

# *The Báb*

---

The Gate and Herald  
of Bahá'u'lláh





## THE GATE AND HERALD OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The year 2019 marks the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Báb, one of the two founders of the Bahá'í Faith. The anniversary of His birth comes two years after the bicentenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh, celebrated around the world in October 2017.

These two celebrations are intimately connected. The life and message of the Báb centred on the imminent appearance of another divine messenger: Bahá'u'lláh. Each year the birth of the Báb and the birth of Bahá'u'lláh are observed as Twin Holy Days, since they also

Details for the Shrine of the Báb.





The upper portion of the House of the Báb in Shiráz, Iran.

occurred within a day of each other according to the calendar in use in Persia at that time. Their birthdays are commemorated on October 29 and 30 in 2019.



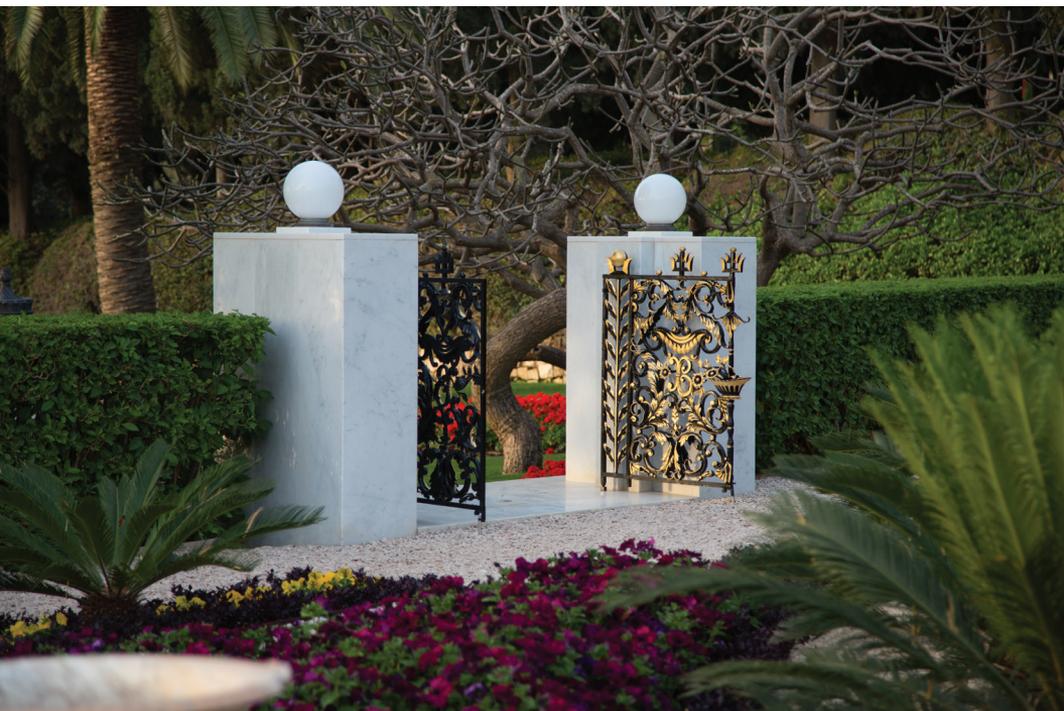
The Báb's life and teachings mark a turning point in human history. Born Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad in 1819, He took the name the Báb, meaning "the Gate" in Arabic. His public mission, from 1844 to 1850, represented a spiritual revolution that upended the prevailing social, political, and religious order in Persia, opening the door to Bahá'u'lláh's new, unifying vision.

The Báb was a Messenger of God in a succession of divine educators over the centuries that includes Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. The Báb appeared at a moment in history in which the cultures and peoples of the world were coming together as never before. The 19th century witnessed a series of changes in the economic, political, scientific and cultural spheres so profound that one eminent historian has characterized it as the century of “the transformation of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

The Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel.



As a young man of 25, the Báb announced the end of one religious era and the beginning of another. He inaugurated an independent religion with its own laws and sacred texts, including the Persian Bayán. In a short period of time, He attracted thousands of fellow Persians as followers. His public mission, lasting only six short years, was far-reaching in its consequences.



Gate entrance to the Shrine of the Báb.

## THE MISSION OF THE BÁB

The Báb's teachings called for a purity of heart and manner of deeds that transcend mere words and belief. He directed His followers to an exacting pattern of prayer, meditation, self-discipline, and solidarity of community life. He wrote:

Purge your heart of worldly desires, and let angelic virtues be your adorning... Beseech the Lord your God to grant that no earthly entanglements, no worldly affections, no ephemeral pursuits, may tarnish the purity, or embitter the sweetness, of that grace which flows through you.<sup>2</sup>

The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance; its prolongation hath not been and is not beloved by God. The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God.<sup>3</sup>

These words reflect something of the nature of the Báb's standards and vision. His teachings upheld the importance of science and praised the cultural and scientific developments in the West, so long as they could avoid extreme materialism. He raised the social



Marble arcade of the Shrine of the Báb.

status of women, powerfully represented by one of His pre-eminent followers, Táhirih, who has been called “the leader of emancipation for women of the Orient.”<sup>4</sup> The Báb set aside animosity between religions, and addressed the coming unity of the human race in a manner that responded to the dreams and ideals of philosophers, poets and previous prophets of God down through the ages.

The Báb summoned humanity to embrace a new vision commensurate with the forces and powers being released in society by science and industry, and changes

in political and economic systems. His teachings included insights into the nature of humanity's destiny on earth that met the hopes and aspirations of those who recognized the nineteenth century as the beginning of a "modern age"<sup>5</sup> with its distinctive spirit and dynamics.

While initially thought to be a religious reformer, the Báb made clear that His religion was independent from Islam and its laws. So remarkable became the fervour among the Báb's followers that the Persian Shah grew alarmed by the rapid spread of the new religion. While a number of prominent Muslim clerics accepted the Báb, many more denounced Him, joining with the government in their efforts to destroy the vibrant, youthful Bábí movement. The Báb was arrested and moved to increasingly remote prisons in an unsuccessful attempt to limit his steadily growing influence. A mere four years after the beginning of His mission, the Báb was called to Tabríz for interrogation by religious and political authorities.

## **THE MARTYRDOM OF THE BÁB**

In 1850, the chief minister of the Shah ordered the Báb's execution. On July 9 in the city of Tabríz, the Báb was suspended from a military barracks along with a young follower named Anís. The first assemblage of

750 soldiers fired their rifles, but left the Báb and His companion unharmed. As a British diplomatic cable reported, “When the smoke and dust cleared away after the volley, [the] Báb was not to be seen.... The balls had broken the ropes by which he was bound.”<sup>6</sup> The Báb was found in His cell, dictating final instructions to His secretary. A second regiment of soldiers replaced the first, completing their orders.

The Báb’s dramatic life and personality were so incandescent and heroic that His fame reached into the heart of Europe in the decades following His death. The French literary critic Jules Bois recalled the continued influence of His story on Europe’s leading writers in the 19th century:

All Europe was stirred to pity and indignation.... Among the *littérateurs* of my generation, in the Paris of 1890, the martyrdom of the Báb was still as fresh a topic as had been the first news of His death [in 1850]. We wrote poems about Him. Sarah Bernhardt entreated Catulle Mendès for a play on the theme of this historic tragedy.<sup>7</sup>

Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College at Oxford, remarked that the Báb’s religion may have “the promise of the future,” which might prove, he said to a



Lancet windows and details from the Shrine of the Báb.

companion, “the most important religious movement since the foundation of Christianity.”<sup>8</sup> Others in the West talked and wrote about the moving story of the Báb in the salons and coffee houses of Europe as late as the 1890s, included among them Leo Tolstoy, Edward Granville Browne, A.L.M. Nicolas, Ernest Renan, Matthew Arnold, and George Curzon.<sup>9</sup>

## HERALD OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH

In His title and in His teachings, the Báb made it clear that He was but the gate to the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, which followed only 19 years after the Báb had announced His own religion in 1844. He said that He was “the

humble Precursor” to One greater than Himself, writing, “Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son of Bahá’u’lláh, would later compare the Revelations of these two central figures in the Bahá’í Faith by analogy to the rising sun. “The Báb, the Exalted One,” He writes, “is the Morn of Truth, the splendor of Whose light shineth throughout all regions.” The daybreak of the Báb’s Revelation was swiftly followed by Bahá’u’lláh’s appearance, “the sun’s mid-summer and highest station.”<sup>11</sup>

Even now as Bahá’ís make their way on pilgrimage to the World Centre of their Faith, they first visit the majestic, gold-domed Shrine of the Báb that adorns Mount Carmel in the Holy Land, before then travelling an hour north to offer their prayers at the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh.

The combined teachings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh constitute the sacred writings of the Bahá’í Faith, which convey the message of humanity’s coming of age: the peoples of the world are passing from our long childhood, through the tumultuous period of adolescence, and are now approaching the maturity of the human race as one, inseparable organic family. In the scriptures



Shrine of the Báb and surrounding gardens.

of these two Manifestations of God, we see the vision and promise that the human race will become one, and that a global civilization of peace and justice, prosperity and well-being, will be established.

It will require a growing consciousness of the oneness of humanity in order to generate the unity of thought and collective action required to navigate the challenges and overcome the problems ahead. Yet there is no question that the Báb, like Bahá'u'lláh, foresaw a future

for humankind more glorious than civilization has ever been, where the power of human reason and imagination, creativity and love will flourish.

## NOTES

1. Jürgen Osterhammel. *The Transformation of the World – A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
2. Muhammad-i-Zarandi (Nabil-i-A'zam). *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. Translated from the Persian by Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975, p. 93.
3. The Báb. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. VII, 19, p.217.
4. Jules Bois quoted in: Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By* (1944; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 76.
5. Duncan Wu. *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
6. Sir Justin Sheil, Queen Victoria's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Tehran, wrote to Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on July 22, 1850, regarding the execution. The letter is found in its original form as document F.O. 60/152/88 in the archives of the Foreign Office at the Public Records Office in London.
7. *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 9, 1940-1944 (1945; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 588.
8. *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 9, 1940-1944 (1945; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 562.
9. Douglas Martin, "The Mission of the Báb: Retrospective, 1844-1944," *The Baha'i World* 1994-5.
10. Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By* (1944; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 25.
11. Shoghi Effendi. "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 127.

Opposite: Lamp inside the arcade of the Shrine of the Báb.



## SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BĀB

Is there any Remover of difficulties save God?  
Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants  
and all abide by His bidding!

SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BĀB



Rid thou thyself of all attachments to aught except  
God, enrich thyself in God by dispensing with all else  
besides Him, and recite this prayer:

Say: God sufficeth all things above all things, and  
nothing in the heavens or in the earth or in whatever  
lieth between them but God, thy Lord, sufficeth.  
Verily, He is in Himself the Knower, the Sustainer,  
the Omnipotent.

SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BĀB



O Lord! Unto Thee I repair for refuge and toward  
all Thy signs I set my heart. O Lord! Whether  
travelling or at home, and in my occupation or in  
my work, I place my whole trust in Thee.

Grant me then Thy sufficing help so as to make  
me independent of all things, O Thou Who  
art unsurpassed in Thy mercy! Bestow upon me  
my portion, O Lord, as Thou pleasest, and  
cause me to be satisfied with whatsoever Thou  
hast ordained for me.

Thine is the absolute authority to command.

SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BĀB



It is better to guide one soul than to possess all  
that is on earth, for as long as that guided soul is  
under the shadow of the Tree of Divine Unity,  
he and the one who hath guided him will both  
be recipients of Gods tender mercy, whereas possession  
of earthly things will cease at the time of death.  
The path to guidance is one of love and compassion,  
not of force and coercion. This hath been  
God's method in the past, and shall continue  
to be in the future!

PERSIAN BAYÁN, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BĀB







National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

ISBN 978-0-88867-180-6