*Golden Crowns Series*

Ṭáhirih

*by*

Lowell Johnson



The National Spiritual Assembly

of the Bahá’ís of South and West Africa

*Johannesburg*

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By Bahá’u’lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*,

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*of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*,

published by the National Spiritual Assembly

of the Bahá’ís of the United States;

by Martha Root: *Ṭáhirih the Pure, Írán’s Greatest Woman,*

published by the National Spiritual Assembly

of the Bahá’ís of Pakistan.

Illustrated by Mary-Jane Rostami.

Set in 11 on 13 pt Monotype Baskerville

Monotype Composing Service (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town

and printed in South Africa by

Budd and Thomson (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town.

ISBN 0 908420 29 3

Introduction to the *Golden Crowns* Series

In these next pages you will read of great sacrifices. Anyone reading

the stories of the early believers in the Bahá’í Faith will wonder why

these people sacrificed so much. What was different about the

Messages of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh which made ordinary people

rise to the heights of heroism and die gloriously for their Faith?

The teachings of the Báb\* and Bahá’u’lláh† repeat the divine

principles announced by the Prophets of the past. You can read these

teachings in a very small book entitled *The Hidden Words*. It was

written by Bahá’u’lláh. But added to these eternal truths, the Báb

and Bahá’u’lláh have given new teachings never announced by any

Prophet of God before. Here are some of them:

The first teaching of the Bahá’í Faith is that all men belong to one

human family. Speaking to all men, Bahá’u’lláh says, ‘Ye are the

fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch.’ By this He means that

the world of men is like a tree, the nations and peoples are the

different branches of that tree, and the men and women are as the

fruits and blossoms of that tree. In all past religions, the world of

men was divided into two parts—one part known as the people of

the Book of God or the pure tree, and the other known as the lost

people or the evil tree. Bahá’u’lláh has changed this teaching by

announcing that the world is one world and all people in it members

of one family. This is a special teaching of Bahá’u’lláh not to be

found in any other religion. Some people are asleep, He says, and

they need to be awakened; some are sick, they need to be healed;

some are like children, they need to be taught; but all receive the

bounty and gifts of God.

\* The Báb is the title given to the Forerunner of Bahá’u’lláh. He was born in

Shíráz, Írán (Persia) on the 20th of October 1819 and was martyred in Tabríz,

Írán, on the 9th of July 1850. The ‘Báb’ means the ‘Gate’.

† Bahá’u’lláh is the name of God’s newest Manifestation on earth. He was born

in Ṭihrán, Írán on the 12th of November 1817 and died near Haifa. Israel on

the 29th of May 1892. Bahá’u’lláh’ means the ‘Glory of God’.

Another new principle in the Bahá’í Faith is the need to investigate

truth. That is to say, no man should blindly follow his ancestors and

forefathers. Each man must see with his own eyes, hear with his own

ears, and investigate truth for himself.

Another teaching is this: that the foundation of all the religions

of God is one. There is only one God. Therefore, there can be only

one religion—the Religion of God. All the past Prophets have taught

the same basic truths, which have all come from the same mouth of

God. This teaching is a new teaching and is special in the Bahá’í

Faith.

A new principle is that religion must be the cause of unity, har-

mony and agreement amongst men. If religion becomes the cause

of disagreement and hatred, if it leads to separation and fighting,

then it would be better if there were no religion in the world.

The Bahá’í Faith also teaches that religion must agree with

science and reason. If it does not agree with science and reason then

it is superstition. Down to the present day it has been the custom for

a man to accept a religious teaching even if it does not agree with

his reason and judgement. The agreement of religious belief with

reason and science opens new windows to the soul of man.

Bahá’u’lláh has taught the equality of men and women. This is

special to the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith, for all other religions

have placed men above women.

A new religious principle is that prejudices, whether religious,

racial, patriotic or political, destroy the solid foundation for a

peaceful life. Therefore, men must overcome their prejudices so that

they can see the underlying truth, that the family of man is one

family and not divided into separate parts.

Universal peace is promised in the Bahá’í teachings. This universal

peace will be accomplished by putting into practice the principles

of Bahá’u’lláh. Peace shall come to all nations, governments, peoples,

religions, races, and all parts of mankind. No other Prophet has

ever promised peace to the world during His ministry, but this is

one of the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.

The Báb and Bahá’u’lláh have taught that every man must gain

knowledge and receive an education. It is a religious law in the

Bahá’í Faith that both girls and boys must be educated.

Bahá’u’lláh has set forth the solution and provided the remedy for

the economic question. The solution of the economic problem, He

says, lies in the realm of the spirit. No religious books of the past

Prophets speak of this important human problem.

The greatest new principle of the new religion is the establishment

and appointment of the Centre of the Covenant. This is another

teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past. Bahá’u’lláh

has appointed a Centre of the Covenant\* to carry on His work and

hold the Bahá’ís together after His passing. When a person becomes

a Bahá’í, he must agree to follow the laws contained in the Covenant.

In this way, Bahá’u’lláh has protected the religion of God against

differences and splits. He has made it impossible for anyone to create

a new sect or faction of belief. To make sure of the unity of the

believers, He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the

world, including the Interpreter and Explainer of His teachings, so

that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according

to his own ideas or opinion, and thus create a sect founded upon his

own understanding of the divine words.

These are some of the principles of religion brought by the Báb

and Bahá’u’lláh which are different from the religions of the past.

Thousands of men and women died during the nineteenth century

rather than give up their faith in these teachings. Today, in the

twentieth century, millions of Bahá’ís live their lives so that they

can demonstrate these teachings and bring them to all people,

everywhere.

In the *Golden Crowns* series, Lowell Johnson tells the stories of some

of these early believers who won the crown of martyrdom. One of

these believers was Ṭáhirih. Ṭáhirih’s story now follows.

\* Bahá’u’lláh appointed His eldest Son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as the Centre of the

Covenant. He guided the Bahá’ís until He passed away in Haifa, Israel, on the

28th of November 1921. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ means the ‘Servant of Bahá’ or the

‘Servant of the Glory’.

Note

*For this edition, these stories have*

*been extensively revised. They may*

*be read aloud effectively, or else*

*used for private reading.*

# Ṭáhirih

‘Ṭáhirih’, meaning the ‘Pure One’, is the title given to the first

woman believer in the Báb. The title was given to her by Bahá’u’lláh,

and later confirmed by the Báb. You will see why she was called the

‘Pure One’, as we tell the story of Ṭáhirih.

Ṭáhirih was born in Qazvín, Írán (Persia) in 1817, the same year

in which Bahá’u’lláh was born. Qazvín is a city which at that time

was one of the main centres of the Muslim religion. Her father was a

priest and a teacher, a very famous and intelligent clergyman in

Írán. Her father’s brother was also a priest and just as well known.

Ṭáhirih’s brother was very much like his father, so the three men

were always discussing religion in the home. Ṭáhirih therefore,

heard much about religion from the day she was born.

Ṭáhirih was not like most children who would rather play than

study their books. She passed most of her time listening to her

parents and family talk about God and the Muslim religion. As they

talked, she learned many things, and part of what she learned was

this: her family was confused about religion, and didn’t really

understand its spiritual meaning. When she discovered this, she

began to study religion for herself.

Even as a child, she became very well known in Qazvín as a

prodigy, a person who is more intelligent and clever than most.

When she was born, she was named Fáṭimih Umm-Salamih, but she

was never called by that name. She was such an outstanding child

that the family always called her ‘Zarrín-Táj’, which means ‘Crown

of Gold’. When her father taught his classes in religion, there would

be hundreds of men studying, but no women. Women were treated

only like animals in those days, especially in that part of the world.

The men believed that they were good only for doing the housework

and bearing the children. In public, the women always had to wear

a veil.

But young Zarrín-Táj received permission from her father to

listen to him teach his classes. He told her she could listen, but that

she must always sit behind a curtain so that none of the men would

know she was there. Zarrín-Táj’s father once said that he wished his

daughter were a son, because if she were his son she would follow

in her father’s footsteps and add glory to the family name. Little did

he know what glory she would add to his name in the future.

Little Zarrín-Táj was happy to listen to her father’s lectures from

behind the curtain. But sometimes she could not remain completely

quiet. One day she became so excited by what her father was saying

that, without thinking, she spoke up from behind the curtain and

told her father that he had made a mistake in what he had just said.

Her father was very surprised, and quite angry, as well. But

Zarrín-Táj proved that he was wrong in what he had just said, and

from then on everyone knew that she was behind the curtain. She

was even permitted to take part in all the discussions.

At the age of thirteen, Zarrín-Táj was married to a cousin, Mullá

Muḥammad. Her parents arranged the marriage, as that was the

custom. Mullá Muḥammad was not her choice for a husband. But

she lived with him for a while, and bore him three children. But most

of the time she spent at the home of her father and mother, until she

became a follower of Siyyid Káẓim and left the city of Qazvín.

Now, this is how Zarrín-Táj learned of Siyyid Káẓim. One day,

she was visiting the home of a cousin. Wherever she went she was

always interested in what books people were reading, and what

books they had in their libraries. In this cousin’s home, she saw some

books written by two great scholars, Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid

Káẓim. She looked through them, and asked if she could take them

home with her. The cousin told her that her father would not like

her to read those books, because they were written by very modern

thinkers. These books did not agree with the way her father taught

the Muslim religion. This pleased Zarrín-Táj very much, because

she did not agree with her father, either. So, she promised to take

good care of the books, and her cousin let her have them.

In one of these books, she read that the time was soon to come

[Image]

As a child, Ṭáhirih learned much about religion.

when a new Prophet of God would appear Who would fulfil all the

promises of all the religions, and especially the promises made by

Muḥammad in the Holy Qur’án. The book was so logical and

convincing that Zarrín-Táj longed to meet these teachers. But,

Shaykh Aḥmad had passed on a few years before, and Siyyid Káẓim

was living a long way away in Karbilá in the country of ‘Iráq.

And in those countries it was not permitted for a woman to travel

alone.

Zarrín-Táj became more and more interested in this new teaching

of Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Káẓim though, and she told everyone

about it. Her family and her husband became very angry with her,

but she could think only of the new Teacher Who was to come into

the world. She even told her uncle that she wanted to be the first

woman to serve the new Prophet when He appeared, because she

knew how low Írán had sunk and how poorly educated the women

were and she wanted to help them. She said to her uncle, ‘Oh, when

will the day come when new laws will be revealed on the earth? I

shall be the first to follow these new Teachings and give my life for my

sisters!’

Zarrín-Táj tried to discuss these new teachings with her father,

but he would not listen. Therefore, she wrote letters to Siyyid

Káẓim himself; to ask him the many questions she had in her mind.

Siyyid Káẓim answered all her questions so well that Zarrín-Táj

began to admire him more and more. She was so pleased with his

answers that she wrote a long paper praising the teachings of Shaykh

Aḥmad and defending these teachings against the many people who

tried to prove that they were wrong. This paper was so intelligent,

and it explained the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad so simply that

Siyyid Káẓim wrote her a letter which started with these words:

‘O thou who art the solace of mine eyes, and the joy of my heart!’

In Persian, the words ‘solace of my eyes’ are translated ‘Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn’—and from then on Zarrín-Táj became known by the name

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn.

2

After Qurratu’l-‘Ayn had received her letter from Siyyid Káẓim,

she decided she must go to Karbilá to see him. But, what excuse

could she use? Her father would never give his permission for her to

visit Siyyid Káẓim. And certainly he would never permit her to

travel hundreds of kilometres across the desert alone. But Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn thought of a plan.

Karbilá is one of the holy cities in the religion of Islám. Many

people go there every year to visit the shrines—if they cannot go to

Mecca and Medina. Qurratu’l-‘Ayn had always wanted to visit

these shrines, although being a woman, she was not expected to do

so. However, she talked to her sister, and they decided they must ask

their father’s permission to visit the shrines in Karbilá. Her father

knew that if she went to Karbilá, she would also visit Siyyid Káẓim.

But he decided that he would let her go anyway. He hoped that

seeing the sacred shrines of Islám would make her change her mind,

and that she would become a true Muslim again.

The journey to Karbilá was made in 1843. Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was

twenty-six years old at that time, and the mother of two sons and

one daughter. She had already become famous all over Írán as the

most beautiful and the most educated woman in the country. It

would be a wonderful to have a picture of this great woman of Írán,

but no photos of her were ever taken, and no artists ever painted her

while she was alive. Therefore, the only picture we can have of her

is a spiritual one.

After making the long journey from Qazvín to Karbilá, Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn went straight to the home of Siyyid Káẓim. But when she

arrived, she received a great disappointment. Siyyid Káẓim had

passed from this world only ten days before. She was overcome with

sadness and wept for many days. So disappointed was she about not

meeting her new teacher that Siyyid Káẓim’s family invited her to

stay with them. They let her read all of his writings, many of which

had never been published. She studied them eagerly, and even

taught some of Siyyid Káẓim’s students. When she was teaching, she

would sit behind a curtain, as she had done in Qazvín when she

was in her father’s classes. It must have seemed very strange for

Siyyid Káẓim’s students, who were all men, to hear the voice of a

woman teaching them from behind a thick curtain.

3

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn stayed for three years in Karbilá. But during this

time many things happened. One of the most important things was

this: One night, after she had kept the fast and meditated during the

day, she had a dream. In this dream, she saw a young Man, a

descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, in the heavens. This young

Man was standing in the air, repeating certain words and praying.

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn remembered some of these words and wrote them

down when she awoke.

In a few days’ time, she learned that her sister’s husband, Mírzá

Muḥammad ‘Alí, was soon to leave Qazvín in search of the Promised

One. As soon as she heard the news, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn sent a sealed

letter to him and asked him to deliver it to the Promised One when

he found Him. She said, ‘You are sure to meet the Promised One in

the course of your journey. Say to Him from me, “The light of Thy

face flashed before my eyes, and its rays arose high above me. Then

speak the word, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and ‘Thou art, Thou art!’ we

will all reply.”’

Mírzá Muḥammad ‘Alí took Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s letter with him on

his journey. When he recognized the Báb in Shíráz, he became the

sixteenth Letter of the Living.\* At the same time, he gave to the Báb

the letter and the message from Qurratu’l-‘Ayn. When the Báb

read it, He immediately declared her the seventeenth Letter of the

Living. And so, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was the only one of the Letters of

\* The first eighteen people to recognize the Báb were called ‘Letters of the Living’.

the Living who never came into the presence of the Báb, but

through her dream she had recognized Him!

When Mullá ‘Alí, the fourth Letter of the Living, left Shíráz,

he received instructions from the Báb to take the news of the Faith

to Karbilá. The Báb sent some of His Arabic Writings with Mullá

‘Alí, and when Qurratu’l-‘Ayn read these Writings, she found in

them the words she had heard in her dream, and which she had

written down. She was sure, then, that the Báb in Shíráz was the

same man she had seen in her dream.

So hungry was Qurratu’l-‘Ayn for news about the Báb that she

kept Mullá ‘Alí with her for a long, long time, asking him questions.

She would not let him rest until she knew everything. She studied the

Writings of the Báb over and over, and then she began to translate

the Books into Persian. She also wrote her own books and poems in

Persian about the Báb and His Teachings.

4

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was not alone in Karbilá. With her were some

women who may interest you. There were the mother and sister of

Mullá Ḥusayn,\* and a woman known as Shams-i-Ḍuḥá† which

means the ‘Morning Sun’. Shams-i-Ḍuḥá’s real name was Khurshíd

Bagum, but most people didn’t use it. She later became the grand-

mother of Mírzá Jalál who married ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s daughter, Rúḥá

Khánum.

Soon everyone in Karbilá knew that Qurratu’l-‘Ayn had become

a believer in the Báb, and that she was openly teaching His Faith in

the Holy City of Islám itself. Not only did she teach this Faith, but

she refused to celebrate the holy days of the Muslim religion any

more. On the anniversary of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn (a very holy

day in the Muslim religion), Qurratu’l-‘Ayn asked her sister and her

relatives to put away the black clothes usually worn on that day, and

instead to wear bright, colourful dresses. Why? Because it was also

\* See the booklet about Mullá Ḥusayn. † Pronounced *Shams-seh-Zoha*.

the anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, and that was a day for great

happiness and joy, not a day for wearing black!

When the priests of Karbilá heard about what Qurratu’l-‘Ayn

had done on such a holy day to Islám, they reported her actions to

the Government and demanded that she be brought before the

Governor of the city and punished. The government officials who

were searching for her arrested Shams-i-Ḍuḥá by mistake. When

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn learned of this, she wrote to the Governor and told

him that they had arrested the wrong woman. They must come and

take her instead. The Governor became quite disgusted with these

women and ordered a guard to keep Qurratu’l-‘Ayn in her house.

For three months she was not permitted to see anyone. No one was

able to enter the house, and she was not permitted to leave.

Soon, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn received the news that the Báb had called a

conference of the leading Bábís in the province of Khurásán in Írán.

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was gloriously happy! But she was a prisoner in her

own home: how was she going to attend? Nothing was going to stop

her from attending this conference, so she wrote a letter to the

Governor and told him that she was leaving Karbilá for Baghdád.

Baghdád was still in ‘Iráq, but nearer the Iranian border, and there-

fore on her way to the conference.

The priests of Karbilá tried to stop Qurratu’l-‘Ayn from leaving

the city. They told her that the journey to Baghdád was too difficult

and dangerous at this time. The real reason why they wanted her to

stay in Karbilá was that the Governor had not yet announced what

he was going to do with her for celebrating the birth of the Báb,

instead of commemorating the Muslim holy day. They were still

hoping that she would be publicly punished.

Naturally, their arguments had no effect on Qurratu’l-‘Ayn.

Instead, she wrote a long letter to each one of them telling them why

she was going, and that she was quite able to make the journey—

because there are no dangers when doing the will of God!

Soon she received permission from the Governor to leave Karbilá.

But, he said, she must stay in Baghdád until a final decision was

reached about her. The ladies packed their belongings and, with

several men to protect them, they left for Baghdád. One of these

companions was Mírzá Muḥammad ‘Alí, the sixteenth Letter of the

Living who had delivered her message to the Báb. As they were

leaving the city, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was hit several times by stones

which people threw at her.

When they arrived in Baghdád, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn began to teach

the Cause every day. People who had known her in the past came to

listen to her lectures, and they were surprised at her power and her

strength of words. ‘This is not the woman we knew before’, they

would say. Her lectures attracted large crowds, and many people

began to investigate the Truth for themselves, especially the women.

Within a short time, many of her former students, both men and

women, left Karbilá and came to Baghdád to attend her classes.

Such was her power of attraction.

Here in Baghdád, just as in Karbilá, she invited the priests to

come to a public discussion of these new religious teachings. The

priests all made excuses, however, and refused to come. Instead they

made a loud outcry against her, such a huge outcry that it reached

the ears of the Government. To protect them, the Governor sent all

the ladies to live in the house of the Judge of Baghdád.

Ṭáhirih and the other ladies lived with the Judge for some time,

and the Judge was very impressed with their spirit. A few years later,

when he wrote a book about his life experiences, he mentioned

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s time in his home. He wrote that every morning in

the early dawn she would arise and pray and meditate. Very often

she would also fast. He added that he had never seen a woman more

pure, nor one who had more knowledge. No woman was more brave

or more eager to give her life to a cause. At one time he said of her,

‘I see in her such knowledge, education, politeness, and good

character as I have not seen in any great man in this century.’

It was 1847, and for three months she stayed in the home of the

Judge. All this time she was waiting for her instructions. One day, the

Judge brought her a message from the Governor. He said, ‘You are

[Image]

The city streets as Ṭáhirih saw them.

now free, but you must leave ‘Iráq tomorrow. You must arrange

your things for travelling to Írán, for the Sultán commands it.’ This

made Qurratu’l-‘Ayn very happy, as she was eager to be on her

way to the conference in the province of Khurásán.

5

When Qurratu’l-‘Ayn made her preparations for the journey back

to her home country, she found that more than thirty of her friends

wanted to go with her. Some were from ‘Iráq and some were friends

who had come to her from Írán. She obtained permission for them

to go with her, and the Judge sent along ten horsemen under the

command of a general to protect them on their way. In this royal

manner, they left on their journey and in a few days’ time they

reached the border of Írán. From there, they continued on their way

alone, without the horsemen, to the city of Kirmánsháh. On the way

to Kirmánsháh, they stayed for three days in the village of Karand.

Before leaving Karand, twelve hundred persons volunteered to

follow Qurratu’l-‘Ayn and do her bidding.

In Kirmánsháh the men in the group stayed in one house and the

women in another. As soon as the people of the city learned that

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was there, they rushed to her house to see her. Even

princes, priests and government officials hurried to visit her. They

listened to her speeches and were impressed by her knowledge, her

power, and her beautiful character. She seemed to have no sense of

fear. She read the Writings of the Báb to everyone who came, and

answered everyone’s questions. Even the wife of the Governor was

among the ladies who heard her speak, and when the Governor

himself heard her explain the Message of the Báb, he accepted the

Cause and told everyone how much he loved and admired Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn.

But some of the priests of Kirmánsháh were not as friendly as the

Governor and the princes. The priests went to the Mayor of the city

and made some reports that were not true. The Mayor then had the

Bábís thrown out of the city. He even permitted a mob to attack their

houses and steal everything that the Bábís owned. Then they were

put into a wagon drawn by horses, and they were driven out into the

desert. There, they were put out of the wagon, and left with no food,

no change of clothing, and no blankets or rugs. It was very cold.

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn wrote a letter to the Governor of Kirmánsháh,

and explained to him what the Mayor had done. ‘We were your

guests in Kirmánsháh’, she said. ‘Do you think it was kind to treat

us like this?’ One of the group walked to Kirmánsháh to carry the

message. When the Governor received the letter, he was very

surprised, for he had known nothing about the order. He invited the

whole group to return to Kirmánsháh as his guests, but this

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn refused to do. She was eager to go on to the con-

ference being called by the Báb.

When the group reached the village of Hamadán, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn

was met by her brothers from Qazvín who delivered a message to

her from her father. Her father wanted her to come home for a visit

and stay for a while. She did not want to go, but she agreed because

it was her father’s desire. Before she left Hamadán, she asked some

of her followers to go back to ‘Iráq; she left others in Hamadán.

Only a few of her companions went with her. Two of them were

Shaykh Ṣáliḥ and Mullá Ibráhím, both of whom soon died as

martyrs, one in Ṭihrán and one in Qazvín. Others were Shams-i-

Ḍuḥá, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí the Letter of the Living, and Siyyid

‘Abdu’l-Hádí, who was promised in marriage to Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s

daughter. These last two had travelled with her all the way from

Karbilá.

6

When Qurratu’l-‘Ayn arrived at her father’s home, a family dis-

cussion was held which included her father, her husband, and her

uncle, who was also her father-in-law. When she told her family that

she had completely given her love to the Teachings of the Báb, her

father became very excited and showed her how really great he

thought she was. He said to her: ‘If you, with all the learning and

intelligence you have, were to claim to be the Báb or even more than

that, I would immediately agree with you and believe in you—but

what can I do, when you choose to follow this young man from

Shíráz?’

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn answered her father: ‘With the knowledge which

I have, it is impossible that I could be mistaken in recognizing Him

Who is the Lord of the worlds, Him Whom all the people are waiting

for. I have recognized Him by the proofs of reason and the facts of

knowledge. But this knowledge of mine is only a drop, compared

with the great ocean of knowledge which is the Báb’s.’

Her father was greatly impressed, but he could not see beyond his

own daughter. He said, ‘If you had been my son instead of my

daughter, and if you had made the claim that you were the Báb

yourself, I would have believed it.’

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s uncle, Mullá Taqí, became very angry during

the evening, and cursed the Báb. In his anger he lost his temper and

even hit Qurratu’l-‘Ayn several times. She remained very calm, but

she turned to him and said these prophetic words: ‘O Uncle, I see

your mouth filling with blood.’

The next day, her husband sent several ladies to her with the

message that she must come back and live with him. Qurratu’l-‘Ayn

was not interested in living with her husband any more, because they

no longer had anything in common. She said to the ladies, ‘Tell my

proud and false-hearted husband, “If you had really wanted to be a

faithful husband and companion to me, you would have hurried to

see me in Karbilá, and would have guided my carriage on foot all

the way back to your home. If you had done that, I would have

awakened you from your sleep of heedlessness while we travelled, and

shown you the way to Truth. But this was not meant to be. We have

been apart for three years. Neither in this world nor in the next can

I ever again be with you. I have put you out of my life forever.”’

So strong and final was her answer to her husband that he and his

father became furiously angry. They immediately tried to prove that

she was a bad woman, and that everything she told the people was

untrue. Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was quite able to defend herself in every way,

and she proved by her actions that it was not her character which

was poor, but her husband’s.

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s father was a peaceful, fair-minded man. He tried

to bring his daughter and husband together again, but it was no use.

A few weeks later, her husband divorced her.

It was during this difficult time that a certain Mullá ‘Abdu’lláh

committed a murder in Qazvín, which caused great trouble to

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn. Mullá ‘Abdu’lláh killed Mullá Taqí, Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn’s uncle, because Mullá Taqí had ordered the persecution and

death of Mullá Ibráhím, one of Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s recent com-

panions on her journey. This murder filled the family of Mullá Taqí

with even more hate and anger against Qurratu’l-‘Ayn. They claim-

ed that she had given the order for his death. You will remember

that she said to Mullá Taqí on the night of the family conference,

‘O Uncle, I see your mouth filling with blood.’ This news got

around to the family, and they said, ‘No one else but you is guilty of

the murder of our father. You gave the order that he must be

killed.’

Of course, what they said was not true. But, nevertheless, the

family succeeded in having her placed under strict guard in her own

father’s home. The women who were chosen to watch over her were

ordered not to let her out of her room, except for the purpose of

washing herself once a day.

Many of the other Bábís were arrested after this murder was

committed. The clergy found it a convenient time to get rid of as

many Bábís as they could. Therefore, the entire company of Bábís

was sent to the prison in the capital city, Ṭihrán. But Mullá Taqí’s

family was not satisfied that they should only be put in prison. They

wanted them all killed, because one of them had killed their father.

The case was then brought before the King himself, and he gave

the order that only the murderer could be killed—the others must

be released. The family could not find the real murderer, as he was

hiding somewhere. Therefore, they declared another Bábí, Shaykh

Ṣáliḥ, to be the murderer. You will remember that he came with

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn on the journey to her home.

Shaykh Ṣáliḥ was arrested and told that he was to die for the

murder of Mullá Taqí. As he was brought to the place where he was

to be hanged, his face was filled with joy. He was not afraid to die.

He was happy. He hurried to greet the man who was to kill him, as

though he were a dear and lifelong friend. Just before he was killed,

he spoke beautifully of the Báb, and said, ‘I gave up the hopes and

the beliefs of men from the moment I recognized Thee, Thou Who

art my Hope and my Belief!’ Shaykh Ṣáliḥ was buried in the court-

yard of one of the Muslim shrines in Ṭihrán.

The death of Shaykh Ṣáliḥ did not satisfy Mullá Taqí’s family.

When the innocent Bábís were returned to Qazvín, all of them were

put to death. A mob of men carrying knives, swords, spears, and

axes attacked the defenceless Bábís, and cut them to pieces. The bits

of their bodies were thrown in so many different directions that it was

not possible to find any part of them for a proper burial. All this was

done in the name of Muḥammad, in the city of Qazvín, where no

less than a hundred of the highest leaders of the Muslim religion had

their homes and lived their lives!

And still the family of Mullá Taqí were not satisfied. They next

turned their attention to Qurratu’l-‘Ayn herself. They insisted that

she must suffer the same kind of death as had all the rest.

During all this trouble, Mullá Muḥammad, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s

husband, had been following in his father’s footsteps and become

the highest religious leader in Qazvín. When Qurratu’l-‘Ayn learned

that her enemies were going to kill her too, she wrote a letter to her

husband, and this is what she said: If my Cause be the Cause of

Truth, if the Lord whom I worship be none other than the one true

God, He will deliver me from this house before nine days have

passed. If God does not deliver me from here you are free to do what

you wish with me.’

In some way, Bahá’u’lláh learned of Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s danger and

her brave announcement to her husband. He immediately sent

Muḥammad-Hádí, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s eldest brother, to Qazvín to

help her escape. Bahá’u’lláh gave him a letter which he was to give

to his wife, Khátún-Ján, to deliver to Qurratu’l-‘Ayn.

Khátún-Ján was a faithful friend of Qurratu’l-‘Ayn, and the only

person who could see her while she was kept in her father’s house.

She found many excuses to go to visit her sister-in-law. Sometimes

she would go there pretending that she must wash some clothes—any

excuse was used. In this way, she would carry food, and help

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn through her difficult times.

Bahá’u’lláh instructed Khátún-Ján to go to Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s

house in the clothes of a beggar. She must deliver the letter into her

own hands, wait at the entrance of the house until Qurratu’l-‘Ayn

joined her, and then hurry to Muḥammad-Hádí.

Then, He told Muḥammad-Hádí that, as soon as Qurratu’l-‘Ayn

had joined him, he must start immediately for Ṭihrán. That very

night, Bahá’u’lláh would send someone to Qazvín with three horses.

Muḥammad-Hádí must bring Qurratu’l-‘Ayn to a spot outside the

city walls, climb on the horses, and try to get to Ṭihrán before

daybreak. As soon as the gates of the city were opened, they must

come immediately to Bahá’u’lláh’s house. Bahá’u’lláh said he must

be very careful that no one could recognize who she is. Then He

added: ‘The Almighty will assuredly guide your steps and surround

you with His unfailing protection.’

Everything was done as Bahá’u’lláh had commanded. When

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn read the letter, she said to Khátún-Jan, ‘You go, and

I shall follow.’ Within the hour, she was on her way. They took her

to the house of a carpenter where no one would look for her. From

there they climbed over the city wall, and went to a slaughter-house

where the horses were waiting. With no trouble at all, they reached

the city of Ṭihrán, and, at the proper time, found themselves in the

home of Bahá’u’lláh.

As you can see, nine days had not yet gone by before Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn was delivered from the danger in Qazvín. The city of Qazvín

was shocked. The whole night they searched the houses for Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn. The house belonging to Khátún-Ján’s father was robbed of all

its goods. Her promise to be out of the hands of her guards within

nine days had surprised everyone. As a result of what had happened,

a few people came to realize the greatness of the Faith she had

accepted, and some of them became followers of the Báb.

7

When Qurratu’l-‘Ayn entered the house of Bahá’u’lláh, she knew

full well Who Bahá’u’lláh was, and what He was going to be. She

had recognized the Báb without even seeing Him, and it was this

same spiritual greatness that caused her to recognize the future glory

of Bahá’u’lláh. Even in the year 1844, while she was in Karbilá, she

had written poems which clearly showed that she knew that both the

Báb and Bahá’u’lláh were Prophets of God. Nothing else could have

given her the courage to do the things which she did during the next

few months of her life.

At this time, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a little boy only three or four

years old. One day, the great scholar Vaḥíd\* came to visit Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn. Vaḥíd was one of the early believers who was later martyred

in Nayríz. He waited for a long time to see her. But Qurratu’l-‘Ayn

was at that moment holding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on her lap, as she so often

did. Quite a long time went by, and Qurratu’l-‘Ayn made no move

to go and talk to the great Vaḥíd. One of the women in the house

became worried, and she said, ‘Shouldn’t you leave the child now,

and go to speak with Vaḥíd?’ But Qurratu’l-‘Ayn pulled little

‘Abdu’l-Bahá even closer to her and said, ‘Shall I leave Thee,

Protector of the Cause, to go and see one of the followers of the

Cause?’

Those who heard her say this were greatly surprised, for no one

knew what she meant. Today, although no one knows if it is true,

\* See the booklet on Vaḥíd, to be published.

some people believe that Bahá’u’lláh had told her many things about

what the future would be, and especially about the importance of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the protector of Bahá’u’lláh against His enemies

in the many years to come.

A few days after Qurratu’l-‘Ayn arrived in Ṭihrán, Bahá’u’lláh

decided to send her on to Khurásán. The long-awaited conference

called by the Báb was about to begin. Bahá’u’lláh Himself was to

follow her in a few days’ time. He, therefore, called His own brother,

Áqáy-i-Kalím, into His presence and gave him instructions about

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn’s journey. He told Áqáy-i-Kalím that he must be

very careful as he took Qurratu’l-‘Ayn through the gates of the city,

as the guards had been given orders not to allow any women to pass

through. If they discovered who Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was, they would not

let her leave.

Áqáy-i-Kalím was very careful to follow all of Bahá’u’lláh’s

instructions. He and Qurratu’l-‘Ayn put their trust in God, and when

they came to the gate, none of the guards took any notice of them.

They rode out of the city safely and easily, and they did not stop

riding for several kilometres.

After two hours of riding, they came to a lovely orchard of trees

situated at the foot of a mountain. In the centre of this orchard was a

house which looked as though no one lived in it. As Áqáy-i-Kalím

went looking for someone who might be in charge of the house, he

came across an old man watering some plants. Áqáy-i-Kalím asked

the old man, ‘Where are the owners of this house?’ and the old man

said, ‘The owners are not here. There has been an argument over

who owns this place, and until the problem is settled, I have been

asked to watch over it.’

Áqáy-i-Kalím was very happy to hear this news, because it meant

that Qurratu’l-‘Ayn would be safe for a while in this place. They

invited the old man to share their lunch with them, and then

Áqáy-i-Kalím asked the old man if he would take care of Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn for a few hours while he made arrangements for their journey

to Khurásán. The old man agreed, and all was settled.

When Áqáy-i-Kalím left Qurratu’l-‘Ayn, he went back into

Ṭihrán through the same gates to tell Bahá’u’lláh what had

happened, and he sent Mullá Báqir, one of the Letters of the Living,

to join Qurratu’l-‘Ayn at the house in the orchard. Bahá’u’lláh was

greatly pleased that everything had worked out so well, and He

named the orchard the ‘Garden of Paradise’. Then He said, ‘That

house has been prepared by the Almighty for this purpose, so that

you may entertain in it the loved ones of God.’

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn stayed in that house for seven days. Then she set

out with several others for the great conference called by the Báb.

8

The conference called by the Báb in the province of Khurásán was

held in the little village of Badasht. Badasht lies between Ṭihrán

and Mázindarán. It was an out-of-the-way summer place full of

gardens and grassland with only a few houses. It was the perfect place

to hold a private conference. It would have been too dangerous to

hold such a gathering in Ṭihrán. Bahá’u’lláh had selected Badasht,

because it was quiet.

It was the beginning of summer. When Bahá’u’lláh arrived in

Badasht, He rented three gardens. One was for Quddús, the leader

of the Bábís.\* The second was for Qurratu’l-‘Ayn and her servant,

and the third was for Himself. In the middle of these three gardens

there was an open place like a court. There, the believers could

consult comfortably and freely.

The Báb was not able to attend, because He was in prison.

Those who gathered in Badasht for this very first conference of the

New Age were eighty-one in number. Every clay, Bahá’u’lláh

revealed a new Tablet, or explanation, which one of the Bábís would

chant for everyone to hear. In these Tablets, He gave each person

present a new name for the New Day. He Himself accepted the

name ‘Bahá”, which the Báb had already given to Him. And to

\* see the booklet about Quddús.

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn He gave the title ‘Ṭáhirih’. Ṭáhirih, you remember,

means the ‘Pure One’. At a later time during the conference, when

Ṭáhirih did some things which to some of the believers did not seem

to be very pure, they questioned whether Bahá’u’lláh had given her

the right name. But later, when the Báb learned that some of the

men were doubting Bahá’u’lláh’s wisdom, He wrote to them from

His prison: ‘What am I to say regarding her whom the Tongue of

Power and Glory has named Ṭáhirih?’ In other words, the Báb

made it clear that He did not question the wisdom of Bahá’u’lláh

and that He agreed with the name given to her. From then on

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was known as Ṭáhirih.

Many of the men present at this conference wondered why

Ṭáhirih, a woman, was permitted to consult with the men, even

from behind a curtain. When one of them questioned her about it,

she answered, ‘Our talk is about God, about religion, about spiritual

matters, and above all, about giving our lives in the path of Truth.

Know that every step we take is in the path of God. Are you prepared

to follow us?’

At this time in the development of the Cause, the Báb had not yet

revealed to His followers His full importance. He had declared

Himself to be the Báb (the Gate), but He had not yet told them that

He was the beginning of a whole new era, and that laws would

necessarily have to be changed. It was left to Bahá’u’lláh, Ṭáhirih

and Quddús to prepare the rest of the believers to accept these new,

revolutionary ideas.

Then, on a certain day, Bahá’u’lláh was ill and stayed in His tent

—and indeed there was a wisdom in this. Quddús came out of his own

garden and went immediately to see Bahá’u’lláh. Soon, the others

gathered around Bahá’u’lláh’s tent—all the believers, except Ṭáhirih.

Being a woman, she was not permitted to be in the presence of the

men, unless she stayed behind a curtain where no one could see

her.

While everyone was gathered around Bahá’u’lláh, Ṭáhirih sent

a message to Quddús to come to see her in her garden. Quddús

refused to go. This did not surprise anyone, but what happened next

surprised everyone. Because Quddús would not come to see her, she

came to see him! And not only did she come into the garden of

Bahá’u’lláh where all the men were—but she came without her veil,

and beautifully dressed! Quietly, silently, and with the greatest calm

and dignity, Ṭáhirih stepped forward and seated herself beside

Quddús.

Such a thing had never been seen by any man before. Everyone

was afraid, angry, and confused to the depths of their souls. One man

was so shocked that he cut his own throat and ran away from the

face of Ṭáhirih. Many others followed him, and the rest stood

speechless before her. In the meantime, Quddús remained seated in

his place, but his face was very angry. It seemed that at any moment

he would lift the sword in his hand and kill her.

But his anger did not affect Ṭáhirih in the least. Her face was filled

with a feeling of joy and triumph. She rose to her feet and, paying no

attention to the fear and anger of her companions, she began to talk

to them in words which sounded very much like the style of the

Qur’án. She was a poetess, and she had never used more beautiful

words. She finished her talk with a sentence from the Qur’án which

reads, ‘Verily, amid gardens and rivers shall the pious dwell in the

seat of truth, in the presence of the potent King.’

Indeed, they were at that moment sitting in gardens beside rivers

and, as she said it, she glanced at both Bahá’u’lláh and Quddús,

so that no one could tell which one she meant was the King. Then

she spoke the words, ‘I am the Word which the Promised One is to

speak, the Word which shall make the chiefs and the nobles of the

earth afraid! The Trumpet is sounding! The great Trump is blown!’

With these words, Ṭáhirih awakened sleeping souls. After she had

spoken, Bahá’u’lláh had someone read the Súrih of the Inevitable

from the Qur’án, which tells of the Day of Resurrection. This shows

what an important moment that was the Day of Resurrection had

begun!

Ṭáhirih then turned her face toward Quddús and said, ‘You were

[Image]

Ṭáhirih announced the coming of the new Age.

not very careful about the way you served the Faith in Khurásán.’

Quddús answered, ‘I can do as I think best. I do not have to follow

the will and the good-pleasure of my fellow disciples.’ Ṭáhirih then

turned away from Quddús and spoke to the others. ‘This is the day to

be happy’, she said. ‘It is the day when everything in the past is

forgotten. Let all of us who have shared this great occasion arise and

embrace each other.’

It seems a very important thing that a woman was chosen to

announce the new Age to the followers of the Báb. It showed, indeed,

that the new Age was to be completely different from the past. For

instance, women were to become equal with men, for the first time

in history. For a woman to be given the responsibility of announcing

the end of the old laws showed that a great revolution was about to

take place in all things.

But great changes bring about great tests. As the old laws were

thrown aside each day at the conference, most of the men became

more and more confused. A few men thought that it was wrong to

end the old laws, especially while the Báb was not there. Others

turned to Ṭáhirih and accepted her as the only person who could be

the judge in these matters. Others felt that Quddús was the proper

person to decide about such things, because he was considered to be

the true representative of the Báb at this meeting. A few believed that

both Quddús and Ṭáhirih were right, and that this conference was

meant to be a test of their faith.

The quarrel between Ṭáhirih and Quddús lasted for several days.

Ṭáhirih would say to the Bábís, ‘Quddús has made many mistakes,

and I was sent here by the Báb to teach him what to do.’ Quddús

would then answer, ‘Ṭáhirih is the one who is really wrong. Anyone

who follows Ṭáhirih is walking down the wrong path.’ After a few

days, Bahá’u’lláh stepped in and stopped the whole argument in His

wonderful way. He brought Ṭáhirih and Quddús together, and both

began to serve again in a constructive way.

The Conference of Badasht lasted only twenty-two days. The

exciting discussions caught the attention of a number of the people

who lived nearby, and they soon attacked the Bábís and stole their

possessions. The Conference broke up very suddenly.

After the Conference, Bahá’u’lláh and Ṭáhirih left for the village

of Níyálá. There, Bahá’u’lláh was arrested by the Governor of Ámul

because of all the trouble concerning the Bábís. Ṭáhirih was separated

from Bahá’u’lláh, and taken under guard back to Ṭihrán where she

was kept in the house of Mahmúd Khán, the Mayor of Ṭihrán.

9

One day, Ṭáhirih was brought before the King, Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh.

When he saw her, he said ‘I like her looks. Leave her, and let her be.’

But Ṭáhirih was still kept at the home of the Mayor.

During her imprisonment, Ṭáhirih was at first kept in a little room

where there were no stairs. A ladder had to be put up each time she

came out or went in. One of the princesses of Írán, who was a poetess,

came especially to walk past this house, hoping to see Ṭáhirih. She

was rewarded with a glimpse of her as Ṭáhirih walked on her

balcony. Later, in one of her books, she tells how completely happy

Ṭáhirih was. No matter where we read about Ṭáhirih in history

books and stories, we always hear of her as being happy—as being

full of joy in her religion. She was always bright and enthusiastic,

and even when in the greatest danger herself, she was always

inspiring others with her courage. She was not only a martyr, she

was a smiling, joyful, beautiful young woman.

It is also reported that the King sent a message to her in the care

of the Mayor asking her to give up her belief in the Báb and become

a true Muslim again. He said that if she would do this, he would

make her his wife and she would be the guardian of all the ladies in

the royal household. But Ṭáhirih wrote her reply in verse on the

back of his letter, and returned it to him. In English, the message

went something like this:

Kingdom, wealth and ruling be for thee,

Wandering, becoming a poor dervish and calamity be for me.

If that station is good, let it be for thee,

And if this station is bad, I long for it, let it be for me!

When the King read her reply, he spoke of her courage and

wonderful spirit, and said: ‘So far, history has not shown such a

woman to us.’

One day there was a great gathering at the Mayor’s home. It was

the day when the Mayor’s son was getting married. Naturally,

many fine ladies of the city were there—princesses, wives of ministers,

and other ladies of importance. The Mayor had gone to great

expense to have music and dancing and the best of entertainment.

During the entertainment, Ṭáhirih began to speak. The ladies

became so interested in what she had to say that they forgot all about

the music and the dancing, and spent the rest of the time listening to

the words of Ṭáhirih.

Not long after Ṭáhirih had come to live with the Mayor of Ṭihrán,

the ladies of the household grew to love her very much. They asked

permission for her to leave her little room with no stairs, and to live

with them in their own home. Ṭáhirih was given a lovely room with

a balcony on the second floor of the house, and although she was

still a prisoner and could not leave the house, she was allowed to

have any number of visitors.

Both men and women came to see her and talk with her in Ṭihrán.

For three years she lived like this in the house of the Mayor, and it

may be said that these three years were the most important ones in

her service to the Faith.

She talked to the women and showed them what a low place they

had in the Muslim religion, and how they would be given more

freedom and respect in the Bábí religion. Through her talks, many

women became Bábís.

This would have continued for many more years, but for the

attempt by a young man to kill the King. Many Bábís were wrongly

accused of having a part in this. The Premier ordered two priests

to visit Ṭáhirih and find out what she was teaching. These two priests

visited Ṭáhirih seven times. Each time Ṭáhirih talked with them and

[Image]

Ṭáhirih prepared for her martyrdom.

insisted that the Báb was the promised Imám expected by the

followers of Muḥammad. The priests tried to show her that the Báb

could not be the Promised One because, according to the Muslims

prophecies, the Imám was supposed to come from the cities of

Jábulqá and Jábulsá—the Báb came from the city of Shíráz.

Ṭáhirih answered that those prophecies had been forged by false

writers, and that there were no such cities as Jábulqá and Jábulsá,

and had never been any such cities—they could only be the super-

stitions of diseased brains. No matter how she explained the

Teachings of the Báb, however, she always met with the same

argument from the priests—the Promised One must come from the

cities of Jábulqá and Jábulsá!

Finally, she lost her patience with these priests, and she said, ‘Your

reasoning is like that of an ignorant and stupid child. How long will

you keep repeating these stupidities and lies? When will you lift your

eyes toward the Sun of Truth?’

The priests were shocked by such a statement. They stood up and

said, ‘Why continue our discussion with a non-believer?’ They

returned home, and wrote out her sentence of death, in the name of

the Holy Qur’án!

A relative of Ṭáhirih tells that the day before she was killed, she

was called before the King and asked the question, ‘Why should you

be a believer in the Báb?’ She replied with a sentence from the

Qur’án which reads like this: ‘I do not worship whom you worship,

and you do not worship whom I worship. I shall never worship whom

you worship, and you will never worship whom I worship. There-

fore, permit that I worship whom I wish and you worship whom you

wish.’

When he heard this verse from the Qur’án, the King bent his head

in silence for a long time, and then he arose and walked out of the

room without a word. The King did not give the order for Ṭáhirih

to be killed. It was done the next day without his knowledge, and

when he learned that the deed had been done, he was filled with

sorrow and tears.

10

There are many stories about the death of Ṭáhirih. Not all of them

agree upon the exact way in which she was killed. But all do agree

that she knew beforehand that her time had come, that she prepared

herself as a bride for the supreme moment, and that she met her

murder bravely, without fear.

In one account, at the hour of her death, she said to a guard: ‘You

can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation

of women.’

The story of her death which is likely to be most complete is the

one told by the wife and the son of the Mayor, who were present

with her on that last night.

It was the day after Ṭáhirih’s visit to the King. The priests had

secretly given the order that she must he killed. This order was

passed on to the Mayor and to the police.

As the Mayor’s son tells the story he says, ‘On the day that she

was secretly killed, it seemed as if she had been told it was going

to happen. Ṭáhirih bathed, changed all of her clothing and came down-

stairs to see the family. One by one, she asked their pardon for

having stayed in our house for so long, and for causing us so much

trouble. She was like a traveller getting herself ready for a journey.

She busied herself with the greatest pleasure and joy. Near sunset, as

she usually did, she started walking back and forth on her balcony.

She talked to no one, but she was quietly whispering to herself. This

continued until three hours after sunset.

‘In the evening, my father came to me and said: “I have made all

the necessary arrangements, and I have commanded all the watch-

men to be very awake tonight, in case anyone finds out about this

order to kill Ṭáhirih and tries to stop it. Now, I want you to go with

these guards and take Ṭáhirih to the police station. You must stay

there until the case is settled, then you must come back and report

to me, so that I may go and inform the King.”’

The Mayor’s wife loved Ṭáhirih very greatly, although she never

became a follower of the Báb. Her story of Ṭáhirih’s last night is this:

‘That night, Ṭáhirih called me to her room. When I walked into the

room, I saw that she was wearing a dress made of snow-white silk.

Her room was filled with beautiful perfume. I was surprised to find

her like this, so I asked her, “What is the reason for this dress and

this perfume?” She answered, “I am preparing to meet my Beloved.

I shall no longer be a prisoner in your home.” I was shocked at the

idea of her leaving us, and tears filled my eyes which I could not

stop. Ṭáhirih tried to comfort me by saying, “You must not cry. The

time for tears has not yet come. Listen to me. I want to share with

you my last wishes, for the hour when I shall be arrested and killed

is soon coming. This is my wish: I want you to let your son come with

me to the place of my death so that he can protect me if the guards

try to take off these clothes. I also want my body thrown into a pit

and I want that pit filled with earth and stones. Three days after my

death a woman will come to visit you. You must give her this parcel

which I now deliver into your hands. My last wish is that you not

allow anyone to come into my room until after I leave this house. No

one must come to me while I am in my last prayers and devotions.

This day I intend to fast—a fast which I shall not break until I am

brought face to face with my Beloved.”

‘With these words, Ṭáhirih asked me to leave her room, to lock

the door, and not to open it until the final hour. She also told me to

keep the news of her coming death a secret, until her enemies should

announce it themselves.

‘I did as she had asked. I locked the door to her room and went to

my own. I could not control my tears. I lay on my bed for hours,

thinking of the great Ṭáhirih, and the end which was soon to come.

I prayed, “Lord, Lord, turn from her, if it be Thy wish, the cup

which her lips desire to drink.”

‘That day and night, I went quietly to her door and listened

several times. Each time I heard her chanting prayers to her Beloved.

The melody of her voice was so beautiful I could hardly remain

standing on my feet. Four hours after sunset, I heard a knocking at

the door. I went immediately to my son and told him of Ṭáhirih’s

wishes. He gave his word that he would carry out every instruction

to the last detail. My son then went to the door and found the

guards standing at the gate. They demanded that Ṭáhirih be handed

over to them.

‘I was filled with tear when I heard their voices. I walked slowly to

Ṭáhirih’s room, unlocked the door, and found her veiled and ready

to leave. She was walking back and forth in her room chanting a

prayer of both sorrow and triumph. As soon as she saw me, she came

to me and kissed me. She put into my hands the key to her wardrobe

and said, “I have left a few little things in the wardrobe for you as a

remembrance of my stay in your house. Whenever you open it and

see the things I have left there, I hope you will remember me and be

happy in my gladness.”

‘With these words she said her last goodbye and left the house

with my son. As I stood by the door, I saw her climb on the horse

which the Chief of Police had sent for her to use. With my son and

a few guards, she rode out of my yard to the place of her martyrdom.’

Three hours later, her son returned to the house, his face covered

with tears and his mouth cursing the police and the guards. This is

the story he told.

‘Mother, I can hardly describe what my eyes have seen tonight.

From our house, we went straight away to the Ílkhání garden,

outside the gate of the city. I went to the police office and reported to

the Chief of Police. He was there waiting for us, but he was drunk.

“Did anyone recognize you on the way?” he asked. I said, “No. No

one.” He then called to a servant and said, “Take this handkerchief

and twist it around the neck of this Bábí woman, and choke her to

death. She is the cause of leading many people from the path of

Muḥammad.” The servant left the room, and I went with him. He

went ahead and I stood by the door. When he came near to Ṭáhirih,

she looked at him and said a few words. He suddenly turned around

and came walking back. He was hanging his head and talking softly

to himself in Turkish. He walked out of the door, and did not come

back.

‘Ṭáhirih called to me and asked me to go to the Chief of Police

with a special request. “It seems that they wish to strangle me”, she

said. “Long ago, I set aside a silk handkerchief which I hoped would

be used for this purpose. I deliver it into your hands and I want you

to ask that drunkard to use it for the purpose of taking my life.”

‘When I went to the Chief I found him completely drunk. He

only shouted at me, “Don’t interrupt our gay festival. Let that Bábí

woman be strangled and her body thrown into a hole.” I was greatly

surprised by such an order, because it was exactly what she had

wanted. I did not ask him whether he would permit the murderer

to use the silk handkerchief. I just went to the two guards and they

agreed that the handkerchief would be a good thing to use.

‘A drunken servant was called and given the handkerchief. “You

are such a brave man”, the policeman said. “Can you choke this

woman?” The servant said yes, and as soon as he reached Ṭáhirih,

he quickly wrapped the silk handkerchief around her throat so

tightly that she became unconscious and fell. It was a slow death. It

seemed to take a long time. Finally, he kicked her in the side and the

chest, and the deed was finished.

‘I hurried to the gardener of this place, then, and asked whether

he could suggest a spot where I could bury the body. He took me to

a well which had been recently dug, and left unfinished. With the

help of a few others, I lowered her into her grave and filled the well

with earth and stones, as she had requested.’

And so ended the life of the glorious Ṭáhirih. On the third day

after her martyrdom, a woman came to visit the wife of the Mayor.

‘I asked her name,’ said the Mayor’s wife, ‘and finding it to be the

same as the one Ṭáhirih had told me, I delivered into her hands the

parcel she had given to me. I had never before met that woman, nor

did I ever see her again.’

The martyrdom of Ṭáhirih took place in August 1852. She was

born in the year 1817, the same year as the birth of Bahá’u’lláh.

She was thirty-six years old when she suffered martyrdom in Ṭihrán.

The time from the day she first heard of the coming of the Báb until

the time she was martyred was a little less than nine years. Her

career was as dazzling as it was short, as tragic as it was eventful. The

lives of most of the early disciples of the Báb remain unknown to

most of the world even to this day. But the life of Ṭáhirih quickly

became famous, even as far as the capital cities of Europe. Both men

and women of many nations, professions and cultures praised her,

and admired her deeds and her sacrifice.

The world remembers Ṭáhirih as the first woman suffrage martyr.

Bahá’ís remember her in the same way as other religions revere

Sarah, Ásíyih, Fáṭimih, and the Virgin Mary. The call she put forth

at the conference of Badasht and in Ṭihrán marked the end of the

1200-year-old law of Islám, and the beginning of a new era.

# Epilogue

Following are additional notes quoted from friends and historians

about the importance of Ṭáhirih to the world.

As the news of Ṭáhirih’s martyrdom quickly spread around the

world, it reached the ears of the great actress Sarah Bernhardt who

requested that a play be written for her about Ṭáhirih’s life. Un-

fortunately, a suitable play has not yet been written.

One great Iranian Prince at the League of Nations in 1927 said,

‘I was only a young man when I heard of the martyrdom of the gifted

poetess Ṭáhirih in Ṭihrán, and I tell you, I wept for three days.’

Sulaymán Náẓim Big, a great author and poet of Turkey, wrote

a book, *Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh and the Bábís*. In it he closes his account of

Ṭáhirih’s life with the words: ‘O Ṭáhirih, you are worth a thousand

Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháhs!’

Mrs Marianna Hainisch of Vienna, Austria, mother of one of the

Presidents of Austria, said in 1925: ‘The greatest ideal of womanhood

all my life has been Ṭáhirih (Qurratu’l-‘Ayn) of Qazvín, Írán. I was

only seventeen years old when I heard of her life and her martyrdom,

but I said: “I shall try to do for the women of Austria what Ṭáhirih

gave her life to do for women of Persia.”’ No woman in Austria has

done so much for freedom and education for women as has Mrs

Marianna Hainisch.

Professor Edward G. Browne, an English historian who was the

only Westerner to meet Bahá’u’lláh in Person, had this to say about

Ṭáhirih: ‘The appearance of such a woman as Qurratu’l-‘Ayn is,

in any country and in any age, a rare phenomenon, but in such a

country as Persia it is a prodigy—nay, almost a miracle. Alike in

virtue of her marvellous beauty, her rare intellectual gifts, her fervid

eloquence, her fearless devotion, and her glorious martyrdom, she

stands incomparable and immortal amidst her countrywomen. Had

the religion of the Báb no other claim to greatness, this were sufficient

—that it produced a heroine like Qurratu’l-‘Ayn.’

An account signed by Jináb-i-Adíb, a famous Bahá’í teacher who

visited Bahá’u’lláh in ‘Akká, has this to say: ‘… in every meeting

held in Ṭihrán, both women and men were speaking in Ṭáhirih’s

praise and honour. Many high-born, loving women came to her

and were filled with joy because of her hopeful words. All were

attracted by her eloquence, and people of all classes, even the

royalty and ministers of state on entering her presence, humbly

bowed before her. Her speeches and explanations were spread all

over Írán, and no one had the least doubt about her erudition and

scientific knowledge.

‘While a youth I used to study philosophy with Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-

Vahháb, a brother of Ṭáhirih. When I had any doubts or made

errors, I used to ask his help. One day in summer I went to him in

his private court. He was alone and as it was a hot day he wore a

loose, light garment. After sitting a little and finding a good oppor-

tunity, I said: “I wanted to ask you some questions but I have

hesitated. Now, if you will permit me, I shall ask you.” He gave

permission and I continued: “Both the learning and perfection of

Ṭáhirih are so spread among the people that minds are amazed. No

one knows better than you, and I want to know from you the truth

or falsity of this matter.”

‘Then he sighed and responded: “You only hear the word of

Ṭáhirih alas, you have not seen her! Know verily, that in a meeting

where she sat neither I nor any one else could say a word. It was as if

all the former and future books were with her. She used to explain a

subject by bringing forth demonstrations and proofs from the learned

books, page by page, so that no one had the power to deny. …”

‘Since then the clergy have prevented all women from studying

lest they should become believers like Ṭáhirih.’

With all these written records and these many praises and proofs

of her greatness in the past, the true measure of her importance lies

in her influence today. Nothing can show how deeply her sacrifice

has penetrated the life of modern Írán more than this: When fathers

in Írán today want to urge their daughters to progress, they say to

them, ‘Be a Ṭáhirih, be a Qurratu’l-‘Ayn!’

# Sources

The following books were consulted in the writing of this story of Ṭáhirih:

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Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers* (Wilmette, 1932)

Martha L. Root, *Ṭáhirih the Pure, Írán’s Greatest Woman* (Karachi, 1938)

All the quotations in the Epilogue are from *Ṭáhirih the Pure*, pages 84 and 85, except the one from Jináb-i-Adíb, which is on pages 69–71 of the same book.