

## Áqá Faraj

In all these straits, Áqá Faraj was the companion of Abu'l-Qásim. When, in Persian 'Iráq, he first heard the uproar caused by the Advent of the Most Great Light, he shook and trembled, clapped his hands, cried out in exultation and hastened off to 'Iráq. Overcome with delight, he entered the presence of his holy Lord. He was gathered into the loving fellowship, and blissfully received the honor of attending upon Bahá'u'lláh. Then he returned, bearing glad tidings to Sultán-Ábád.

Here the malevolent were lying in wait, and disturbances broke out, with the result that the sainted Mullá-Báshí and some other believers who had none to defend them were struck down and put to death. Áqá Faraj and Abu'l-Qásim, who had gone into hiding, then hurried away to Adrianople, to fall, ultimately, with the others and with their Well-Beloved, into the Akká prison.

Áqá Faraj then won the honor of waiting upon the Ancient Beauty. He served the Holy Threshold at all times and was a comfort to the friends. During the days of Bahá'u'lláh he was His loyal servitor, and a close companion to the believers, and so it was after Bahá'u'lláh's departure: he remained true to the Covenant, and in the domain of servitude he stood like a towering palm; a noble, superior man, patient in dire adversity, content under all conditions.

Strong in faith, in devotion, he left this life and set his face toward the Kingdom of God, to become the object of endless grace. Upon him be God's mercy and good pleasure, in His Paradise. Greetings be unto him,

and praise, in the meadows of Heaven. The Consort of the King of Martyrs

Among the women who came out of their homeland was the sorrowing Fátimih<sup>i</sup> Begum, widow of the King of Martyrs. She was a holy leaf of the Tree of God. From her earliest youth she was beset with uncounted ordeals. First was the disaster which overtook her noble father in the environs of Badasht, when, after terrible suffering, he died in a desert caravanserai, died hard—helpless and far from home.

The child was left an orphan, and in distress, until, by God's grace, she became the wife of the King of Martyrs. But since he was known everywhere as a Bahá'í, was an impassioned lover of Bahá'u'lláh, a man distracted, carried away, and since Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh thirsted for blood—the hostile lurked in their ambush, and every day they informed against him and slandered him afresh, started a new outcry and set new mischief afoot. For this reason his family was never sure of his safety for a single day, but lived from moment to moment in anguish, foreseeing and dreading the hour of his martyrdom. Here was the family, everywhere known as Bahá'ís; their enemies, stony-hearted tyrants; their government inflexibly, permanently against them; their reigning Sovereign rabid for blood.

It is obvious how life would be for such a household. Every day there was a new incident, more turmoil, another uproar, and they could not draw a breath in peace. Then, he was martyred. The Government proved brutal and savage to such a degree that the human race cried out and trembled. All his possessions were stripped away and plundered, and his family lacked even their daily bread.

Fátimih spent her nights in weeping; till dawn broke, her only companions were tears. Whenever she gazed on her children, she would

sigh, wearing away like a candle in devouring grief. But then she would thank God, and she would say: “Praised be the Lord, these agonies, these broken fortunes are on Bahá’u’lláh’s account, for His dear sake.” She would call to mind the defenseless family of the martyred Ḥusayn, and what calamities they were privileged to bear in the pathway of God. And as she pondered those events, her heart would leap up, and she would cry, “Praise be to God! We too have become companions of the Prophet’s Household.”<sup>ii</sup>

Because the family was in such straits, Bahá’u’lláh directed them to come to the Most Great Prison so that, sheltered in these precincts of abounding grace, they might be compensated for all that had passed. Here for a time she lived, joyful, thankful, and praising God. And although the son of the King of Martyrs, Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Ḥusayn, died in the prison, still his mother, Fátimih, accepted this, resigned herself to the will of God, did not so much as sigh or cry out, and did not go into mourning. Not a word did she utter to bespeak her grief.

This handmaid of God was infinitely patient, dignified and reserved, and at all times thankful. But then Bahá’u’lláh left the world, and this was the supreme affliction, the ultimate anguish, and she could endure no more. The shock and alarm were such that like a fish taken from the water she writhed on the ground, trembled and shook as if her whole being quaked, until at last she took leave of her children and she died. She rose up into the shadowing mercy of God and was plunged in an ocean of light. Unto her be salutations and praise, compassion and glory. May God make sweet her resting-place with the outpourings of His heavenly mercy; in the shade of the Divine Lote-Tree<sup>iii</sup> may He honor her dwelling.

He is God!<sup>iv</sup>

Thou seest, O my Lord, the assemblage of Thy loved ones, the company of Thy friends, gathered by the precincts of Thine all-sufficing Shrine, and in the neighborhood of Thine exalted garden, on a day among the days of Thy Ridván Feast—that blessed time when Thou didst dawn upon the world, shedding thereon the lights of Thy holiness, spreading abroad the bright rays of Thy oneness, and didst issue forth from Baghdád, with a majesty and might that encompassed all mankind; with a glory that made all to fall prostrate before Thee, all heads to bow, every neck to bend low, and the gaze of every man to be cast down. They are calling Thee to mind and making mention of Thee, their breasts gladdened with the lights of Thy bestowals, their souls restored by the evidences of Thy gifts, speaking Thy praise, turning their faces toward Thy Kingdom, humbly supplicating Thy lofty Realms.

They are gathered here to commemorate Thy bright and holy handmaid, a leaf of Thy green Tree of Heaven, a luminous reality, a spiritual essence, who ever implores Thy tender compassion. She was born into the arms of Divine wisdom, and she suckled at the breast of certitude; she flourished in the cradle of faith and rejoiced in the bosom of Thy love, O merciful, O compassionate Lord! And she grew to womanhood in a house from which the sweet savors of oneness were spread abroad. But while she was yet a girl, distress came upon her in Thy path, and misfortune assailed her, O Thou the Bestower, and in her defenseless youth she drank from the cups of sorrow and pain, out of love for Thy beauty, O Thou the Forgiver!

Thou knowest, O my God, the calamities she joyfully bore in Thy pathway, the trials she confronted in Thy love, with a face that radiated delight. How many a night, as others lay on their beds in soft repose, was she wakeful, humbly entreating Thy heavenly Realm. How many a

day did Thy people spend, safe in the citadel of Thy sheltering care, while her heart was harried from what had come upon Thy holy ones.

O my Lord, her days and her years passed by, and whenever she saw the morning light she wept over the sorrows of Thy servants, and when the evening shadows fell she cried and called out and burned in a fiery anguish for what had befallen Thy bondsmen. And she arose with all her strength to serve Thee, to beseech the Heaven of Thy mercy, and in lowliness to entreat Thee and to rest her heart upon Thee. And she came forth veiled in holiness, her garments unspotted by the nature of Thy people, and she entered into wedlock with Thy servant on whom Thou didst confer Thy richest gifts, and in whom Thou didst reveal the ensigns of Thine endless mercy, and whose face, in Thine all-glorious Realm, Thou didst make to shine with everlasting light. She married him whom Thou didst lodge in the assemblage of reunion, one with the Company on high; him whom Thou didst cause to eat of all heavenly foods, him on whom Thou didst shower Thy blessings, on whom Thou didst bestow the title: Martyrs' King.

And she dwelt for some years under the protection of that manifest Light; and with all her soul she served at Thy Threshold, holy and luminous; preparing foods and a place of rest and couches for all Thy loved ones that came, and she had no other joy but this. Lowly and humble she was before each of Thy handmaids, deferring to each, serving each one with her heart and soul and her whole being, out of love for Thy beauty, and seeking to win Thy good pleasure. Until her house became known by Thy name, and the fame of her husband was noised abroad, as one belonging to Thee, and the Land of Sád (Işfáhán) shook and exulted for joy, because of continual blessings from this mighty champion of Thine; and the scented herbage of Thy knowledge

and the roses of Thy bounty began to burgeon out, and a great multitude was led to the waters of Thy mercy.

Then the ignoble and the ignorant amongst Thy creatures rose against him, and with tyranny and malice they pronounced his death; and void of justice, with harsh oppression, they shed his immaculate blood. Under the glittering sword that noble personage cried out to Thee: “Praised be Thou, O my God, that on the Promised Day, Thou hast helped me to attain this manifest grace; that Thou hast reddened the dust with my blood, spilled out upon Thy path, so that it puts forth crimson flowers. Favor and grace are Thine, to grant me this gift which in all the world I longed for most. Thanks be unto Thee that Thou didst succor me and confirm me and didst give me to drink of this cup that was tempered at the camphor fountain<sup>v</sup>—on the Day of Manifestation, at the hands of the cupbearer of martyrdom, in the assemblage of delights. Thou art verily the One full of grace, the Generous, the Bestower.”

And after they had killed him they invaded his princely house. They attacked like preying wolves, like lions at the hunt, and they sacked and plundered and pillaged, seizing the rich furnishings, the ornaments and the jewels. She was in dire peril then, left with the fragments of her broken heart. This violent assault took place when the news of his martyrdom was spread abroad, and the children cried out as panic struck at their hearts; they wailed and shed tears, and sounds of mourning rose from out of that splendid home, but there was none to weep over them, there was none to pity them. Rather was the night of tyranny made to deepen about them, and the fiery Hell of injustice blazed out hotter than before; nor was there any torment but the evil doers brought it to bear, nor any agony but they inflicted it. And this holy leaf remained, she and her brood, in the grip of their oppressors, facing the malice of the unmindful, with none to be their shield.

And the days passed by when tears were her only companions, and her comrades were cries; when she was mated to anguish, and had nothing but grief for a friend. And yet in these sufferings, O my Lord, she did not cease to love Thee; she did not fail Thee, O my Beloved, in these fiery ordeals. Though disasters followed one upon another, though tribulations compassed her about, she bore them all, she patiently endured them all, to her they were Thy gifts and favors, and in all her massive agony—O Thou, Lord of most beauteous names—Thy praise was on her lips.

Then she gave up her homeland, rest, refuge and shelter, and taking her young, like the birds she winged her way to this bright and holy Land—that here she might nest and sing Thy praise as the birds do, and busy herself in Thy love with all her powers, and serve Thee with all her being, all her soul and heart. She was lowly before every handmaid of Thine, humble before every leaf of the garden of Thy Cause, occupied with Thy remembrance, severed from all except Thyself.

And her cries were lifted up at dawntide, and the sweet accents of her chanting would be heard in the night season and at the bright noonday, until she returned unto Thee, and winged her way to Thy Kingdom; went seeking the shelter of Thy Threshold and soared upward to Thine everlasting sky. O my Lord, reward her with the contemplation of Thy beauty, feed her at the table of Thine eternity, give her a home in Thy neighborhood, sustain her in the gardens of Thy holiness as Thou willest and pleasest; bless Thou her lodging, keep her safe in the shade of Thy heavenly Tree; lead her, O Lord, into the pavilions of Thy godhood, make her to be one of Thy signs, one of Thy lights.

Verily Thou art the Generous, the Bestower, the Forgiver, the All-Merciful.

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<sup>i</sup>Accent the first syllable: FÁ-teh-meh

<sup>ii</sup>Gibbon writes of the Imám Ḥusayn's martyrdom and the fate of his Household, that "in a distant age and climate the tragic scene ... will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader."

<sup>iii</sup>The Sadratu'l-Muntahá, translated inter alia as the Sidrah Tree which marks the boundary, and the Lote-Tree of the extremity. Cf. Qur'án 53:14. It is said to stand at the loftiest point in Paradise, and to mark the place beyond which neither men nor angels can pass. In Bahá'í terminology it refers to the Manifestation of God.

<sup>iv</sup>This prayer was revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the Consort of the King of Martyrs.

<sup>v</sup>Qur'án 76:5.