

Birth and Childhood of Baha'u'llah

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Birth and Childhood of Baha'u'llah

David Merrick

2008

Early Life of Bahá'u'lláh

Father, Family, Lineage, Location

Looking north onto the shore of the Caspian Sea, and nestling against the protective rocky peaks to the south, lies the small village of Takur. This village is the ancestral home of one of the most ancient,

wealthy and renowned families of Nur, a family honoured by its descent from Abraham,

Zoroaster and the ancient Prophets, and through the last Zoroastrian King of Persia. Many members of this family held important Government posts, both in the Civil and the Military.

It was to this illustrious family that Bahá'u'lláh's father was born, and named 'Abbas. As an adult, he was married, and lived within the Persian Capital of Tihran, where he was a favoured minister of the Crown.

Father Named 'Mirza Buzurg'

Bahá'u'lláh's father was distinguished by a special name from the Shah himself. One day the Shah was marvelling at a masterpiece of beautiful writing, wondering if anyone alive could ever create its equal. Bahá'u'lláh's father was suggested, and was sent for. Challenged to match its excellence and beauty, he copied this work of art, adding his own lines, and after illuminating them, he brought the new masterpiece as a present to the Shah.

The Shah was overwhelmed with admiration, and he issued a royal decree giving Bahá'u'lláh's father the name of 'Mirza Buzurg'; he also gave him a robe of honour, which he had himself worn, and exempted his entire village from tax. A few years later, Bahá'u'lláh's father was made a high-ranking advisor to the Shah's own son, and so he prospered in this and many

other ways.

Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh's father had seven wives, and a great many children through them. At dawn, on the second day of the Islamic Year, on 12 November 1817, his wife Khadijih Khanum gave birth to the eldest of her surviving sons.

At that very same moment, Shaykh Ahmad, who announced the coming of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, was found fallen upon his face, repeating in wrapt devotion the words, 'God is Great!' and saying, 'That which I have been announcing to you is now revealed. At this very hour the light of the Promised One has broken, and is shedding illumination upon the world.'

Given the name of Husayn-'Ali, as the Child grew from an infant into adulthood, He astounded all who encountered Him, and would later, as Bahá'u'lláh, change the face of history.

Infancy

From His birth, Bahá'u'lláh never cried, always remaining in a most remarkable state of peacefulness. His mother was completely astonished, and before long it became obvious to everyone around, that her Child was entirely different from other children.

Residence

Bahá'u'lláh was brought up on the outskirts of Tihran, close to a moat. Part of every year, typically in the summer months, He would spend in His father's great mansion in their ancestral village of Takur, on the shores of the sea.

In a prominent place of this mansion, there still survives the inscription of Bahá'u'lláh's father, recording, "When you reach the threshold of the Beloved, say 'Yea'; for 'Peace' and 'Upon Thee' find no place there.

This is the vale of Love, pause your steps; this is holy ground, cast off your shoes!"

Character and Qualities

Bahá'u'lláh as a child displayed a purity of character quite extraordinary, and a wonderful, innate wisdom and knowledge.

He greatly loved outdoor life, spending most of His time in the garden or fields.

Extremely kind and generous, He had an incredible power of attraction, which was felt by all. People always crowded around Him, children

were devoted to Him, and the ministers and people of the Court would gather about Him.

Schooling

As He grew up, Bahá'u'lláh desired no schooling. He received a little customary education at home, in riding, using a sword or gun, good manners, calligraphy, poetries, and the ability to read out the words of the Qur'an.

Despite a lack education, Bahá'u'lláh shone forth in wisdom and ability, and all who knew Bahá'u'lláh were astonished. It was usual for them to say, that such a child will not live beyond maturity.

Letter [5]

To His aunt, when still so young in years, the Child Bahá'u'lláh wrote this remarkable and most literate letter:-

"He is the Well-Beloved! God willing you are abiding restfully beneath the canopy of Divine mercy, and the tabernacle of His bounty. Although to outward seeming, I am little and cannot write, yet because this Illiterate

One is clinging to the Divine Lote tree, He can read without knowledge and write without being taught. And this fact is clear and evident in the spiritual realm to those endowed with insight. Those who are outside have been, and still are, unaware of this mystery."

Dream of Swimming in an Ocean [5-6]

One night Bahá'u'lláh appeared in a dream, which was so very vivid, it awakened its dreamer.

Bahá'u'lláh was in a garden; great birds flew overhead; they attacked Him, yet they were powerless to harm Him. He was bathing in the sea, and

began to swim in a vast, limitless ocean; His body shone out, and illuminated the sea! Above the waters, His long, jet-black locks, stood forth, floating in great profusion above the waves in all directions. Large numbers of fish gathered around Him, each fish holding fast to the end of a hair with its mouth.

There were every kind of fish: large fish, small fish, white and black: and wherever

He swam, they followed the light of His face. Such a vast number of fish clinging so tightly, caused no damage: not even a hair was lost from His head. Free and unrestrained, Bahá'u'lláh moved above the waters, with all the fish following His light.

His father was stunned by this dream, and with the Shah's permission, laid it before his well-known seer. The seer, swept away with

amazement,
explained how the garden and its birds, and the limitless ocean with its fish,
were
the world of existence, and its people, and that Bahá'u'lláh would
single-handedly
triumph over it, unhindered and alone; yet, he declared himself quite unable to
imagine how it could ever come to pass. So His father took him to see
Bahá'u'lláh,
who was just a Child of five, and his praise and admiration of Bahá'u'lláh
was
so profuse, and so great his concern that He be protected, that His father
became
yet more passionately devoted to Him.

Short in Size [7]

As Bahá'u'lláh was walking one day, and His parents were
watching Him, His mother happened to comment upon His shortness. His father
immediately rejoined that such things had no importance: "Just look how
intelligent He is!" he said:- "What a wonderful mind He has!"

Tax Collector [7]

During His childhood, Bahá'u'lláh witnessed three
confrontations between His father, and a very unjust tax collector, who was
cruelly
demanding payment. Incensed, Bahá'u'lláh, though merely seven, mounted His
horse, and rode for two days to Tihiran, where He sought the dismissal of the
arrogant
tax collector. He succeeded in obtaining the necessary papers ordering his
dismissal, and returned successful to His parents.

Banu Qurayza [12]

The story of the execution for treason of a large number of
Jews, one day came before Bahá'u'lláh's eyes, and He was so moved, so
profoundly
filled with sadness and grief. Yet He felt surging before Him the limitless
ocean of God's mercy and forgiveness, and He implored God to grant in the world
the establishment of unity and love.

Transfiguration [12]

A short while after, suddenly before dawn, Bahá'u'lláh was
overcome by a transfiguration, lasting for twelve days, unceasingly, bringing
glad-tidings of the highest success and joy. Entirely transforming His manners,
thought and speech, from thenafter the ocean of His words began to surge, and
the sun of assurance shone forth from Him.

Skill and Renown [13]

By the time he was thirteen, Bahá'u'lláh was renowned for

His ability to discuss any matter, and resolve any problem presented before Him.

He was always courteous and patient, and only the disrespectful reference to a Messenger or Chosen One of God was able to arouse His displeasure; even then, He would address the offender with kindness and calm.

He appeared before large gatherings in discussions with the leading clergy, resolving intricate religious questions, whilst everyone paid deep attention and interest, and His explanations became the authoritative word on every matter.

Despite these abilities, the kulah on His head and the locks flowing over His shoulders meant no one ever suspected a person of such a class would become the fountain of a new Truth and revitalising Spirit.

Political Unambition

Bahá'u'lláh was held in the highest regard by all levels of society, yet He showed no desire for the splendid ranks and positions opening out everywhere before Him; the Prime Minister himself had even offered Him a post in the government. All these very things His ancestors pursued and cultivated, and His relatives held out great hopes for Him. His lack of interest in such things of importance was therefore a cause of great surprise and frequent comment.

Generosity

Whilst declining such wealthy position and income, Bahá'u'lláh showed astonishing generosity. The doors of His home were open to all, and He always had many guests, giving abundantly to all in need. He was a refuge for every weak one, a shelter for the fearful one, kind to the destitute, and lenient and loving to all creatures. This unbounded generosity amazed everyone, as He did not use it to promote His position; rather, it was clear to everyone that such free generosity would quickly cause His wealth to disappear entirely. The more spiritually-minded saw in these acts His attraction to the celestial realm of God and a great destiny to come.

Turbaned Divines on Gabriel

One day, two hugely-turbaned divines were instructing some ladies hidden behind a curtain. They were questioning whether the angel Gabriel was superior to the first Imam's servant; and, whether the brother of the martyred third Imam was superior to a certain companion of Muhammad. Bahá'u'lláh was astonished at the tone of their debate, saying that since the Holy Spirit descended upon the heart of Muhammad through Gabriel, then even the first Imam himself could not remotely reach Him!

Dream of the Promised One (Qa'im)

Distantly related to Bahá'u'lláh, there was a famous religious doctor who taught a thousand scholars, and he would present them with complex questions to resolve.

It was Bahá'u'lláh's custom to stop by. One morning after prayer, this religious doctor told Bahá'u'lláh's mother of a most impressive and powerful dream he had experienced. In this dream, he found himself outside a house. No one was allowed to enter, and the door-keeper told him that the Promised

One was inside, in a secret meeting with Bahá'u'lláh. He was very surprised that the son of a government advisor should be so privileged, instead of someone with a religious calling like himself; after a little reflection, he decided that this privilege of a secret meeting with the Promised One must have been given Bahá'u'lláh by virtue of His distant kinship to himself!

Daughters of Fatimih and Mary

On another occasion, Bahá'u'lláh was sitting with this same man, along with other scholars and divines. They asked Bahá'u'lláh to resolve a question, as they had been unable to answer it themselves with any satisfaction.

How could Fatimih, they wondered, be the best of all women, except the one born of Mary, when Mary had no daughter? Bahá'u'lláh replied that this was simply in praise of there being no woman comparable to Fatimih. The teacher held a stern silence, and the next day rebuked his disciples for letting an unturbaned youth solve a matter which they, with all their years of training, were unable to resolve.

Dream of the Trunks

On another night, this same doctor had a second dream, in which he came across a room full of trunks. He was told the trunks belonged to Bahá'u'lláh, and when he opened one, he found it packed with books. All the lines of the books were studded with gems, shining so brilliantly, that he awoke out of his dream.

Jesus Christ at Door

One day, Bahá'u'lláh was present in the gathering of a famous Sufi whom the Shah admired immensely. The sufi began boasting that if his servant brought him news that Jesus was at the door asking to see him, he was

so detached he would feel no wish to go. Many kept silent; others murmured flatteringly their assent. Bahá'u'lláh alone spoke up, turning to the boaster, and challenging him. "The Shah is very devoted to you; however, if the chief executioner and ten men arrived at the door and told you the monarch wanted to see you, would you be calm, or troubled?" The sufi paused for a while, and admitted he would feel rather anxious. Bahá'u'lláh's authoritative statement, that he should therefore not make such claims, left him lost for a reply.

Puppet Show [13]

When Bahá'u'lláh was still a child, His father arranged for one of His older brothers to marry. The festivities lasted for seven days and nights, and on the final day, there was a puppet show. A large number of princes, dignitaries, and notables gathered from the capital for the occasion, and Bahá'u'lláh was sitting in one of the upper rooms of the building, watching.

A tent was pitched in the courtyard, and from it soon some tiny human-like figures emerged, crying, "His Majesty is coming! Arrange the seats at once!" Other figures came out, engaged in sweeping and sprinkling of water, and then the chief town crier bade the people assemble for the audience with the king. Several groups began to arrive and take their places, the first wearing

hats and sashes, the second wielding battleaxes, and the third of footmen and executioners with batons. Finally, the king himself appeared in majesty and splendour, crowned with a royal diadem, bearing himself with unspeakable superiority and grandeur. Advancing with pauses, he proceeded with great seriousness to his throne.

As he sat upon his throne, a surge of shots were fired, and trumpets sounded; the king and the tent were enveloped in a great pall of smoke. As it cleared, the king was seen upon his throne surrounded by a suite of ministers, princes, and dignitaries standing to attention. A thief was brought before the king, and ordered to be beheaded. The chief executioner cut off his head, with blood flowing from him. News was brought in of a rebellion, and the king reviewed and despatched several regiments and artillery. Cannons began booming from behind the tent, and the battle was announced.

The royal scene came to an end; the curtain was drawn down, and twenty minutes later, a man emerged from behind the tent carrying a box under his arm.

Bahá'u'lláh asked him about the box, and he replied that all the lavish display was now contained within that box. Bahá'u'lláh experienced the world as an impermanent and inconsequential puppet display, and marvelled how

men should pride themselves upon the vain and fleeting things around them.

Asiyih Khanum [15]

When Bahá'u'lláh was nearly fifteen, His elder sister was married.

The man she married had a younger, only sister, whose name was Asiyih Khanum.

She

was an endearing, vivacious and very beautiful young woman, tall, slender and graceful, with dark blue eyes and a wonderful intelligence. She was most considerate

and gentle with everybody, her actions overflowing with loving-kindness springing

from a pure heart. Her very presence enfolded everyone in the fragrance of her good spirits. When He was eighteen, Bahá'u'lláh's sister asked their father if

he would seek Asiyih for Bahá'u'lláh: and so their marriage took place in October 1835.

Bahá'u'lláh later named her Navvab, and bestowed upon her the unique distinction of being His everlasting companion in all the worlds of God.

Asiyih came from a noble and wealthy family; her wedding treasures were so extensive, forty mules were needed to carry them to His home. For six months before the marriage, a jeweller worked at her home, preparing jewellery

- even the buttons of her garments were gold, set with precious stones. These two marriages roused much interest in the land, the people seeing great wealth adding to more wealth.

Father and Mother of the Poor

Yet the wealth they inherited, they spent on charitable ends.

Taking part as little as possible in State functions, social ceremonies, and the luxurious habits of high-placed and wealthy families, they treated worldly pleasures of no worth, and occupied themselves instead in caring for the poor, and for all who were unhappy or troubled. From their doors nobody was ever turned

away, and a welcoming table was spread for all who might come. The poor women flowed

constantly to Asiyih, pouring out their stories of woe, and were comforted and consoled by her love and helpfulness.

Bahá'u'lláh was called "the Father of the Poor," whilst Asiyih was named "the Mother of Consolation."

Bahá'u'lláh told to warn Father [17]

The Shah passed away, and his grandson took up the throne. Through the good friendship of the Prime Minister, Bahá'u'lláh's father became both

governor

and tax collector over a large and rebellious region, taming the unruly inhabitants with such excellence and justice, that he was commended by the Shah.

A vain man persuaded the Shah to put this friend treacherously to death, and then

rose immediately to the high position of Prime Minister himself.

Bahá'u'lláh's

father could not hide his feelings of horror and disgust, and on hearing a rumour that the Shah had replaced him, expressed his delight in a letter to a Prince, who then showed the letter to him. Infuriated, the Prime Minister sent for Bahá'u'lláh and showed him his father's letter, asking why he had deserved

this. Bahá'u'lláh held silence. One of those present took the letter, and trying

to smooth matters away, stated it was a forgery. The Prime Minister exclaimed this was impossible, since no one else could produce such a beautiful calligraphy and style of writing. Still Bahá'u'lláh kept silent, and the Prime

Minister advised Him to write to His father to ensure it should not happen again. However, firm in eliminating his chief rivals, he retaliated as soon as he was able, and had Bahá'u'lláh's father dismissed from the governorship, stopped

his annual allowance, and induced his last wife, the daughter of the previous Shah, whom he had married a few years earlier, to divorce him. In dire financial straits and with such a very large family, Bahá'u'lláh's father was driven into selling part of his properties and mortgaging others, including those

in Tihiran where he and his family resided, whilst flooding destroyed the better part of the mansion he had built and richly furnished in Takur. Some while later he bought them back through Bahá'u'lláh.

Though His father was brought to ruin by such powerful enemies, yet they continued to hold Bahá'u'lláh in very high esteem.

Father's Woes - Divorce, Reselling and Resettlement

With the backing of the Prime Minister and her powerful nephew, his last wife forced through the divorce with such a heavy settlement that

he could not pay it immediately: so she had Bahá'u'lláh's father imprisoned in

his own house, and set men to beat him daily and torture him to extract the money

from him. At last, he was obliged to sell again his houses and furnishings in the capital for a negligible sum, leading to the separation of Bahá'u'lláh from

His brother, who went to live near the entrance of a Mosque, whilst

Bahá'u'lláh

rented a place to live near the Gate of Shimiran, near the theological college where Mulla Husayn would stay on his journey, carrying the message of the Báb to Tihiran.

Bahá'u'lláh Living near Gate of Shimiran

Bahá'u'lláh took with Him, His mother, wife, other step-mothers and the other brothers and sisters, and remained in this residence for the remaining years of His stay in Iran. The children of Bahá'u'lláh - 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahiyyih Khanum and Mirza Mihdi - were all born to Asiyih Khanum in this rented accommodation.

Regaining Houses

The storms eventually subsided, and Bahá'u'lláh's father attempted to regain the houses auctioned off for such a negligible sum. The illegality of the sale was announced by some noted divines; however, no reparation was ever made.

Passing of Father [22]

He made plans to retire to 'Iraq; however, death intervened, and Bahá'u'lláh's father passed away, in 1839. He was carried on to 'Iraq, and remained remembered highly for his calligraphy. Bahá'u'lláh, though still a youth, was left responsible for His younger brothers and sisters, and the management of the extensive family estates.

Position Offered

With His father's passing, the Government was eager for Bahá'u'lláh to succeed His father in the Ministry. Bahá'u'lláh declined this custom, and so the Prime Minister left Him to pursue the higher-minded aims He clearly sought, and continued to show Bahá'u'lláh the utmost consideration, visiting Him in His home, and addressing Him as his own son.

Bahá'u'lláh's Youthful Position

Receiving such continuous marks of consideration and favour from the Prime Minister, despite the great alienation from His father, his successor and other ministers became filled with envy and resented the superiority which Bahá'u'lláh, a mere youth, was clearly given, and they expected and feared the time He would succeed His father.

Jealousy

The high regard of the Prime Minister for Bahá'u'lláh meant

he would inevitably come to seek Bahá'u'lláh's support for one of his intrigues.

The uprightness of Bahá'u'lláh's dealings with the Prime Minister, His skill in handling such a confrontation and His faith in Divine protection, ensured that He came through unscathed.

Purchase of Estate Thwarted

One day, the Prime Minister was passing through a village belonging to Bahá'u'lláh. He was so impressed by its charm, beauty and abundant water that he decided to become its owner. He summoned Bahá'u'lláh to purchase the village for him immediately. Bahá'u'lláh replied that He willingly would have done so had it been wholly His, but other inhabitants shared the village with Him, and He would need to have their approval. So the Prime Minister began to plan an underhand means to gain the property. Bahá'u'lláh, with the consent of everyone concerned, transferred the village to the Shah's sister, who had often desired to become its owner. This made the Prime Minister furious, and he attempted to seize it forcibly, claiming he had purchased it. His representatives were severely rebuked by those of the Shah's sister. He complained to the Shah, who had that same night learnt of the matter. The Shah demanded the Prime Minister give up the idea, and so he in turn summoned Bahá'u'lláh and strove by every means to discredit His name. Bahá'u'lláh responded vigorously to every charge, and succeeded in establishing His innocence. In a fury, the Prime Minister declared how Bahá'u'lláh must be plotting against him, as seen by the number and variety of His daily guests. Bahá'u'lláh made it clear how out of the abundance of His heart, He was sharing His bread with his fellow men. The Prime Minister dared not reply, and though supported by the religious and civil powers of Persia, he found himself defeated in every contest he ventured against Bahá'u'lláh.

Other Encounters Summarised

On various other occasions, Bahá'u'lláh's innocence was established over His opponents' attacks, and these triumphs enhanced His position and spread abroad His fame. All men high and low marvelled at His miraculous success in emerging unscathed from the most perilous encounters. Nothing short of Divine protection, they felt, could have ensured His safety. Not once did Bahá'u'lláh submit to the arrogance, greed, and treachery of those

around, despite the gravest perils. Whilst constantly associating with the highest religious and ministerial figures of the land, He would fearlessly champion the cause of truth before them and their gatherings, asserting the rights of the downtrodden, defending the weak and protecting the innocent.

Message of the Báb [26]

Immediately following the Call of God proclaimed by the Báb, Mulla Husayn set off at the Báb's own bidding and sealed with His power and protection. Seeking that incomparable light hidden in Tihiran, he at length arrived

in the religious academy near to Bahá'u'lláh's home. His message was rejected contemptuously by the teacher there; however a student, overhearing with rapture from the neighbouring room, came to him secretly at midnight. Enquiring after the sons of Mirza Buzurg, the student related the extraordinary character of Bahá'u'lláh, His virtuous life, high attainments, loving-kindness and liberality, His sole occupation being to cheer the disconsolate and feed the hungry, befriending all, roaming the woods and delighting in the beauty of the countryside. Mulla Husayn, with an eagerness and satisfaction that baffled the student, entrusted him with a scroll wrapped in a piece of cloth, to be handed to Bahá'u'lláh the next day at the hour of dawn.

The student approached the house of Bahá'u'lláh, and recognized His brother Mirza Musa standing at the gate. He went into the house and soon reappeared bringing a message of welcome, ushering him into His presence. The student presented the scroll to Mirza Musa, who laid it before Bahá'u'lláh.

Bidding

both be seated, He unfolded the scroll. Glancing at its contents, He began to read aloud certain passages, enrapturing the room with the sweetness of His voice. After reading a page of the scroll, He turned to His brother and declared

that whoever believed in the Qur'an, yet hesitated for a moment to realise those

soul-stirring words were from the same Source, had indeed strayed afar. Saying no

more, he sent the student back to Mulla Husayn with a rare loaf of Russian sugar and a package of tea, with the expression of His appreciation and love.

Mulla Husayn received the gifts with bowed head, and fervently kissed his hand and eyes and expressed words of overwhelming joy, such that the student was quite bewildered. As Mulla Husayn left a few days later, he bade the student keep everything secret within his heart, and pray the Almighty protect Bahá'u'lláh, that the Tree of the Divine Call would grow and flourish, and overshadow all mankind.

Bahá'u'lláh Arises

Bahá'u'lláh arose, consecrating His life to the service of the Call of the Báb. At first He called upon His relatives and connections, and

then fearlessly identified Himself with the new teachings, distinguishing Himself by the remarkable part He played in their diffusion. He flung aside every consideration of fame, wealth and position; neither the taunts and threats of friends and enemies could induce Him from championing the Cause. No effort or sacrifice was too great in His devotion for the Faith that inspired Him. So highly did Bahá'u'lláh's fellow-disciples esteem Him, they refrained from mentioning His name, and simply called Him in the plural as 'They'.

Summary

Guiding the Faith through its break from Islám, receiving torturous punishments, arrests, persecution, and abuse, assisting the Bábis through their trials, and in the persecution that followed the martyrdom of the Báb, imprisoned for execution in an underground reservoir in crushing chains of gargantuan weight; riding safely through the extermination of the Báb's supporters, Bahá'u'lláh arose like a Sun that shone its rays across the world amidst a life of continual tribulation and exile, until His ultimate triumph over all that ranged itself against Him.

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