

Some Answered Questions, Bahá'u'lláh

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh appeared at a time when Persia was plunged in the darkest ignorance and consumed by the blindest fanaticism. You have no doubt read at length the accounts that European histories provide of the morals, manners, and thoughts of the Persians during the last few centuries, and these require no repetition. Suffice it to say that Persia had sunk to such abysmal depths that foreign travellers would all deplore that a country which had in former times occupied the pinnacle of greatness and civilization had by then fallen into such abasement, desolation, and ruin, and that its people had been reduced to utter wretchedness.

It was at such a time that Bahá'u'lláh appeared. His father was a court minister, not a divine, and it is well known throughout Persia that He never studied in a school or associated with the learned and the divines. He passed the early part of His life in the utmost comfort and happiness, and His companions and associates were Persians of rank rather than learned men.

As soon as the Báb revealed His Cause, Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed: "This great Man is the Lord of the righteous, and it is incumbent upon all to bear allegiance unto Him." He arose to promote the Cause of the Báb, adducing decisive proofs and conclusive arguments of His truth. Although the divines of the nation had obliged the Persian government to exert the most vehement opposition; although they had all issued decrees ordering the massacre, pillage, persecution, and annihilation of the Báb's followers; and although throughout the land the people had undertaken to kill, burn, and plunder them, and even harass their women and children—despite all this, Bahá'u'lláh was engaged, with the utmost constancy and composure, in exalting the word of the Báb. Nor did He seek for a moment to conceal Himself, but associated openly and visibly with His enemies, occupied Himself with adducing proofs and arguments, and became renowned for exalting the Word of God. Time and again He suffered intense adversities, and at every moment His life was in grave danger.

He was put in chains and thrown into a subterranean dungeon. His extensive hereditary possessions were entirely plundered, He was four times exiled from land to land, and in the end He came to abide in the Most Great Prison.

Notwithstanding all this, the call of God was ceaselessly raised and the fame of His Cause was noised abroad. Such were the knowledge, learning, and perfections He evinced that everyone in Persia was astonished. All the learned people—friend and foe alike—who attained His presence in Tīhrán, Baghdád, Constantinople, Adrianople, and 'Akká received a complete and convincing



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answer to their every question. All readily acknowledged that in every perfection He was peerless and unique throughout the world.

It often happened in Baghdád that Muslim, Jewish, and Christian divines and European men of learning would be gathered in His blessed presence. They would each ask a different question and, despite their varying beliefs, would each receive so complete and convincing a reply as to be fully satisfied. Even the Persian divines residing in Karbilá and Najaf chose a learned man by the name of Mullá Ḥasan ‘Amú and dispatched him as their representative. He came into His blessed presence and asked a number of questions on their behalf, to which Bahá’u’lláh responded. He then said, “The divines fully recognize the extent of your knowledge and attainments, and it is acknowledged by all that you are without peer or equal in every field of learning. It is moreover evident that you have never studied or acquired this learning. But the divines say that they are not satisfied with this and cannot acknowledge the truth of your claim on the basis of your knowledge and attainments alone. They therefore ask you to produce a miracle in order to satisfy and assure their hearts.”

Bahá’u’lláh replied, “Although they have no right to ask this, since it is for God to test His creatures and not for them to test God, yet their request is in this case accepted and allowed. But the Cause of God is not a theatrical stage where every hour a new performance may be offered and every day a new demand presented. For otherwise the Cause of God would become the plaything of children.

“Let the divines, therefore, assemble and choose unanimously one miracle, and let them stipulate in writing that once it has been performed they will no longer entertain any doubt, but will all acknowledge and confess the truth of this Cause. Let them seal that paper and bring it to Me. They must fix this as the criterion of truth: If it be performed, they should have no remaining doubt; and if not, We shall stand convicted of imposture.”

That learned man arose and replied, “There is no more to be said.” He kissed Bahá’u’lláh’s knee, even though he was not a believer, and departed. Then he gathered the divines and conveyed Bahá’u’lláh’s message. They consulted together and said, “This man is a magician; perchance he will perform some enchantment, and then we will have no recourse”, and so they dared not respond.

Mullá Ḥasan ‘Amú, however, reported this fact in many gatherings. He left Karbilá for Kirmánsháh and Tīhrán, where he provided all with a detailed account of this episode and spoke of the fear and inaction of the divines.

Our point is that all the adversaries of Bahá’u’lláh in the East acknowledged His greatness, distinction, knowledge, and learning, and that in spite of their enmity they referred to Him as “the renowned Bahá’u’lláh”.

In brief, this most great Luminary appeared suddenly above the horizon of Persia, and all the people of that land, whether ministers, divines, or the general populace, rose against Him with the fiercest animosity, claiming that He was bent upon annihilating and extinguishing their religion, laws, nation, and empire, even as had been said of Christ. Yet Bahá’u’lláh, alone and single-handed, withstood them all without faltering in the slightest.

At last they said, "So long as this man is in Persia there will be no peace or tranquillity. He should be banished, that Persia might again find rest." They subjected Bahá'u'lláh, therefore, to severe hardships so that He would be forced to seek permission to leave Persia, and they imagined that the lamp of the Cause would be thereby extinguished. But this persecution produced the contrary effect: The Cause grew in stature and its flame waxed brighter. It had until then spread only within Persia; this caused it to spread to other regions. Later they said, "'Irâq is too close to Persia; we must dispatch Him to distant lands." Thus the Persian government persisted until Bahá'u'lláh was exiled from 'Irâq to Constantinople. But again they saw that He did not falter in the least. They said, "Constantinople is a crossroads for divers peoples and nations, and there are many Persians there." Hence they took further steps and had Him exiled to Adrianople. But that flame gathered still more intensity and the Cause grew even greater in stature. Finally the Persians said, "None of these locations was a place of humiliation: He must be sent to a place where He will be disgraced and subjected to trials and persecutions, and where His kindred and followers will suffer the direst afflictions." Thus they chose the prison city of 'Akká, which was reserved for rebels, murderers, thieves, and highway robbers, and in this wise they made Him associate with such people. But the power of God was made manifest, for this prison became the means of the promotion of His Faith and the glorification of His Word. The greatness of Bahá'u'lláh became apparent in that He succeeded, from within such a prison and under such humiliating circumstances, in wholly transforming the condition of Persia, in overcoming His enemies, and in proving to all the resistless power of His Cause. His sacred teachings spread to all regions and His Cause was firmly established.

In every province of Persia His enemies arose with the utmost hatred, seizing and killing, beating and burning, uprooting a thousand households, and resorting to every violent means to extinguish His Cause. Notwithstanding all this, He promoted His Cause and promulgated His teachings from within this prison of murderers, thieves, and highwaymen, awakening many of His most virulent enemies and making them firm believers. Such was the influence of His actions that the Persian government itself arose from its slumber and regretted what had been wrought at the hands of the wicked divines.

When Bahá'u'lláh arrived at this prison in the Holy Land, discerning souls were awakened to the fact that the prophecies which God had voiced through the tongue of His Prophets two or three thousand years before had been realized and that His promises had been fulfilled, for He had revealed unto certain Prophets and announced unto the Holy Land that the Lord of Hosts would be manifested therein. All these promises were fulfilled, and, but for the opposition of His enemies and His banishment and exile, it can scarcely be imagined how Bahá'u'lláh could have left Persia and pitched His tent in this sacred land. His enemies intended that this imprisonment should completely destroy and annihilate His Cause, but His incarceration became instead the greatest confirmation and the means of its promotion. The call of God reached the East and the West, and the rays of the Sun of Truth illumined every land. Praise be to God! Though He was a prisoner, His tent was raised on Mount Carmel, and He moved about with the utmost majesty. And whoever entered His presence, be it friend or stranger, would exclaim, "This is not a captive but a king!"

Immediately upon His arrival in prison, He addressed an epistle to Napoleon which He sent through the French ambassador, the substance of which was: "Ask what crime We have

committed to be confined in this prison." Napoleon made no reply. Then a second epistle was issued, which is contained in the *Súriy-i-Haykal*, and which in substance says: "O Napoleon! Since thou hast failed to heed and answer My call, thou shalt lose Thy dominion and be reduced to naught." This epistle was dispatched to Napoleon by post, through the care of César Catafago and with the full knowledge of His companions in exile. The text of this address quickly reached all of Persia, for the *Kitáb-i-Haykal* was sent at that time to every corner of that land and this address was included therein. This took place in the year 1869, and as this *Súriy-i-Haykal* had been circulated throughout Persia and India, all the believers had it in their hands and were awaiting the outcome of this address. Not long after, in 1870, the fire of war was ignited between Germany and France, and although no one at the time anticipated the triumph of Germany, Napoleon was resoundingly defeated, surrendered to his enemies, and saw his glory changed into deepest abasement.

Tablets were likewise dispatched to other kings, among them an epistle to His Majesty Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh. In that epistle Bahá'u'lláh said: "Summon Me to thy presence and gather all the divines, and ask for proof and testimony, that truth might be distinguished from error." His Majesty sent Bahá'u'lláh's epistle to the divines and assigned them this task, but they dared not undertake it. He then asked seven of the most renowned divines to respond to this epistle. After a while they returned it, saying, "This man is an opponent of the Faith and an enemy of the King." His Majesty the Sháh of Persia was sorely vexed and said, "This is a matter of proof and testimony, of truth and error. What has it to do with enmity towards the government? How pitiful that we have shown forth such respect to these divines, and yet they cannot even reply to this address."

Briefly, all that was recorded in the Tablets to the kings has come to pass. One need only compare their contents with the events that have transpired since the year 1870 to see that every prediction has been fulfilled, save for a few that remain to be manifested in the future.

Moreover, foreign peoples and non-believers attributed wondrous works to Bahá'u'lláh. Some believed He was a saint, and some even wrote accounts to this effect, such as Siyyid Dávúdí, a Sunní divine of Baghdád, who composed a short treatise in which he related in some connection certain extraordinary feats of Bahá'u'lláh. To this day there are people throughout the East who do not believe in Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God, but who regard Him as a saint and attribute miracles to Him.

To summarize, not a single soul, whether friend or foe, who attained Bahá'u'lláh's presence failed to acknowledge and attest to His greatness. Although he might not become a believer, he would invariably bear witness to His greatness. No sooner would someone appear before Him than the encounter would produce such an impression as to prevent him, in most cases, from uttering a word. How often would a bitter enemy resolve in his heart to say such-and-such or to argue so-and-so when he had attained His presence, only to find himself amazed, bewildered, and reduced to utter silence!

Bahá'u'lláh never studied Arabic, had a teacher or tutor, or entered a school. Nevertheless His eloquence and fluency in spoken Arabic, as well as in His Arabic Tablets, would astonish the most articulate and accomplished among the Arab men of letters, and all acknowledged that in this His attainments were without peer or equal.

If we carefully examine the text of the Torah, we see that none of the Manifestations of God ever said to those who denied Them, "Whatever miracle you desire, I am ready to perform, and I will submit to whatever test you propose." Yet in His epistle to the Sháh Bahá'u'lláh clearly stated: "Gather together the divines and summon Me to thy presence, that the proof and testimony might be established."

For fifty years Bahá'u'lláh withstood His enemies like a mountain: They all sought to annihilate Him; they all assailed Him; they plotted a thousand times to crucify and destroy Him; and throughout those fifty years He was in the greatest peril.

As to Persia, which to this day remains in such an abject and ruinous state, every man of wisdom, whether from within or without her borders, who knows her true state of affairs recognizes that her progress, her prosperity, and her civilization depend entirely upon the promulgation of the teachings and the dissemination of the principles of this glorious Being.

In His blessed lifetime Christ educated, in reality, only eleven souls, the greatest of whom, Peter, nonetheless denied Him thrice when put to the test. Notwithstanding this, behold how the Cause of Christ subsequently pervaded the whole earth! In this day Bahá'u'lláh has educated thousands of souls who, under the threat of the sword, have raised to the highest heaven the cry of "O Thou the Glory of Glories!" and whose faces have shone as brightly as gold in the crucible of trials. Infer then from this what shall transpire in the future!

Now, we must be fair and acknowledge what an Educator of mankind this illustrious Being was, what marvellous signs He has manifested, and what power and might have been realized in the world of existence through Him.