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Bahá'u'lláh**

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Bahá'u'lláh raised the banner of universal peace and brotherhood, and revealed the Word of God. Although His enemies combined their forces against Him, He was victorious over them as God had promised Him when in chains in the prison of Tihrán. During His own lifetime, His Message revived the hearts of thousands of people and many gave their lives in His Path. And today, His Teachings continue to spread throughout the world. Nothing can prevent Him from achieving His ultimate goal, which is to unify humankind in one universal Cause, in one common Faith.

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Constantinople was the seat of the Ottoman Empire. Here again, Bahá'u'lláh's great wisdom and personal charm began to attract an increasing number of people. "He must not stay in Constantinople any longer," murmured the fanatical Muslim clergy who convinced the authorities to exile Him to the town of Adrianople. In Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh wrote Tablets to the kings and the rulers of the world calling them to abandon the ways of oppression and dedicate themselves to the welfare of their people. Then, His enemies conceived a most cruel punishment. He and His family would be exiled to 'Akká which at the time was the worst penal colony in the entire empire. Surely He would perish in the harsh conditions of that prison-city, thought the feeble-minded men who imagined they could stop what God Himself had set in motion.

The hardships Bahá'u'lláh suffered in 'Akká are too many to recount. At the beginning He was imprisoned alone in a cell where even His children were not permitted to see Him. He lacked every means of comfort and was surrounded by enemies day and night.

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Bahá'u'lláh was born on 12 November 1817 in Tihiran, the capital city of Persia. From childhood He showed extraordinary qualities, and His behavior convinced His parents that He was destined for greatness. Bahá'u'lláh's father, a distinguished minister in the court of the king, had immense love for his Son.

One night he dreamt that Bahá'u'lláh was swimming in a limitless ocean, His body shining and illuminating the vast sea. Around His head radiated His long jet-black hair, floating in all directions. A multitude of fish gathered around Him, each holding on to one hair. Great as was the number of fish, not a single hair was detached from Bahá'u'lláh's head. Free and unrestrained, He moved above the waters and they all followed Him. Bahá'u'lláh's father asked a man renowned for his wisdom to explain the dream. He was told that the limitless ocean was the world of being. Alone and single-handed, Bahá'u'lláh would achieve sovereignty over it. The multitude of fish represented the turmoil which He would arouse among the peoples of the world. He would have the unfailing protection of the Almighty, and nothing would harm Him.

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By the time Bahá'u'lláh was fourteen, He was famous in the court of the king for His wisdom and learning. He was twenty-two years old when His father died and the government offered Him the same high position. But Bahá'u'lláh had no intention of spending His time in the management of worldly affairs. He left behind the court and its ministers to follow the path set for Him by the Almighty. He spent His time helping the oppressed, the sick and the poor, and soon He became known as a champion of the cause of justice.

At the age of twenty-seven, Bahá'u'lláh received, through a special messenger, some of the Writings of the Báb Who was proclaiming the nearness of the Day of God, the Day when a new Manifestation of God would bring to the world the peace, unity and justice long-awaited by humanity. Bahá'u'lláh immediately accepted the Message of the Báb and became one of His most enthusiastic followers.

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April of 1863 was a month of great sadness for the population of Baghdád. The One Whom they had grown to love was leaving their city, heading for what to them was an unknown destination. A few days before His departure, Bahá'u'lláh moved to a garden on the outskirts of the city, raised His tent and for twelve days received the stream of visitors who came to say farewell. The followers of the Báb came to this garden with heavy hearts; some would accompany Bahá'u'lláh on this next stage of His exile, but many would have to stay behind and be deprived of close association with Him. But God had not willed that this occasion would be one of sadness. The doors of His infinite bounty were opened wide, and Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed to those around Him that He was the One foretold by the Báb—He Whom God would make manifest. Sadness gave way to boundless joy; hearts were uplifted and souls were enkindled with the fire of His love. For centuries to come, these twelve days, from 21 April to 2 May, will be celebrated by Bahá'ís everywhere as the Festival of Ridvan, the anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh of His world-embracing Mission.

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During Bahá'u'lláh's absence, the conditions of the Bábí community had declined rapidly. Baha'u'llah set out to fill the persecuted and confused followers of the Báb with a new spirit. Although He had not yet announced His own great Station, the power and wisdom of His words began to win the loyalty of an increasing number of Bábí's and the admiration of people of every walk of life. But the fanatical Muslim clergy and His jealous brother Mírzá Yahyá could not bear to see the tremendous influence Bahá'u'lláh had on such a large number of souls. They complained and complained to the authorities until the government of Persia joined hands with some of the officials of the Ottoman Empire to remove Bahá'u'lláh farther away from His homeland, this time to the city of Constantinople.

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But alas, those who ruled over the people of Persia, blinded by their own selfish desires, set out to persecute the followers of the Báb with great savagery. Bahá'u'lláh despite being known for His nobility, was not spared. A little over eight years after the Báb's Declaration, and two years after the Báb Himself had been martyred, He was thrown into a dark dungeon called the Black Pit. The chains put around His neck were so heavy that He could not lift His head. Here Bahá'u'lláh spent four terrible months of severe hardship. Yet it was in this same dungeon that the Spirit of God filled His soul and revealed to Him that He was the Promised One of all ages. From this dark prison, the Sun of Bahá'u'lláh rose illuminating the entire creation.

After four months in the Black Pit, and having been stripped of all His possessions, Bahá'u'lláh and His family were sent into exile. In the bitter cold of winter, they traveled along the western mountains of Persia towards Baghdád then a city in the Ottoman Empire and today the capital of Iraq. Words cannot describe their sufferings as they walked hundreds of miles on snow and ice-covered ground on their way to that fate-ladened city.

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The fame of Bahá'u'lláh soon spread throughout Baghdád and other cities of the region, and more and more people came to the door of this exiled Prisoner to receive His blessings. But there were a few who became jealous of His fame. Among them was Bahá'u'lláh's own half-brother Mírzá Yahyá who was living under His loving care. Mírzá Yahyá opposed Bahá'u'lláh thinking that the Bábí's who at the time showed him great respect, would accept him as their leader. Little did he know that by turning against the Manifestation of God, he would bring about his own downfall. For when a Divine Manifestation appears, only those who live in servitude to Him can hope for true greatness. Even His closest relatives cannot forget that He stands apart from all other human beings and has a station which no one else can share.

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Mírzá Yahyá's plotting caused disunity among the followers of the Báb and brought great sadness to Bahá'u'lláh. One night, without telling anyone, He left His home and went to the mountains of Kurdistán. There He lived a secluded life engaged in prayer and meditation. He stayed in a small cave and subsisted on the simplest of foods. No one knew His origin and no one knew His name. But, then, gradually the people of the region began to speak of the "Nameless One", a great Saint who had knowledge bestowed upon Him by God. When the news of this Holy Personage reached Bahá'u'lláh's eldest Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, He immediately recognized the signs of His beloved Father. Letters were sent with a special messenger entreating Bahá'u'lláh to return to Baghdád. This He accepted, bringing to an end a period of painful separation that had lasted two years.

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