

# Memorials of the Faithful, Ṭáhirih

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



## Ṭáhirih – Memorials of the Faithful, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

A woman chaste and holy, a sign and token of surpassing beauty, a burning brand of the love of God, a lamp of His bestowal, was Jináb-i-Ṭáhirih. She was called Umm-Salmá; she was the daughter of Ḥájí Mullá Šálih, a mujtahid of Qazvín, and her paternal uncle was Mullá Taqí, the Imám-Jum’ih or leader of prayers in the cathedral mosque of that city. They married her to Mullá Muḥammad, the son of Mullá Taqí, and she gave birth to three children, two sons and a daughter; all three were bereft of the grace that encompassed their mother, and all failed to recognize the truth of the Cause.

When she was still a child her father selected a teacher for her and she studied various branches of knowledge and the arts, achieving remarkable ability in literary pursuits. Such was the degree of her scholarship and attainments that her father would often express his regret, saying, “Would that she had been a boy, for he would have shed illumination upon my household, and would have succeeded me!”

One day she was a guest in the home of Mullá Javád, a cousin on her mother’s side, and there in her cousin’s library she came upon some of the writings of Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Ahsá’í. Delighted with what he had to say, Ṭáhirih asked to borrow the writings and take them home. Mullá Javád violently objected, telling her: “Your father is an enemy of the Twin Luminous Lights, Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim. If he should even dream that any words of those two great beings, any fragrance from the garden of those realities, had come your way, he would make an attempt against my life, and you too would become the target of his wrath.” Ṭáhirih answered: “For a long time now, I have thirsted after this; I have yearned for these explanations, these inner truths. Give me whatever you have of these books. Never mind if it angers my father.” Accordingly, Mullá Javád sent over the writings of the Shaykh and the Siyyid.

One night, Ṭáhirih sought out her father in his library, and began to speak of Shaykh Aḥmad’s teachings. The very moment he learned that his daughter knew of the Shaykhí doctrines, Mullá Šálih’s denunciations rang out, and he cried: “Javád has made you a lost soul!” Ṭáhirih answered, “The late Shaykh was a true scholar of God, and I have learned an infinity of spiritual truths from reading his books. Furthermore, he bases whatever he says on the traditions of the Holy Imáms. You call yourself a mystic knower and a man of God, you consider your respected uncle to be a scholar as well, and most pious—yet in neither of you do I find a trace of those qualities!”

For some time, she carried on heated discussions with her father, debating such questions as the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment, the Night-Ascent of Muḥammad to Heaven, the Promise and the Threat, and the Advent of the Promised One. Lacking arguments, her father



TRANSLATION

would resort to curses and abuse. Then one night, in support of her contention, Ṭáhirih quoted a holy tradition from the Imám Ja'far-i-Šádiq; and since it confirmed what she was saying, her father burst out laughing, mocking the tradition. Ṭáhirih said, "Oh my father, these are the words of the Holy Imám. How can you mock and deny them?"

From that time on, she ceased to debate and contend with her father. Meanwhile she entered into secret correspondence with Siyyid Kázim, regarding the solution of complex theological problems, and thus it came about that the Siyyid conferred on her the name "Solace of the Eyes" (Qurratu'l-'Ayn); as for the title Ṭáhirih ("The Pure One"), it was first associated with her in Badasht, and was subsequently approved by the Báb, and recorded in Tablets.

Ṭáhirih had caught fire. She set out for Karbilá, hoping to meet Siyyid Kázim, but she arrived too late: ten days before she reached that city, he passed away. Not long before his death the Siyyid had shared with his disciples the good news that the promised Advent was at hand. "Go forth," he repeatedly told them, "and seek out your Lord." Thus the most distinguished of his followers gathered for retirement and prayer, for fasts and vigils, in the Masjid-i-Kúfih, while some awaited the Advent in Karbilá. Among these was Ṭáhirih, fasting by day, practicing religious disciplines, and spending the night in vigils, and chanting prayers. One night when it was getting along toward dawn she laid her head on her pillow, lost all awareness of this earthly life, and dreamed a dream; in her vision a youth, a Siyyid, wearing a black cloak and a green turban, appeared to her in the heavens; he was standing in the air, reciting verses and praying with his hands upraised. At once, she memorized one of those verses, and wrote it down in her notebook when she awoke. After the Báb had declared His mission, and His first book, "The Best of Stories," was circulated, Ṭáhirih was reading a section of the text one day, and she came upon that same verse, which she had noted down from the dream. Instantly offering thanks, she fell to her knees and bowed her forehead to the ground, convinced that the Báb's message was truth.

This good news reached her in Karbilá and she at once began to teach. She translated and expounded "The Best of Stories," also writing in Persian and Arabic, composing odes and lyrics, and humbly practicing her devotions, performing even those that were optional and supernumerary. When the evil 'ulamás in Karbilá got wind of all this, and learned that a woman was summoning the people to a new religion and had already influenced a considerable number, they went to the Governor and lodged a complaint. Their charges, to be brief, led to violent attacks on Ṭáhirih, and sufferings, which she accepted and for which she offered praise and thanks. When the authorities came hunting for her they first assaulted Shamsu'd-Ḍuḥá, mistaking her for Ṭáhirih. As soon, however, as they heard that Ṭáhirih had been arrested they let Shams go—for Ṭáhirih had sent a message to the Governor saying, "I am at your disposal. Do not harm any other."

The Governor set guards over her house and shut her away, writing Baghdád for instructions as to how he should proceed. For three months, she lived in a state of siege, completely isolated, with the guards surrounding her house. Since the local authorities had still received no reply from Baghdád, Ṭáhirih referred her case to the Governor, saying: "No word has come from either Baghdád or Constantinople. Accordingly, we will ourselves proceed to Baghdád and await the answer there." The Governor gave her leave to go, and she set out, accompanied by Shamsu'd-Ḍuḥá and the Leaf of Paradise (the sister of Mullá Ḥusayn) and her mother. In Baghdád she stayed first in the house of Shaykh Muḥammad, the distinguished father of Áqá Muḥammad-

Muṣṭafá. But so great was the press of people around her that she transferred her residence to another quarter, engaged night and day in spreading the Faith, and freely associated with the inhabitants of Baghdád. She thus became celebrated throughout the city and there was a great uproar.

Ṭáhirih also maintained a correspondence with the 'ulamás of Kazímayn; she presented them with unanswerable proofs, and when one or another appeared before her she offered him convincing arguments. Finally she sent a message to the Shí'ah divines, saying to them: "If you are not satisfied with these conclusive proofs, I challenge you to a trial by ordeal." Then there was a great outcry from the divines, and the Governor was obliged to send Ṭáhirih and her women companions to the house of Ibn-i-Álúsí, who was muftí of Baghdád. Here she remained about three months, waiting for word and directions from Constantinople. Ibn-i-Álúsí would engage her in learned dialogues, questions would be asked and answers given, and he would not deny what she had to say.

On a certain day the muftí related one of his dreams, and asked her to tell him what it meant. He said: "In my dream I saw the Shí'ah 'ulamás arriving at the holy tomb of Imám Ḥusayn, the Prince of Martyrs. They took away the barrier that encloses the tomb, and they broke open the resplendent grave, so that the immaculate body lay revealed to their gaze. They sought to take up the holy form, but I cast myself down on the corpse and I warded them off." Ṭáhirih answered: "This is the meaning of your dream: you are about to deliver me from the hands of the Shí'ah divines." "I too had interpreted it thus," said Ibn-i-Álúsí.

Since he had discovered that she was well versed in learned questions and in sacred commentaries and Texts, the two often carried on debates; she would speak on such themes as the Day of Resurrection, the Balance, and the Şiraṭ, and he would not turn away.

Then came a night when the father of Ibn-i-Álúsí called at the house of his son. He had a meeting with Ṭáhirih and abruptly, without asking a single question, began to curse, mock and revile her. Embarrassed at his father's behavior, Ibn-i-Álúsí apologized. Then he said: "The answer has come from Constantinople. The King has commanded that you be set free, but only on condition that you leave his realms. Go then, tomorrow, make your preparations for the journey, and hasten away from this land."

Accordingly Ṭáhirih, with her women companions, left the muftí's house, saw to arranging for their travel gear, and went out of Baghdád. When they left the city, a number of Arab believers, carrying arms, walked along beside their convoy. Among the escort were Shaykh Sultán, Shaykh Muḥammad and his distinguished son Muḥammad-Muṣṭafá, and Shaykh Şálih, and these were mounted. It was Shaykh Muḥammad who defrayed the expenses of the journey.

When they reached Kirmánsháh the women alighted at one house, the men at another, and the inhabitants arrived in a continuous stream to seek information as to the new Faith. Here as elsewhere the 'ulamás were soon in a state of frenzy and they commanded that the newcomers be expelled. As a result the kad-khudá or chief officer of that quarter, with a band of people, laid siege to the house where Ṭáhirih was, and sacked it. Then they placed Ṭáhirih and her companions in an uncovered howdah and carried them from the town to an open field, where

they put the captives out. The drivers then took their animals and returned to the city. The victims were left on the bare ground, with no food, no shelter, and no means of traveling on.

Ṭáhirih at once wrote a letter to the prince of that territory, in which she told him: "O thou just Governor! We were guests in your city. Is this the way you treat your guests?" When her letter was brought to the Governor of Kirmánsháh he said: "I knew nothing of this injustice. This mischief was kindled by the divines." He immediately commanded the kad-khudá to return all the travelers' belongings. That official duly surrendered the stolen goods, the drivers with their animals came back out of the city, the travelers took their places and resumed the journey.

They arrived in Hamadán and here their stay was a happy one. The most illustrious ladies of that city, even the princesses, would come to visit, seeking the benefits of Ṭáhirih's teaching. In Hamadán she dismissed a part of her escort and sent them back to Baghdád, while she brought some of them, including Shamsu'd-Ḍuḥá and Shaykh-Ṣáliḥ, along with her to Qazvín.

As they traveled, some riders advanced to meet them, kinsmen of Ṭáhirih's from Qazvín, and they wished to lead her away alone, unescorted by the others, to her father's house. Ṭáhirih refused, saying: "These are in my company." In this way they entered Qazvín. Ṭáhirih proceeded to her father's house, while the Arabs who had formed her escort alighted at a caravanserai. Ṭáhirih soon left her father and went to live with her brother, and there the great ladies of the city would come to visit her; all this until the murder of Mullá Taqí, when every Bábí in Qazvín was taken prisoner. Some were sent to Ṭíhrán and then returned to Qazvín and martyred.

Mullá Taqí's murder came about in this way: One day, when that besotted tyrant had mounted his pulpit, he began to mock and revile the great Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Ahsá'í. Shamelessly, grossly, screaming obscenities, he cried out: "That Shaykh is the one who has kindled this fire of evil, and subjected the whole world to this ordeal!" There was an inquirer in the audience, a native of Shíráz. He found the taunts, jeers and indecencies to be more than he could bear. Under cover of darkness he betook himself to the mosque, plunged a spearhead between the lips of Mullá Taqí and fled. The next morning they arrested the defenseless believers and thereupon subjected them to agonizing torture, though all were innocent and knew nothing of what had come to pass. There was never any question of investigating the case; the believers repeatedly declared their innocence but no one paid them any heed. When a few days had passed the killer gave himself up; he confessed to the authorities, informing them that he had committed the murder because Mullá Taqí had vilified Shaykh Aḥmad. "I deliver myself into your hands," he told them, "so that you will set these innocent people free." They arrested him as well, put him in the stocks, chained him, and sent him in chains, along with the others, to Ṭíhrán.

Once there he observed that despite his confession, the others were not released. By night, he made his escape from the prison and went to the house of Riḍá Khán—that rare and precious man, that star-sacrifice among the lovers of God—the son of Muḥammad Khán, Master of the Horse to Muḥammad Sháh. He stayed there for a time, after which he and Riḍá Khán secretly rode away to the Fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsí in Mázindarán. Muḥammad Khán sent riders after them to track them down, but try as they might, no one could find them. Those two horsemen got to the Fort of Ṭabarsí, where both of them won a martyr's death. As for the other friends who were in the prison at Ṭíhrán, some of these were returned to Qazvín and they too suffered martyrdom.

One day the administrator of finance, Mírzá Sháfí, called in the murderer and addressed him, saying: "Jináb, do you belong to a dervish order, or do you follow the Law? If you are a follower of the Law, why did you deal that learned mujtahid a cruel, a fatal blow in the mouth? If you are a dervish and follow the Path, one of the rules of the Path is to harm no man. How, then, could you slaughter that zealous divine?" "Sir," he replied, "besides the Law, and besides the Path, we also have the Truth. It was in serving the Truth that I paid him for his deed."

These things would take place before the reality of this Cause was revealed and all was made plain. For in those days no one knew that the Manifestation of the Báb would culminate in the Manifestation of the Blessed Beauty and that the law of retaliation would be done away with, and the foundation-principle of the Law of God would be this, that "It is better for you to be killed than to kill"; that discord and contention would cease, and the rule of war and butchery would fall away. In those days, that sort of thing would happen. But praised be God, with the advent of the Blessed Beauty such a splendor of harmony and peace shone forth, such a spirit of meekness and long-suffering, that when in Yazd men, women and children were made the targets of enemy fire or were put to the sword, when the leaders and the evil 'ulamás and their followers joined together and unitedly assaulted those defenseless victims and spilled out their blood—hacking at and rending apart the bodies of chaste women, with their daggers slashing the throats of children they had orphaned, then setting the torn and mangled limbs on fire—not one of the friends of God lifted a hand against them. Indeed, among those martyrs, those real companions of the ones who died, long gone, at Karbilá—was a man who, when he saw the drawn sword flashing over him, thrust sugar candy into his murderer's mouth and cried, "With a sweet taste on your lips, put me to death—for you bring me martyrdom, my dearest wish!"

Let us return to our theme. After the murder of her impious uncle, Mullá Taqí, in Qazvín, Ṭáhirih fell into dire straits. She was a prisoner and heavy of heart, grieving over the painful events that had come to pass. She was watched on every side, by attendants, guards, the farráshes, and her foes. While she languished thus, Bahá'u'lláh dispatched Hádíy-i-Qazvíní, husband of the celebrated Khátún-Ján, from the capital, and they managed, by a stratagem, to free her from that embroilment and got her to Ṭihrán in the night. She alighted at the mansion of Bahá'u'lláh and was lodged in an upper apartment.

When word of this spread throughout Ṭihrán, the Government hunted for her high and low; nevertheless, the friends kept arriving to see her, in a steady stream, and Ṭáhirih, seated behind a curtain, would converse with them. One day the great Siyyid Yaḥyá, surnamed Vahíd, was present there. As he sat without, Ṭáhirih listened to him from behind the veil. I was then a child, and was sitting on her lap. With eloquence and fervor, Vahíd was discoursing on the signs and verses that bore witness to the advent of the new Manifestation. She suddenly interrupted him and, raising her voice, vehemently declared: "O Yaḥyá! Let deeds, not words, testify to thy faith, if thou art a man of true learning. Cease idly repeating the traditions of the past, for the day of service, of steadfast action, is come. Now is the time to show forth the true signs of God, to rend asunder the veils of idle fancy, to promote the Word of God, and to sacrifice ourselves in His path. Let deeds, not words, be our adorning!"

The Blessed Beauty made elaborate arrangements for Ṭáhirih's journey to Badasht and sent her off with an equipage and retinue. His own party left for that region some days afterward.

In Badasht, there was a great open field. Through its center a stream flowed, and to its right, left, and rear there were three gardens, the envy of Paradise. One of those gardens was assigned to Quddús, but this was kept a secret. Another was set apart for Ṭáhirih, and in a third was raised the pavilion of Bahá'u'lláh. On the field amidst the three gardens, the believers pitched their tents. Evenings, Bahá'u'lláh, Quddús and Ṭáhirih would come together. In those days the fact that the Báb was the Qá'im had not yet been proclaimed; it was the Blessed Beauty, with Quddús, Who arranged for the proclamation of a universal Advent and the abrogation and repudiation of the ancient laws.

Then one day, and there was a wisdom in it, Bahá'u'lláh fell ill; that is, the indisposition was to serve a vital purpose. On a sudden, in the sight of all, Quddús came out of his garden, and entered the pavilion of Bahá'u'lláh. But Ṭáhirih sent him a message, to say that their Host being ill, Quddús should visit her garden instead. His answer was: "This garden is preferable. Come, then, to this one." Ṭáhirih, with her face unveiled, stepped from her garden, advancing to the pavilion of Bahá'u'lláh; and as she came, she shouted aloud these words: "The Trumpet is sounding! The great Trump is blown! The universal Advent is now proclaimed!" The believers gathered in that tent were panic struck, and each one asked himself, "How can the Law be abrogated? How is it that this woman stands here without her veil?"

"Read the Súrih of the Inevitable," said Bahá'u'lláh; and the reader began: "When the Day that must come shall have come suddenly... Day that shall abase! Day that shall exalt!..." and thus was the new Dispensation announced and the great Resurrection made manifest. At the start, those who were present fled away, and some forsook their Faith, while some fell a prey to suspicion and doubt, and a number, after wavering, returned to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. The Conference of Badasht broke up, but the universal Advent had been proclaimed.

Afterward, Quddús hastened away to the Fort of Ṭabarsí and the Blessed Beauty, with provisions and equipment, journeyed to Niyálá, having the intention of going on from there by night, making His way through the enemy encampment and entering the Fort. But Mírzá Taqí, the Governor of Ámul, got word of this, and with seven hundred riflemen arrived in Niyálá. Surrounding the village by night, he sent Bahá'u'lláh with eleven riders back to Ámul, and those calamities and tribulations, told of before, came to pass.

As for Ṭáhirih, after the breakup at Badasht she was captured, and the oppressors sent her back under guard to Ṭíhrán. There she was imprisoned in the house of Maḥmúd Khán, the Kalántar. But she was aflame, enamored, restless, and could not be still. The ladies of Ṭíhrán, on one pretext or another, crowded to see and listen to her. It happened that there was a celebration at the Mayor's house for the marriage of his son; a nuptial banquet was prepared, and the house adorned. The flower of Ṭíhrán's ladies were invited, the princesses, the wives of vazírs and other great. A splendid wedding it was, with instrumental music and vocal melodies—by day and night the lute, the bells and songs. Then Ṭáhirih began to speak; and so bewitched were the great ladies that they forsook the cithern and the drum and all the pleasures of the wedding feast, to crowd about Ṭáhirih and listen to the sweet words of her mouth.

Thus she remained, a helpless captive. Then came the attempt on the life of the Sháh; a farmán was issued; she was sentenced to death. Saying she was summoned to the Prime Minister's,

they arrived to lead her away from the Kalántar's house. She bathed her face and hands, arrayed herself in a costly dress, and scented with attar of roses she came out of the house.

They brought her into a garden, where the headsman waited; but these wavered and then refused to end her life. A slave was found, far gone in drunkenness; besotted, vicious, black of heart. And he strangled Ṭáhirih. He forced a scarf between her lips and rammed it down her throat. Then they lifted up her unsullied body and flung it in a well, there in the garden, and over it threw down earth and stones. But Ṭáhirih rejoiced; she had heard with a light heart the tidings of her martyrdom; she set her eyes on the supernal Kingdom and offered up her life.

Salutations be unto her, and praise. Holy be her dust, as the tiers of light come down on it from Heaven.