

# Life of Tahirih by Avirih

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## HERALDS OF THE NEW DAY

Adapted from addresses given in London by Jináb-i-Avárih, whose great history of the Bahá'í Cause is now being published in Persian in Cairo, Egypt

WHEN Qurratu'l-'Ayn was a child there was in Persia a very celebrated mulla, Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai. So great a scholar was he that throughout all the Muhammadan world he had no peer. Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai was the first divine to attack certain established beliefs prevalent among the Muslims, one of which was that Muhammad in his living, physical body departed from this earth and ascended into heaven, a belief similar to that held by many Christians with regard to the Christ. There were other Muhammadans who in their hearts disbelieved this teaching, but Shaykh Ahmad was the first who had the courage to publicly declare against it.

Another Muhammadan doctrine was that of the resurrection of the body. Shaykh Ahmad taught his students that the physical body cannot go to heaven, that it will not rise but will disintegrate; while the spirit will be taken up and will dwell in the presence of God. He explained that it was the spirit of Muhammad, not his body, which ascended.

Again, the Shaykh taught that God always sends teachers to His people, to lead them to His Kingdom, and that this divine bounty had not ceased.

The Muhammadans believed that there was one - who had been hidden for a thousand years - who would appear suddenly, a great teacher. Shaykh Ahmad said that the Promised One would not come that way; he would be manifest shortly but would be born in the natural way. This teaching of the Shaykh was of utmost importance to the Muslims, because for a thousand years they had been looking for this person who they believed had been in hiding for that period. And now the Shaykh said he would be born, and would appear very shortly.

Although strictly forbidden by the mullás, these teachings found many adherents, until thousands of people became followers of Shaykh Ahmad. They were popularly known as "Shaykhi," and by many of the mullas were called atheists.

At last the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad were carried to Qazvin, the home of Qurratu'l-'Ayn and her relatives. Her father and her eldest uncle, both of whom were mullás, opposed the Shaykh. But her

two younger uncles believed him and secretly became his followers. Qurratu'l-'Ayn's father and uncle had many discussions about the Shaykh, calling him, in private, "Kafir," which means, "Turned away from God and not of the Muhammadan religion." Qurratu'l-'Ayn, then between thirteen and fourteen years of age, listened to these conversations. and said, "The Shaykh is right and my father and uncle are wrong." She secured the books and writings of the Shaykh and read them constantly. Whereupon her father and uncle said to her, "Read *our* books. Read *our* writings. We know better than he."

Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai went from Karbala to Khorassan and thence to Tihran where he met Shah Fathe Ali who so honoured him that he offered to share with him his throne. But the Shaykh refused, and left for Karbala, on his journey passing through Qazvin.

After the death of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai, his disciple Siyyid Kazim, carried forward his teachings, constantly telling his disciples and students that soon, within a few years, the Promised One would appear. Through the assistance of her younger uncle, who believed in Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim, Qurratu'l-'Ayn and [?! was] able to correspond with Siyyid Kazim and secure his writings. She watched eagerly for the Promised One, and often told her younger uncle that unless the new order appeared and the Muhammadan religion was changed the condition of women in the East would become much worse. She would say, "Will a day come when new laws and revelations will be revealed, and shall I be one of the first to follow those teachings and give my life for my sisters?"

Her longing for the coming of the great Teacher and the new era became so strong that at last she besought her uncle, her father and her husband for permission to make a pilgrimage to Karbala. She knew that there she would be able to meet Siyyid Kazim. Through the efforts of her younger uncle this permission was at last granted and she set out upon her wonderful journey, accompanied by this uncle. What were her sorrow and disappointment to hear, three days before her arrival in Karbala, the news of the death of Siyyid Kazim!

However, she soon remembered that the Siyyid had left glad tidings of the One to come, and who would come quickly, and her heart was again filled with happiness. She journeyed on to Karbala and there visited the family of the Siyyid, who gave her access

to many of the Siyyid's unpublished writings, some of which were not even finished. As she read she exclaimed, "Behold, how much the Shaykh and the Siyyid have left us. They have left us a sea of writings."

There was no one to take the place of Siyyid Kazim and teach his students. So Qurratu'l-'Ayn came forward and announced that she would take this place, would teach his followers just what the Siyyid had taught and impart to them his knowledge.

This caused much discussion among the Siyyid's followers. Then thirty-two of the students said, "We will go and hear her once or twice. If we are satisfied we will advise the others to come, and she will teach them."

It was extremely dangerous and difficult for Qurratu'l-'Ayn to teach men and for them to come to hear her for in those days - and even at the present time in many places - women were kept veiled and in utmost seclusion. But Qurratu'l-'Ayn overcame all difficulties, had a curtain arranged in the room, and behind this sat and taught those thirty-two students who came to hear her. They soon recognized her as the one who could best teach them and saw that she was greater than all the divines in Karbala. For more than a year she taught these students, and all the time she wept and prayed that when the Promised One came she might recognize him. And she urged the people to watch for him and obey Him who was shortly to come into the world.

When Mullá Husayn-i-Bushrú'i visited the Báb, and became convinced that he was the Promised One, he told the news to Mullá 'Ali Bastami, who likewise became a follower of the Báb, the second disciple. Mullá 'Ali Bastami then went to Karbala, and there announced the great tidings that the New Light had arisen. When Qurratu'l-'Ayn heard this news she summoned him to her presence and asked, "What proofs have you, and where is he? Mullá 'Ali gave her some of the writings and prayers of the Báb. She took them, and straightway became a believer. The following day when her pupils came for their lesson she announced the glad tidings that the long-expected time was at hand, saying, "All the promises given by the Shaykh and the Siyyid have come to pass. The Promised One is on earth today!"

#### AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

##### *An Incident from the Early Life of the Báb*

WE now wish to know if Qurratu'l-'Ayn had seen or met or had had any direct communication with the Báb previous to his public appearance and, if not, how she became acquainted with him.

She had heard that there was a young man in Shiráz, twenty-five years of age, who from childhood had lived a perfect life and shown wonderful signs of wisdom and inspiration. But she had never seen him or had access to his writings, and she did not know that the one of whom Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim spoke was this same youth. All that she knew concerning the Báb had been told her by Hájí Siyyid Javad, one of the greatest mullás (divines) in Karbala.

When Hájí Siyyid Javad went to Shiraz the Báb, at that time called Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, was between seven and eight years of age. Hájí Siyyid Javad states:

One night I was invited to the house of the uncle of this little boy, and I perceived some beautiful traits in the little child's character which aroused my interest. This uncle, Hájí Siyyid 'Ali, had charge of the little child, as his father had died. I spent the night in the house of Hájí Siyyid 'Ali and, in the early morning I heard a tiny, sweet little voice in the next room, which I found to be a prayer room. It was a little child's voice in prayer - such prayers, such a voice, such devotion that I became absolutely enraptured and I, who was a great divine and was known to be very learned became quite humble upon hearing those beautiful words, so that I wanted to open the door and go out and see who that little child was. I waited patiently until dawn, when Hájí Siyyid 'Ali came and met me. And then that little child came, and I saw that he was the little child between seven and eight years of age - and he it was who had been chanting in the prayer room. As soon as I gazed upon the child I saw such illumination, and on his face an expression so beautiful, that I felt I could not find throughout the whole human race one like him. Before I could ask Hájí Siyyid 'Ali who he was, Hájí Siyyid 'Ali said, 'This is my sister's child.'

When we were having breakfast I asked a few simple questions of the little boy, and he answered me in a deep and grave way, such as one would expect from a very learned person. The child then said, "I am going to school," and left.

I asked where that child went to school and the uncle answered, "He goes to Shaykh Abed to school."

I was so much drawn to the child that I could not stay where I was but got up and followed him to the house of Shaykh Abed.

Shaykh Abed, who was a teacher for the young, was surprised to see me, so great a scholar, so well-known and so famous that the Governor came out

and welcomed me into the town, coming to his house unheralded. I at once understood the wonderment in the face of the Shaykh and said to him:

"I have not come to see you. I followed this little child," pointing to him. Then I asked the Shaykh:

"What do you think of this boy?"

As soon as I said this the Shaykh showed great emotion, saying:

"What are you asking me? This child seems to me to be ready to proclaim, to give out a message to the world. What can I say about this child!"

He said, further: "You see that this child comes to my school as a pupil, but in reality he is my teacher and I am his pupil. During classtime he says so many wonderful things and goes into so many deep and important questions that I have never heard anything like it in all my life. When the children go out to play one sees him sitting there, reading most important writings. If the children come and insist that he go and play with them he goes and engages them in a way which they do not understand; then he slips away and returns to his work."

The admiration of this Shaykh for the child so increased my own admiration and wonder that I returned to the house of Hájí Siyyid 'Ali and told him what Shaykh Abed had said to me. The uncle answered: "I hear so much about this boy. Yet, if I told anything people would only say, 'he likes to speak well of his nephew.'"

Hájí Siyyid Javad urged the uncle to tell him more about the little boy. So at last the uncle consented and told him of a wonderful dream which the child had had, when five years old. He dreamed that a pair of scales hung down from heaven. In one side of the scales was one of the prophets; in the other side, which was empty, this little child was placed by an invisible hand. Then this side weighed down the other, and the prophet seemed to be going up and the little boy coming down.

"Then, again," the uncle said, "we went one day to a public bath. The child slept when there. Suddenly he awoke and said, 'I dreamed that the roof of the bath next door fell down and killed seven ladies.' We were surprised, but when we came out of the bath we discovered that this had actually happened."

If we were to recount in detail the proofs of the truth of the Báb it would take a long time. Suffice it to say that after the Báb proclaimed his mission this uncle and this teacher believed in him, and the uncle was, finally, martyred in his footsteps.

This, indeed, is proof!

All these wonderful incidents about the Báb were related to Qurratu'l-'Ayn by Hájí Siyyid Javad, and thus she came to know him.

When eighteen years old the Báb made a pilgrimage to Karbala, where he met Hájí Siyyid Kazim of Rasht who also recognized signs of the greatness and illumination in this youth. These things and what she had read in the books of old made Qurratu'l-'Ayn confident that the light was to come from Shiráz. Therefore when she heard that the youth, Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, in Shiráz, had proclaimed his mission she instantly believed in him, and when she read some of his writings these confirmed still more deeply her belief.

When she heard this news and became a follower of the Báb her whole attitude, condition and point of view were completely changed. She now spoke with such power and insight that those who had seen and heard her before were astonished, and exclaimed, "This is not the woman we knew before!" She was so aflame that at any gathering of men or women where she spoke she won the entire attention and the very heart and soul of the audience.