

Shamsu'd-Duḥá

Khurshíd Begum, who was given the title of Shamsu'd-Duḥá,ⁱ the Morning Sun, was mother-in-law to the King of Martyrs. This eloquent, ardent handmaid of God was the cousin on her father's side of the famous Muḥammad-Báqir of Iṣfáhán, widely celebrated as chief of the 'ulamás in that city. When still a child she lost both her parents, and was reared by her grandmother in the home of that famed and learned mujtahid, and well trained in various branches of knowledge, in theology, sciences and the arts.

Once she was grown, she was married to Mírzá Hádíy-i-Nahrí; and since she and her husband were both strongly attracted to the mystical teachings of that great luminary, the excellent and distinguished Siyyid Kázim-i-Raṣhtí,ⁱⁱ they left for Karbilá, accompanied by Mírzá Hádí's brother, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alíy-i-Nahrí.ⁱⁱⁱ Here they used to attend the Siyyid's classes, imbibing his knowledge, so that this handmaid became thoroughly informed on subjects relating to Divinity, on the Scriptures and on their inner meanings. The couple had two children, a girl and a boy. They called their son Siyyid 'Alí and their daughter Fátimih Begum, she being the one who, when she reached adolescence, was married to the King of Martyrs.

Shamsu'd-Duḥá was there in Karbilá when the cry of the exalted Lord was raised in Shíráz, and she shouted back, "Yea, verily!" As for her husband and his brother, they immediately set out for Shíráz; for both of them, when visiting the Shrine of Imám Ḥusayn, had looked upon the beauty of the Primal Point, the Báḅ; both had been astonished at what they saw in that transplendent face, in those heavenly attributes and ways, and had agreed that One such as this must indeed be some very

great being. Accordingly, the moment they learned of His Divine summons, they answered: “Yea, verily!” and they burst into flame with yearning love for God. Besides, they had been present every day in that holy place where the late Siyyid taught, and had clearly heard him say: “The Advent is nigh, the affair most subtle, most elusive. It behoves each one to search, to inquire, for it may be that the Promised One is even now present among men, even now visible, while all about Him are heedless, unmindful, with bandaged eyes, even as the sacred traditions have foretold.”

When the two brothers arrived in Persia they heard that the Báb had gone to Mecca on a pilgrimage. Siyyid Muḥammad-‘Alí therefore left for Iṣfáhán and Mírzá Hádí returned to Karbilá. Meanwhile Shamsu’d-Ḍuḥá had become friends with the “Leaf of Paradise,” sister to Mullá Husayn, the Bábu’l-Báb.^{iv} Through that lady she had met Táhirih, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn,^v and had begun to spend most of her time in close companionship with them both, occupied in teaching the Faith. Since this was in the early days of the Cause, the people were not yet afraid of it. From being with Táhirih, Shams profited immeasurably, and was more on fire with the Faith than ever. She spent three years in close association with Táhirih in Karbilá. Day and night, she was stirred like the sea by the gales of the All-Merciful, and she taught with an eloquent tongue.

As Táhirih became celebrated throughout Karbilá, and the Cause of His Supreme Holiness, the Báb, spread all over Persia, the latter-day ‘ulamás arose to deny, to heap scorn upon, and to destroy it. They issued a fatvá or judgment that called for a general massacre. Táhirih was one of those designated by the evil ‘ulamás of the city as an unbeliever, and they mistakenly thought her to be in the home of Shamsu’d-Ḍuḥá. They broke into Shams’s house, hemmed her in, abused and vilified her, and

inflicted grievous bodily harm. They dragged her out of the house and through the streets to the bázár; they beat her with clubs; they stoned her, they denounced her in foul language, repeatedly assaulting her. While this was going on, Hájí Siyyid Mihdí, the father of her distinguished husband, reached the scene. “This woman is not Táhirih!” he shouted at them. But he had no witness to prove it,^{vi} and the farráshes, the police and the mob would not let up. Then, through the uproar, a voice screamed out: “They have arrested Qurratu’l-‘Ayn!” At this, the people abandoned Shamsu’d-Duḥá.

Guards were placed at the door of Táhirih’s house and no one was allowed to enter or leave, while the authorities waited for instructions from Baghdád and Constantinople. As the interval of waiting lengthened out, Táhirih asked for permission to leave for Baghdád. “Let us go there ourselves,” she told them. “We are resigned to everything. Whatever happens to us is the best that can happen, and the most pleasing.” With government permission, Táhirih, the Leaf of Paradise, her mother and Shamsu’d-Duḥá all left Karbilá and traveled to Baghdád, but the snake-like mass of the populace followed them for some distance, stoning them from a little way off.

When they reached Baghdád they went to live at the house of Shaykh Muḥammad-i-Shibl, the father of Muḥammad-Muṣṭafá; and since many crowded the doors there was an uproar throughout that quarter, so that Táhirih transferred her residence elsewhere, to a lodging of her own, where she continually taught the Faith, and proclaimed the Word of God. Here the ‘ulamás, shaykhs and others would come to listen to her, asking their questions and receiving her replies, and she was soon remarkably well known throughout Baghdád, expounding as she would the most recondite and subtle of theological themes.

When word of this reached the government authorities, they conveyed Táhirih, Shamsu'd-Ḍuḥá and the Leaf to the house of the Muftí, and here they remained three months until word as to their case was received from Constantinople. During Táhirih's stay at the Muftí's, much of the time was spent in conversations with him, in producing convincing proofs as to the Teachings, analyzing and expounding questions relative to the Lord God, discoursing on the Resurrection Day, on the Balance and the Reckoning,^{vii} unraveling the complexities of inner truths.

One day the Muftí's father came in and belabored them violently and at length. This somewhat discomfited the Muftí and he began to apologize for his father. Then he said: "Your answer has arrived from Constantinople. The Sovereign has set you free, but on condition that you quit his realms." The next morning they left the Muftí's house and proceeded to the public baths. Meanwhile Shaykh Muḥammad-i-Shibl and Shaykh Sultán-i-'Arab made the necessary preparations for their journey, and when three days had passed, they left Baghdád; that is, Táhirih, Shamsu'd-Ḍuḥá, the Leaf of Paradise, the mother of Mírzá Hádí, and a number of Siyyids from Yazd set out for Persia. Their travel expenses were all provided by Shaykh Muḥammad.

They arrived at Kirmansháh, where the women took up residence in one house, the men in another. The work of teaching went on at all times, and as soon as the 'ulamás became aware of it they ordered that the party be expelled. At this the district head, with a crowd of people, broke into the house and carried off their belongings; then they seated the travelers in open howdahs and drove them from the city. When they came to a field, the muleteers set them down on the bare ground and left, taking animals and howdahs away, leaving them without food or luggage, and with no roof over their heads.

Táhirih thereupon wrote a letter to the Governor of Kirmansháh. “We were travelers,” she wrote, “guests in your city. ‘Honor thy guest,’ the Prophet says, ‘though he be an unbeliever.’ Is it right that a guest should be thus scorned and despoiled?” The Governor ordered that the stolen goods be restored, and that all be returned to the owners. Accordingly the muleteers came back as well, seated the travelers in the howdahs again, and they went on to Hamadán. The ladies of Hamadán, even the princesses, came every day to meet with Táhirih, who remained in that city two months.^{viii} There she dismissed some of her traveling companions, so that they could return to Baghdád; others, however, accompanied her to Qazvín.

As they journeyed, some horsemen, kinsfolk of Táhirih’s, that is, her brothers, approached. “We have come,” they said, “at our father’s command, to lead her away, alone.” But Táhirih refused, and accordingly the whole party remained together until they arrived in Qazvín. Here, Táhirih went to her father’s house and the friends, those who had ridden and those who had traveled on foot, put up at a caravanserai. Mírzá Hádí, the husband of Shamsu’d-Ḍuḥá, had gone to Máh-Kú, seeking out the Báb. On his return, he awaited the arrival of Shams in Qazvín, after which the couple left for Iṣfáhán, and when they reached there, Mírzá Hádí journeyed on to Badasht. In that hamlet and its vicinity he was attacked, tormented, even stoned, and was subjected to such ordeals that finally, in a ruined caravanserai, he died. His brother, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, buried him there, along the roadside.

Shams-i-Ḍuḥá remained in Iṣfáhán. She spent her days and nights in the remembrance of God and in teaching His Cause to the women of that city. She was gifted with an eloquent tongue; her utterance was wonderful to hear. She was highly honored by the leading women of Iṣfáhán, celebrated for piety, for godliness, and the purity of her life. She

was chastity embodied; all her hours were spent in reciting Holy Writ, or expounding the Texts, or unraveling the most complex of spiritual themes, or spreading abroad the sweet savors of God.

It was for these reasons that the King of Martyrs married her respected daughter and became her son-in-law. And when Shams went to live in his princely house, day and night the people thronged its doors, for the leading women of the city, whether friends or strangers, whether close to her or not, would come and go. For she was a fire lit by the love of God, and she proclaimed the Word of God with great ardor and verve, so that she became known among the non-believers as Fátimih, the Bahá'ís' Lady of Light.^{ix}

And so time passed, until the day when the “She-Serpent” and the “Wolf” conspired together and issued a decree, a fatvá, that sentenced the King of Martyrs to death. They plotted as well with the Governor of the city so that among them they could sack and plunder and carry off all that vast treasure he possessed. Then the Sháh joined forces with those two wild animals; and he commanded that the blood of both brothers, the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs, be spilled out. Without warning, those ruthless men: the She-Serpent, the Wolf, and their brutal farráshes and constabulary—attacked; they chained the two brothers and led them off to prison, looted their richly furnished houses, wrested away all their possessions, and spared no one, not even infants at the breast. They tortured, cursed, reviled, mocked, beat the kin and others of the victims' household, and would not stay their hands.

In Paris, Zillu's-Sultán^x related the following, swearing to the truth of it upon his oath: “Many and many a time I warned those two great scions of the Prophet's House, but all to no avail. At the last I summoned them one night, and with extreme urgency I told them in so many words: ‘Gentlemen, the Sháh has three times condemned you to death. His

farmáns keep on coming. The decree is absolute and there is only one course open to you now: you must, in the presence of the ‘ulamás, clear yourselves and curse your Faith.’ Their answer was: ‘Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá! O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious! May our lives be offered up!’ Finally I agreed to their not cursing their Faith. I told them all they had to say was, ‘We are not Bahá’ís.’ ‘Just those few words,’ I said, ‘will be enough; then I can write out my report for the Sháh, and you will be saved.’ ‘That is impossible,’ they answered, ‘because we are Bahá’ís. O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious, our hearts hunger for martyrdom! Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!’ I was enraged, then, and I tried, by being harsh with them, to force them to renounce their Faith, but it was hopeless. The decree of the rapacious She-Serpent and Wolf, and the Sháh’s commands, were carried out.”

After those two were martyred, Shamsu’d-Duḥá was hunted down, and had to seek a refuge in her brother’s house. Although he was not a believer, he was known in Iṣfáhán as an upright, pious and godly man, a man of learning, an ascetic who, hermit-like, kept to himself, and for these reasons he was highly regarded and trusted by all. She stayed there with him, but the Government did not abandon its search, finally discovered her whereabouts and summoned her to appear; the evil ‘ulamás had a hand in this, joining forces with the civil authorities. Her brother was therefore obliged to accompany Shamsu’d-Duḥá to the Governor’s house. He remained without, while they sent his sister into the women’s apartments; the Governor came there, to the door, and he kicked and trampled her so savagely that she fainted away. Then the Governor shouted to his wife: “Princess! Princess! Come here and take a look at the Bahá’ís’ Lady of Light!”

The women lifted her up and put her in one of the rooms. Meanwhile her brother, dumbfounded, was waiting outside the mansion. Finally, trying

to plead with him, he said to the Governor: “This sister of mine has been beaten so severely that she is at the point of death. What is the use of keeping her here? There is no hope for her now. With your permission I can get her back to my house. It would be better to have her die there, rather than here, for after all, she is a descendant of the Prophet, she is of Muḥammad’s noble line, and she has done no wrong. There is nothing against her except her kinship to the son-in-law.” The Governor answered: “She is one of the great leaders and heroines of the Bahá’ís. She will simply cause another uproar.” The brother said: “I promise you that she will not utter a word. It is certain that within a few days she will not even be alive. Her body is frail, weak, almost lifeless, and she has suffered terrible harm.”

Since the brother was greatly respected and trusted by high and low alike, the Governor released Shamsu’d-Duḥá in his custody, letting her go. She lived for a while in his house, crying out, grieving, shedding her tears, mourning her dead. Neither was the brother at peace, nor would the hostile leave them alone; there was some new turmoil every day, and public clamor. The brother finally thought it best to take Shams away on a pilgrimage to Mashhad, hoping that the fire of civil disturbances would die down.

They went to Mashhad and settled in a vacant house near the Shrine of the Imám Riḍá.^{xi}

Because he was such a pious man the brother would leave every morning to visit the Shrine, and there he would stay, busy with his devotions until almost noon. In the afternoon as well, he would hasten away to the Holy Place, and pray until evening. The house being empty, Shamsu’d-Duḥá managed to get in touch with various women believers and began to associate with them; and because the love of God burned so brightly in her heart she was unable to keep silent, so that during

those hours when her brother was absent the place came alive. The Bahá'í women would flock there and absorb her lucid and eloquent speech.

In those days life in Mashhad was hard for the believers, with the malevolent always on the alert; if they so much as suspected an individual, they murdered him. There was no security of any kind, no peace. But Shamsu'd-Duḥá could not help herself: in spite of all the terrible ordeals she had endured, she ignored the danger, and was capable of flinging herself into flames, or into the sea. Since her brother frequented no one, he knew nothing of what was going on. Day and night he would only leave the house for the Shrine, the Shrine for the house; he was a recluse, had no friends, and would not so much as speak to another person. Nevertheless there came a day when he saw that trouble had broken out in the city, and he knew it would end in serious harm. He was a man so calm and silent that he did not reproach his sister; he simply took her away from Mashhad without warning, and they returned to Isfáhán. Here, he sent her to her daughter, the widow of the King of Martyrs, for he would no longer shelter her under his roof.

Shamsu'd-Duḥá was thus back in Isfáhán, boldly teaching the Faith and spreading abroad the sweet savors of God. So vehement was the fiery love in her heart that it compelled her to speak out, whenever she found a listening ear. And when it was observed that once again the household of the King of Martyrs was about to be overtaken by calamities, and that they were enduring severe afflictions there in Isfáhán, Bahá'u'lláh desired them to come to the Most Great Prison. Shamsu'd-Duḥá, with the widow of the King of Martyrs and the children, arrived in the Holy Land. Here they were joyously spending their days when the son of the King of Martyrs, Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn, as a result of the awful

suffering he had been subjected to in Iṣfáhán, came down with tuberculosis and died in Akká.

Shamsu'd-Duḥá was heavy of heart. She mourned his absence, she wasted away with longing for him, and it was all much harder because then the Supreme Affliction came upon us, the crowning anguish. The basis of her life was undermined; candle-like, she was consumed with grieving. She grew so feeble that she took to her bed, unable to move. Still, she did not rest, nor keep silent for a moment. She would tell of days long gone, of things that had come to pass in the Cause, or she would recite from Holy Writ, or she would supplicate, and chant her prayers—until, out of the Most Great Prison, she soared away to the world of God. She hastened away from this dust gulf of perdition to an unsullied country; packed her gear and journeyed to the land of lights. Unto her be salutations and praise, and most great mercy, sheltered in the compassion of her omnipotent Lord.

ⁱPronounced Shams-oz-Zohá.

ⁱⁱA forerunner of the Báb, and co-founder of the Shaykhí School. See glossary.

ⁱⁱⁱHis daughter, at a later date, became the consort of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Cf. *God Passes By*, p. 130, and *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 461.

^{iv}"Gate of the Gate", a title of Mullá Ḥusayn, the first to believe in the Báb. For an account of his sister, cf. *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 383, note.

^v"Solace of the Eyes."

^{vi}Persian women of the day went heavily veiled in public.

^{vii}*Qur'án* 7:7; 14:42; 21:48; 57:25, etc

^{viii}Cf. Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, chapter XV.

^{ix}The reference is to Muḥammad's daughter, Fátimih, "the bright and fair of face, the Lady of Light."

^xEldest son of the Sháh and ruler over more than two-fifths of the kingdom. He ratified the death sentence. Soon after these events, he fell into disgrace. Cf. *God Passes By*, p. 200; 232.

^{xi}The eighth Imám, poisoned by order of the Caliph Ma'múm, A.H. 203, after the Imám had been officially designated as the Caliph's heir apparent. His shrine, with its golden dome, has been called the glory of the Shí'ih world. "A part of My body is to be buried in Khurásán", the Prophet traditionally said.