

The Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

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1. Persia, the birthplace of the Bahá'í Revelation, has occupied a unique place in the history of the world. In the days of her early greatness she was a veritable queen among nations, unrivaled in civilization, in power and in splendor. She gave to the world great kings and statesmen, prophets and poets, philosophers and artists. Zoroaster, Cyrus and Darius, Háfíz and Firdawsi, Sa'dí and `Umar Khayyam are but a few of her many famous sons. Her craftsmen were unsurpassed in skill; her carpets were matchless, her steel blades unequaled, her pottery world famous. In all parts of the Near and Middle East she has left traces of her former greatness.

Yet, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries she had sunk to a condition of deplorable degradation. Her ancient glory seemed irretrievably lost. Her government was corrupt and in desperate financial straits; some of her rulers were feeble, and other monsters of cruelty. Her priests were bigoted and intolerant, her people ignorant and superstitious. Most of them belonged to the Shí'ih sect, of Muhammadans, but there were also considerable numbers of Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians, of diverse and antagonistic sects. All professed to follow sublime teachers who exhorted them to worship the one God and to live in love and unity, yet they shunned, detested and despised each other, each sect regarding the others as unclean, as dogs or heathens. Cursing and execration were indulged in to a fearful extent. It was dangerous for a Jew or a Zoroastrian to walk in the street on a rainy day, for if his wet garment should touch a Muhammadan, the Muslim was defiled, and the other might have to atone for the offense with his life. If a Muhammadan took money from a Jew, Zoroastrian or Christian he had to wash it before he could put it in his pocket. If a Jew found his child giving a glass of water to a poor Muhammadan beggar he would dash the glass from the child's hand, for curses rather than kindness should be the portion of infidels! The Muslims themselves were divided into numerous sects, among whom strife was often bitter and fierce. The Zoroastrians did not join much in these mutual recriminations, but lived in communities apart, refusing to associate with their fellow countrymen of other faiths.

Social as well as religious affairs were in a state of hopeless decadence. Education was neglected. Western science and art were looked upon as unclean and contrary to religion. Justice was travestied. Pillage and robbery were of common occurrence. Roads were bad and unsafe for travel. Sanitary arrangements were shockingly defective.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, the light of spiritual life was not extinct in Persia. Here and there, amid the prevailing worldliness and superstition, could still be found some saintly souls, and in many a heart the longing for God was cherished, as in the hearts of Anna and Simeon before the appearance of Jesus. Many were eagerly awaiting the coming of a promised Messenger of God, and confident that the time of His advent was at hand. Such was the state of affairs in Persia when the Báb, the Herald of a new era, set all the country in commotion with His message. Early Life Mírzá `Alí Muhammad, Who afterwards assumed the title of Báb (i.e. Gate), was born at Shíráz, in the south of Persia, on the 20th

of October 1819 A.D. He was a Siyyid, that is, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. His father, a well-known merchant, died soon after His birth, and He was then placed under the care of a maternal uncle, a merchant of Shíráz, who brought Him up. In childhood He learned to read, and received the elementary education customary for children. At the age of fifteen He went into business, at first with His guardian, and afterward with another uncle who lived at Búshihir, on the shore of the Gulf of Persia.

As a youth He was noted for great personal beauty and charm of manner, and also for exceptional piety, and nobility of character. He was unflinching in His observance of the prayers, fasts and other ordinances of the Muhammadan religion, and not only obeyed the letter, but lived in the spirit of the Prophet's teachings. He married when about twenty-two years of age. Of this marriage one son was born, who died while still an infant, in the first year of the Báb's public ministry.

Baha'u'llah and The New Era, pages 11-14

2. The distinguished orientalist, the late Professor Edward G. Browne, of the University of Cambridge, visited Baha'u'llah at Bahjí in the year 1890, and recorded his impressions as follows: -

"... my conductor paused for a moment while I removed my shoes. Then, with a quick movement of the hand, he withdrew, and, as I passed, replaced the curtain; and I found myself in a large apartment, along the upper end of which ran a low divan, while on the side opposite to the door were placed two or three chairs. Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called *Itajl* by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued: -- "Praise be to God that thou has attained! ... Thou has come to see a prisoner and an exile. ... We desire but the good of the world and happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. ... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled -- what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come. ... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? ... Yet do we see your

kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. ... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind. ..."

Such, so far as I can recall them, were the words which, besides many others, I heard from Beha. Let those who read them consider well with themselves whether such doctrines merit death and bonds, and whether the world is more likely gain or lose by their diffusion."

3. "I testify before God," proclaims Bahá'u'lláh, "to the greatness, the inconceivable greatness of this Revelation. Again and again have We in most of Our Tablets borne witness to this truth, that mankind may be roused from its heedlessness." "In this most mighty Revelation," He unequivocally announces, "all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation." "That which hath been made manifest in this préminent, this most exalted Revelation, stands unparalleled in the annals of the past, nor will future ages witness its like." "He it is," referring to Himself He further proclaims, "Who in the Old Testament hath been named Jehovah, Who in the Gospel hath been designated as the Spirit of Truth, and in the Qur'án acclaimed as the Great Announcement." "But for Him no Divine Messenger would have been invested with the robe of prophethood, nor would any of the sacred scriptures have been revealed. To this bear witness all created things." "The word which the one true God uttereth in this day, though that word be the most familiar and commonplace of terms, is invested with supreme, with unique distinction." "The generality of mankind is still immature. Had it acquired sufficient capacity We would have bestowed upon it so great a measure of Our knowledge that all who dwell on earth and in heaven would have found themselves, by virtue of the grace streaming from Our pen, completely independent of all knowledge save the knowledge of God, and would have been securely established upon the throne of abiding tranquillity." "The Pen of Holiness, I solemnly affirm before God, hath writ upon My snow-white brow and in characters of effulgent glory these glowing, these musk-scented and holy words: `Behold ye that dwell on earth, and ye denizens of heaven, bear witness, He in truth is your Well-Beloved. He it is Whose like the world of creation hath not seen, He Whose ravishing beauty hath delighted the eye of God, the Ordainer, the All-Powerful, the Incomparable!'"

Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh page 100

4. "This is the King of Days," He thus extols the age that has witnessed the advent of His Revelation, "the Day that hath seen the coming of the Best-beloved, Him Who through all eternity hath been acclaimed the Desire of the World." "The world of being shineth in this Day with the resplendency of this Divine Revelation. All created things extol its saving grace and sing its praises. The universe is wrapt in an ecstasy of joy and gladness. The Scriptures of past Dispensations celebrate the great jubilee that must needs greet this most great Day of God. Well is it with him that hath lived to see this Day and hath recognized its station." "Were mankind to give heed in a befitting manner to no more

than one word of such a praise it would be so filled with delight as to be overpowered and lost in wonder. Entranced, it would then shine forth resplendent above the horizon of true understanding."

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* page 101

5. Tablet of Visitation

The praise which hath dawned from Thy most august Self, and the glory which hath shone forth from Thy most effulgent Beauty, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art the Manifestation of Grandeur, and the King of Eternity, and the Lord of all who are in heaven and on earth! I testify that through Thee the sovereignty of God and His dominion, and the majesty of God and His grandeur, were revealed, and the Day-Stars of ancient splendor have shed their radiance in the heaven of Thine irrevocable decree, and the Beauty of the Unseen hath shone forth above the horizon of creation. I testify, moreover, that with but a movement of Thy Pen Thine injunction "Be Thou" hath been enforced, and God's hidden Secret hath been divulged, and all created things have been called into being, and all the Revelations have been sent down.

I bear witness, moreover, that through Thy beauty the beauty of the Adored One hath been unveiled, and through Thy face the face of the Desired One hath shone forth, and that through a word from Thee Thou hast decided between all created things, causing them who are devoted to Thee to ascend unto the summit of glory, and the infidels to fall into the lowest abyss.

I bear witness that he who hath known Thee hath known God, and he who hath attained unto Thy presence hath attained unto the presence of God. Great, therefore, is the blessedness of him who hath believed in Thee, and in Thy signs, and hath humbled himself before Thy sovereignty, and hath been honored with meeting Thee, and hath attained the good pleasure of Thy will, and circled around Thee, and stood before Thy throne. Woe betide him that hath transgressed against Thee, and hath denied Thee, and repudiated Thy signs, and gainsaid Thy sovereignty, and risen up against Thee, and waxed proud before Thy face, and hath disputed Thy testimonies, and fled from Thy rule and Thy dominion, and been numbered with the infidels whose names have been inscribed by the fingers of Thy behest upon Thy holy Tablets.

Waft, then, unto me, O my God and my Beloved, from the right hand of Thy mercy and Thy loving-kindness, the holy breaths of Thy favors, that they may draw me away from myself and from the world unto the courts of Thy nearness and Thy presence. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou, truly, hast been supreme over all things.

The remembrance of God and His praise, and the glory of God and His splendor, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art His Beauty! I bear witness that the eye of creation hath never gazed upon one wronged like Thee. Thou wast immersed all the days of Thy life beneath an ocean of tribulations. At one time Thou wast in chains and fetters; at another Thou wast threatened by the sword of Thine enemies. Yet, despite all this, Thou didst

enjoin upon all men to observe what had been prescribed unto Thee by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

May my spirit be a sacrifice to the wrongs Thou didst suffer, and my soul be a ransom for the adversities Thou didst sustain. I beseech God, by Thee and by them whose faces have been illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy countenance, and who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden, to remove the veils that have come in between Thee and Thy creatures, and to supply me with the good of this world and the world to come. Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate.

Bless Thou, O Lord my God, the Divine Lote-Tree and its leaves, and its boughs, and its branches, and its stems, and its offshoots, as long as Thy most excellent titles will endure and Thy most august attributes will last. Protect it, then, from the mischief of the aggressor and the hosts of tyranny. Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the Most Powerful. Bless Thou, also, O Lord my God, Thy servants and Thy handmaidens who have attained unto Thee. Thou, truly, art the All-Bountiful, Whose grace is infinite. No God is there save Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.

(Bahá'u'lláh: Prayers and Meditations, pages 310-313)