

Who Was the Báb?

By studying the life and words of the Báb, we can discover every proof that God has bestowed on His great Messengers and Redeemers:

Thou art the Repository of all Our proofs in this Day.¹ The Báb

On May 22, 1844, a young man who called Himself the Báb (the Gate) proclaimed Himself the One promised in all Holy Scriptures. He declared the dawning of a new day in the religious history of humankind: the day of peace and unity, the age of the coming of the heavenly Kingdom to the earthly, the day of divine justice. Here is an invitation from the Báb to all seekers and lovers of truth:

Assuredly we are today living in the Days of God. These are the glorious days on the like of which the sun hath never risen in the past. These are the days which the people in bygone times eagerly expected. What hath then befallen you that ye are fast asleep? These are the days wherein God hath caused the Day-Star of Truth to shine resplendent. What hath then caused you to keep your silence? These are the appointed days which ye have been yearningly awaiting in the past—the days of the advent of divine justice.² The Báb

Just as John the Baptist foretold the coming of One greater than Himself, so did the Báb. He referred to One still to come by many titles, among them *Bahá'u'lláh* (Glory of God).

The Báb came from southern Persia, where God promised to set His throne. Within the brief span of His ministry (1844-1850), He attracted many followers, thousands of whom were massacred, mostly by order of fanatical religious leaders of Islam who feared the loss of their powers. The Báb Himself was imprisoned and finally executed in 1850.

The Báb's mission was primarily symbolic of the destruction of the old order; Bahá'u'lláh's mission was the creation of a new order to replace the old. One came to clear the way, the other to build.

All God's Messengers reveal the same signs of greatness. They manifest His light with full glory and splendor. If we know what a genuine diamond is the sheep Christ (John 10:11)

The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life... Christ (Matt. 20:28)

I have sacrificed myself wholly for Thee; I have accepted curses for Thy sake, and have yearned for naught but martyrdom in the path of Thy love. Sufficient witness unto me is God, the Exalted, the Protector, the Ancient of Days.³ The Báb

I heard a Voice calling in my inmost being: "Do thou sacrifice the thing which Thou lovest most in the path of God..."⁴ The Báb

For assuredly *whatsoever God hath decreed for Me shall come to pass* and naught else save that which God hath ordained for us shall ever touch us. *Woe betide him from whose hands floweth evil*, and blessed the man from whose hands floweth good.⁵ The Báb

Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! *Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!*

Christ (Matt. 18:7)

The Báb was martyred in July of 1850, a few months short of His 31st birthday. His martyrdom is one of the best documented and most incredible events in religious history. It was observed by an estimated audience of 10,000 and recorded by writers of various religious persuasions, and

even by the official historian of the state that ordered the execution.

First, a few words regarding the reasons behind the martyrdom. Why did Christ and the Báb offer their lives? An essential feature of the design of creation is that every worthy achievement must be preceded or accompanied by a sacrifice. Whether it is raising well-behaved children, getting a degree, staying healthy, losing weight, or eliminating racism, sexism, and poverty, some degree of sacrifice is required.

To grow and multiply, to bear flowers and fruits, the seed must sacrifice itself:

Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Christ (John 12:24)

What is by far the greatest achievement? It is educating humanity, elevating the human spirit to everlasting hope and happiness; it is leading the soul from the kingdom of earth to the Kingdom of Heaven. Can such a glorious purpose be achieved without sacrifice?

Human beings are best inspired by models who show their devotion and sincerity through examples. The first ones to offer perfect examples of devotion, nobility, and self-sacrifice are God's chosen Messengers. If they, with all their perfections and powers, submitted themselves to the law of

sacrifice, are we not inspired to do the same?

I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you.

Christ (John 13:15)

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

Christ (John 10:11)

To most of us, self-sacrifice has negative connotations. It implies giving something away. That is a misconception. Self-sacrifice involves no loss; it is the process by which short-term interests are exchanged for long-term dividends. It is like exchanging junk bonds for reliable and late-maturing bonds, or junk food for healthy food. Self-sacrifice is the catalyzer of perfection; it is the yeast that elevates the human spirit by breaking down apathy, inertia, complacency, pride, self-glory, and attachment to the world. It is the price that must be paid for a lasting and genuine happiness.

God's ways are often opposite to ours. By His standard, "We must lose to gain; we must give to obtain; we must be humble to be exalted; we must be least to be greatest; we must die to live."

...how can My way accord with thine?⁶

Bahá'u'lláh

Behold how contrary are the ways of the Manifestations of God, as ordained by the King of creation, to the ways and desires of men!⁷

Bahá'u'lláh

All great Messengers have endured pain and suffering. The only difference is this: Some of them have become martyrs, others *living* martyrs. Death does not necessarily impose the gravest suffering. In some ways, life can be far more painful than death. Bahá'u'lláh's life was of this kind. Martyrdom attracts our attention because, in addition to being tragic, it is dramatic. The deaths of Christ and the Báb were of this kind.

In the Báb's death we can discern evidence of a divine power at work. Should we use that evidence as proof of His station? Definitely not. Then what purpose should it serve? Only this: *It should elevate us from apathy to awareness. It is not evidence in itself, but a call for us to investigate the evidence.* For instance, you know you will be asleep at 7:00 a.m. You set your clock to awaken you at that time to be ready for an invited guest. In the state of sleep, you are unaware of the coming of the guest. *When you awaken, you begin to see and hear. That is the only purpose miracles should serve.* You do not welcome your guest because of the alarm clock, you welcome him because you see him and recognize him with your own eyes.

With these points in mind, let us proceed with the story of the Báb's martyrdom. The Persian government wanted to make the execution of the Báb a lesson to all people, especially to His followers. Hence, a decision was made to make it a public event.

But, as we shall see, God had a different plan.

Just before the time of the execution, the Báb was in prison speaking to a disciple. A government official came to the Báb's prison cell and told Him to come to the public square for the impending execution. The Báb asked for a little time to finish His conversation with the disciple, but the official would not comply. The Báb offered this warning: "Not until I have said to him all those things that I wish to say, can any earthly power silence Me. Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall they be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling, to the last word, My intention."⁸ The official ignored the warning and took the Báb (along with a young disciple who wanted to die with Him) to the public square to be shot by a regiment of 750 soldiers, who stood in three lines ready to fire.

The regiment was headed by an Armenian colonel, Sám Khán, who had no animosity toward the Báb and no interest in executing two young men for their religious beliefs. To absolve himself of responsibility, he went to the Báb and said, "I profess the Christian Faith and entertain no ill will against you. If your Cause be the Cause of Truth, enable me to free myself from the obligation to shed your blood."⁹

The Báb replied, "Follow your instructions, and if your intention be

sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you from your perplexity."¹⁰

The martyrdom of the Báb and His disciple was planned with precision. To give people a good view of the event, the officials suspended the Báb and His disciple above the ground by putting two heavy ropes under their armpits and tying the ropes to a heavy nail driven into a thick wall. The Báb's disciple pleaded to be placed in such a position that his body would shield that of his Master. He was suspended so that his head rested on his Master's chest.

At about 10:00 a.m., the gaze of thousands of onlookers was fixed on the two young men suspended in the air. The first of the three lines of soldiers, 250 of them, were ordered to fire. They fired, then knelt so that the second and then the third lines of soldiers could fire. The firing of 750 bullets created a great cloud of smoke that obscured the people's vision. (The smoke came from the gun powder used in those days.) For a few minutes, people were blinded, but when the smoke cleared, they saw no trace of the Báb. His disciple was standing unharmed on the ground just below the point of suspension.

It is hard to imagine the uproar, the astonishment, and the confusion that seized the onlookers, especially the government officials. The nervous and puzzled officials frantically searched for the Báb. Where do you think He

was found? In His original prison cell, completing His unfinished conversation with His disciple.

The man who located Him was the same man who had taken Him for execution. When he arrived, the Báb was ready. His face radiated with unruffled calm. He welcomed the official by saying, "Now you may proceed to fulfill your intention."¹¹ The guard was so shaken by what he saw that he refused to take the Báb a second time. He left the scene and resigned from his position.

In the meantime, the Christian colonel, who had been looking for any reason to excuse himself from the ominous task, could not have been more jubilant. He saw this as a sure sign from God and immediately withdrew his soldiers and swore never again to engage in that task, even if his refusal led to his death.

A second regiment was ordered into action. Now two hours had passed. It was about noon. Because of the seemingly miraculous event, the Báb had a more receptive audience. He had a chance to address the people:

Had you believed in Me, O wayward generation, every one of you would have followed the example of this youth [the disciple who wanted to die with Him]...The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you.¹²

Everything was now ready. The second regiment took position and was ordered to fire. This time the bullets reached their targets. The two bodies were so shattered and riddled with bullets, they blended into one mass of mangled flesh and bone, except for the face of the Báb, which miraculously remained intact.

Unto God do I commit Mine affair
...Naught shall touch Me besides
that which God, My Lord, hath pre-
ordained for Me. In Him have I
placed My whole trust...¹³ The Báb

I am well pleased to lay down My
life in Thy path and ere long to re-
turn to Thy presence. Unto Thee be
praise in the heavens and on the
earth.¹⁴ The Báb

Glory be unto Thee, O my God.
Thou art well aware that I have pro-
claimed Thy Word and have not
failed in the mission Thou didst
enjoin upon me.¹⁵ The Báb

I, verily, have not fallen short of
My duty to admonish...people, and
to devise means whereby they may
turn towards God, their Lord, and
believe in God, their Creator.¹⁶
The Báb

The One called the Desire of nations,
the Savior and Redeemer of human-
kind, Lord of Lords and King of
Kings, was made a sacrifice for the
world. This is the way it has been and
may always be:

You always resist the Holy Spirit!
Was there ever a prophet your fathers

did not persecute? They even killed
those who predicted the coming of
the Righteous One. Acts 7:51-52

Great spirits have always encoun-
tered opposition from mediocre
minds. Albert Einstein

The sacrifices made by the Báb and
Jesus present us with two dramatic
examples by which God teaches us
lessons of detachment and dedication.
He allows the Ones He loves most to
become sacrificial Lambs. The few
examples of self-sacrifice by God's
chosen Messengers have had and will
continue to have far more influence
in elevating the human spirit than
countless books of commandments and
counsels.

How did this seemingly incredible
event happen? The only explanation
offered is that some bullets hit the
rope first and severed it, thus allowing
the Báb and His disciple to fall to the
ground. Did God intervene or was it
merely a coincidence? We have the
choice to come to either conclusion.

1. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 159.
2. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 161.
3. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 59.
4. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 232.
5. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 15.
6. *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Arabic), no. 56.
7. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 57.

8. *The Dawn-Breakers*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1953, p. 509.
9. *The Dawn-Breakers*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1953, p. 512.
10. *The Dawn-Breakers*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1953, p. 512.
11. *The Dawn-Breakers*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1953, p. 513.
12. *The Dawn-Breakers*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1953, p. 514.
13. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 27.
14. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 27.
15. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 166.
16. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 156.



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