relates the import of the events taking place. We share here a small part:

“Yes, yes, that's Him suspended from the wall — Ropes round His armpits. See the spike above—? That's what the ropes are fastened to and, yes, There is a young man hanging with his head On the Bab's chest — a follower who begged To die with Him — begged on his knees and wept!

“This Bab inspires ferocious loyalty, So much the mullah's tremble at His name. They'll take no chances — Have you ever seen A firing squad with seven hundred rifles — At less than thirty yards? The mullahs and the Shah, They want Him more than dead — obliterated! Smashed to the very atoms . . . “

What happened next is difficult to imagine. Reading of it 175 years later, it feels like a scene from a blockbuster film. Maybe that's why it's said that miracles are good only for those who see them.

But this one is no myth or legend, no fictionalized movie script. It was documented by numerous foreigners who witnessed the events. Let's hear the words of two French Orientalists present at proceedings:

M. C. Huart exclaimed: "Amazing to believe, the bullets had not struck the condemned but, on the contrary, had broken the bonds and he was delivered. It was a real miracle."⁹

A. L. M. Nicolas declared, "An extraordinary thing happened, unique in the annals of the history of humanity: the bullets cut the cords that held the Báb and he fell to his feet without a scratch."¹¹

Sears provides a picture of the scene: "The frantic search by the authorities for the Báb came to an end within but a few feet of the execution post. They found Him back in His cell in the barracks, in the same room He had occupied the night before . . . completing His conversation with His secretary . . . giving . . . him those final instructions which had been interrupted that morning.

An expression of unruffled calm . . . upon His face. His body, obviously, had emerged unscathed from the shower of bullets. The Báb looked at the chief-attendant and smiled. *'I have finished My conversation,'* He said. *'You may now proceed to fulfill your duty.'*"¹²

Amidst the chaos and confusion, and in awe of what he'd witnessed, the

chief-attendant, rather than escort the prisoners to their doom, fled. Sam Khan, recalling the words spoken to him by the Báb, also quit his post. He and his entire Christian regiment turned on their heels and left.

A new contingent assembled, led by a colonel of the bodyguard. Once again, the two youthful prisoners found themselves suspended from that same stake. The 31-year-old Báb addressed the multitudes who'd come to gawk: *'Had you believed in Me, O wayward generation every one of you would have followed the example of this youth who stood in rank above most of you, and willingly would have sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me, but that day I shall have ceased to be with you.'*"¹³

A sudden silence blanketed that vast multitude. The tension of the onlookers only increased when that silence was broken by the clicks of 750 rifles being cocked.

The soldiers aimed.

The colonel ordered, "Shoot."

The rifles thundered.

Gunsmoke rose and spread, so dense it darkened the sky as if the sun had departed along with Sam Khan's regiment, leaving the noonday looking like midnight.

Sears mused, "The bodies of the Báb and His youthful companion were shattered by the blast. As Jesus had expired on the cross so that men might be called back to God, so did the Báb breathe His last against a barracks wall in the city of Tabriz, Persia."

" . . . Nicolas also compared the plights of Jesus and the Báb, 'Christians believe that if Jesus had wished to come down from the cross he could have done so easily; he died of his own free will because it was written that he should and in order that the prophecies might be fulfilled. The same is true of the Báb so [His followers] say . . . He likewise died voluntarily because his death was to be the salvation of humanity...'"¹¹

Struck by these similarities and the passions they evoke, Chris Ruhe composed, "Passion Play," which he'll sing for us now. [Play song]

At noon on July 9, 1850, the second volley succeeded, but another seeming miracle was evident in the condition of the bodies. Once the smoke cleared, it was seen that their bodies, as the result of being riddled by most, if not

all, of the 750 bullets, melded into one, but their saintly faces were left untouched.

Those sacred remains were then brusquely tossed into a moat where sentinels stood guard lest they be reclaimed by His followers.

The following morning, the Russian Consul took an artist with him to the moat and ordered a sketch be drawn.

In Nabil's narrative, *The Dawn Breakers*, he shares the account of one of the Bábís:

"An official of the Russian consulate, to whom I was related, showed me that same sketch on the very day it was drawn. It was such a faithful portrait of the Báb that I looked upon! No bullet had struck His forehead, His cheeks, or His lips. I gazed upon a smile which seemed to be still lingering upon His countenance."

Determined to thwart the guards, who were obviously not very vigilant in their duty, the believers succeeded in gathering those precious remains and removing them. Over several decades they were transferred clandestinely from place to place, city to city, and finally, interred safely and reverently

by the hands of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land.

Today the superstructure built over that tomb serves as both a shrine to His memory and a beacon of light from One Who was deprived of it during His several incarcerations in dark, unlit conditions.

Roger White honors this irony, this symbol of God's triumph over the futile efforts of wayward people to extinguish the Lamp of Love and Light He sent to guide us, in his poem, Who Had No Candle¹³

"He Who had no candle has here, ensconced in circled circle, amid adoring flowers and green deferential trees, this whitest marble taper tipped with gold.

"It gleams serenely from Carmel, inextinguishably lights the world, our reverential hearts the willing wick.

"This light will melt remotest snows, outlast the names by which we know it.

See Ádhirbáyján, this constant flame which casts no shadow.

Jeanie Murday described this shrine and its light in *Queen of Carmel*.

Vortex, by poet Michael Fitzgerald, offers in but a few lines, much on which we might meditate.

as the pinnacle of giving beyond giving, the Báb rides high noon into the vortex —

this young man, merchant, spirit-genius, breaks open a millennium at the deep end / of seven hundred and fifty rifles —

history implodes one hot day — in Tabríz — remember that day,

and learn the inside of giving double —

learn ultimate things in the fleck of the second —

weep at what it takes to win time's arc.

We close our program with one last musical selection: *More than a Man*, by Smith and Dragoman—a haunting recap of the stories we've shared with you today, with lyrics and music to stir your soul.

Sources

¹ Roger White, The The Song of Khadījih-Bagum, *The Witness of Pebbles*, pp. 49–50

² Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 30

³ Roger White, Inscription for the Head of a Pin, *The Witness of Pebbles*, pp. 62–63

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 21

⁶ Roger White, Dr. Cormick Decides, *Another Song, Another Season*, pp. 77–79

⁷ William Sears, *Release the Sun*, p. 173–174

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John S. Hatcher, In His Name, the Concealer, *A Sense of History*, p, 170

¹⁰ William Sears, *Release the Sun*, p. 175

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. p. 176

¹³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p.53

¹⁴ William Sears, *Release the Sun*, p. 175

¹⁵ White, Roger, Who Had No Candle, *Another Song, Another Season*, pp. 113–114

¹⁶ Fitzgerald, Michael, Vortex, *Glimpses of Hope*, p. 109