

MULLA RIDA, THE INDESTRUCTIBLE

A transcript of audio-cassette from series
WINDOWS TO THE PAST
by Darius K. Shahrokh, M.D.

Let this window from these ageless windows to the past open to a superhuman endurance and courage, beyond words. May the life-story of Mulla Rida bring joy to your heart, smile to your face, and, hopefully, inspiration to your soul.

What you are about to hear is extracted from a Persian book called Masabih-i-Hidayat, Volume I, by Azizu'llah-i-Sulaymani, and an article by Habib Taherzadeh, quoted in The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, by Abid Taherzadeh, Volume I.

Other than seventeen-year-old Badi, no one has surpassed Mulla Rida's unusual power of endurance. The rare combination of endurance, eloquence, courage and humor made him that unique hero who illuminated the pages of the history of the Baha'i Faith.

This outstanding exponent of the Faith, with his sword-like power of utterance, was created by God to proclaim His Cause. His old-age photo does not depict his shapely, tall, and dignified bearing which complemented his other attributes. His real name was Mulla Muhammad Rida-i-Muhammad-Abadiyi Yazdi, which explains that he was from Muhammad Abad, a village near Yazd which is a southern city in Iran. He was a clergy in the city of Yazd, and in the early years of the Faith, he became a Babi, or a follower of the Bab.

A few historical points will be helpful for understanding the timing of the next event. Baha'u'llah received His mission in the Siyah-Chal of Tehran in 1852. After His release from that underground dungeon, He was exiled to Baghdad. His total stay in Baghdad was ten years, two years of which were spent in seclusion in the

mountains of Sulaymaniyyih. He composed His heart-touching poetry called Qasidiy-i-Varqa'iyih during those two years. He declared His station in 1863, but before leaving Baghdad for His next exile to Constantinople.

Now back to Mulla Rida. A well-known Babi from Yazd visited Baha'u'llah after His return from seclusion, and took a copy of His poetry back to Yazd. Mulla Rida had a chance to read it, and told that believer that it was clearly written by the Promised One. Here you can see his spiritual insight. That well-known Babi, who had brought the poetry, protested and said, "You should be out of your mind. The writer of these poems himself has not claimed to be the Promised One by the Bab." So this believer kept distance from Mulla Rida because of his outrageous remarks. Well! We can imagine that believer's shame and regret after Baha'u'llah declared His station in 1863. No doubt, Mulla Rida, as great as he was, with pity forgave that believer, and prayed for his guidance. After all, that poor believer had seen Baha'u'llah with his mortal eyes as well as reading Baha'u'llah's poetry, but failed to recognize Him. It is perceivable that Mulla Rida was chosen and recreated by Baha'u'llah with his sword-like power of utterance to tear the veils of ignorance, and proclaim and prove His Cause.

From the moment he recognized Baha'u'llah, he fixed his sight, well above anything or anyone else, right on Baha'u'llah, and never let any obstacle block it. Let us not forget his human side which brought smiles to those around him. He always was jovial, and joked to the end of his life. That side of him surely brought him down to earth in the eyes of those who were at awe about his spiritual qualities and faculties.

Mulla Rida never waited for the opportunity to teach the Faith. He would create, and, at times, force the opportunity. At many times by doing so, he exposed himself to intense pain and suffering which he welcomed with great joy. He did not seek gratification from pain, but when it came as a result of proclaiming the Cause, it caressed his soul.

Once, while still in Yazd before his expulsion, he heard there was a gathering of merchants consulting on how to improve the trade business. Mulla Rida took a large sheet of paper, and wrote on

it, "I have a suggestion and solution to offer to such an honorable gathering. If it is accepted and carried out, all the bounties and blessings of this world and the next will be yours, otherwise, all the tests and trials of both worlds shall befall you. My suggestion is that everyone should follow the laws and teachings of Baha'u'llah who has provided guidance for every segment of the society." He wrote additional explanations, and sent it to that gathering. I cannot tell you their response because I don't know it, but your guess is as good as mine!

By no means, Mulla Rida would deprive himself of the material pleasures and delicacies of this life. He would feed a very young lamb nuts, candy, cardamom and cloves to make the meat delicious and nutritious. Then he would invite the friends and serve the meat in gourmet dishes.

In his early years, he was rich and quite generous. Although his wealth was taken away, he never lost his generosity. Mulla Rida was not fond of the customary bad-tasting medications of those days. These, as you know, were made from brewing bark, leaves, roots and seeds of certain plants. As a child, I have taken some of them. I cannot tell you which one is worse, the smell or the taste. His cure-all recipe was broth. However, the ingredients needed to be accurately adjusted. Majority of times he preferred more meat and less water. Referring to that recipe, he used to recommend more deeds and less words for those who came in contact with him.

We learned a little about some of Mulla Rida's pleasures and the combination of his main prescription. What was the combination of his own skin and flesh? Was it tough and scarred? No way! Knowing his professional background as a clergy, undoubtedly his skin and flesh were more tender and pampered than yours and mind. What gave him the unsurpassed endurance was not the nature of his tissue, but the spirit which animated every fiber of his being. He was truly on fire with the love of Baha'u'llah. Listen to this example.

In his final days in Yazd prior to his expulsion, the governor ordered bastinado, which is flogging of the soles of the feet, at seven main intersections on a single day. The purpose was to

dissuade the inhabitants of Yazd from getting interested in the Faith. At each intersection, Mulla Rida would spread a large handkerchief on the ground, remove his aba which is the outer cloak, turban and socks and neatly put them on the handkerchief. Then after lying down, he would insert his feet into the loops of the bastinado rod, and tell the attendants, "Please, help yourself," while covering his face with the hem of his garment. At no time during these rounds of torture, did he make a sound or move indicating suffering and pain. This unusual calm aggravated the attendant who made their floggings as fierce as they could, but still he never cried out. At one point, his unusual calm in the face of violent floggings made the onlookers suspect that he had collapsed. When the hem of his garment was removed from his face, to their utmost astonishment, they found him cleaning his teeth in a quiet manner.

As a teacher, Mulla Rida was highly knowledgeable and audacious. In the knowledge of the Qur'an, Islamic laws, and traditions, no one could rival him or withstand the force of his arguments. Being blessed with such faculties and extraordinary stamina, he also was a man of broad vision. Of course, sometimes his imagination seemed to border on fantasy. The following story is fantastic!

He was a firm believer that the transmutation of elements, or the science of alchemy, would be discovered during the Baha'i Era. He was heard to say, "If I were guided to discover this science, I would build a city, and in it, I will erect a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, (which means House of Worship) made out of crystal." You heard it right. Not stone, not concrete or bricks, but crystal! Now listen to some details or specifications. Its central hall or the dome would be supported by ninety-five pillars, and each of its doors would be of solid gold and the dimension of each door, nineteen by nine meters. One meter is slightly longer than three feet. You can imagine the enormous weight of each door. Well! Rather impressive, but quite impractical.

Another time, he planned to put irrigation pipe from a lake in the vicinity of Kirman to supply water to the lower land. This one was quite ingenious for his time in that part of the country which is very dry and hot. Being a man of means, he purchased more than five hundred picks and shovels, and the project began.

Shortly after, he was arrested on account of his religious activities, and was detained. The whole project came to immediate halt, and soon the tools were stolen. He had an iron will and was well-determined. He was heard to say, "God is my helper. I will start from where I left the project," but it was not to be.

Around 1883, he, the great scholar, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, and a number of prominent Baha'is were arrested, and by the order of Kamran Mirza, the prince-governor of Tehran, were imprisoned. It is essential for you to know that the arrest of prominent Baha'is was an act of desperation. The mass conversion of all classes, particularly of the influentials, caused great alarm to the clergy and the officials. The intention for these arrests was nothing but execution. Now you can realize the gravity of the situation, and what is to follow.

On several occasions, these Baha'i prisoners were brought to the gathering of notables for questioning. One of the princes present was Farhad Mirza, who was the uncle of the king, Nasiri'd-Din Shah, and was a man of learning and knowledge. This prince had recently written and published a book on geography of the world.

Mulla Rida, far from being cautious and calculating, was extremely bold and frank. He always spoke on the spur of the moment quite effectively, and prevailed over his opponents, invariably revealing their ignorance. Remember the sword-like power of utterance. Here you will see it in action.

One day in such a gathering, Mulla Rida said that all the government officials and religious leaders of the capital (where he was in prison) should choose a miracle. Since Baha'u'llah was living in Akka, they should send a telegram to Him, and ask Him to perform. Mulla Rida also suggested that the inhabitants of Tehran should all be notified about this, so, once and for all, the issue of truth would be settled. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl writes in his book, Fara'id, the following account.

One day I was called to such a gathering where the prime minister was also present. He permitted me to sit down, and said, "Yesterday Mulla Rida told this gathering to send a telegram to Baha'u'llah

for a miracle, and had no doubt that Baha'u'llah would oblige. Mulla was so adamant that he promised that should Baha'u'llah, heaven forbid, fail to produce the requested miracle, he himself would arise against the Faith, and publically denounce it." The prime minister said, "Abu'l-Fadl, what do you say about this?" Heare you can clearly see their intrigues, to call a few prisoners one day and different ones the next day, hoping to produce controversy and contention among the believers.

Mirza Abu'l-Fadl answered, "No one doubts Mulla Rida's truthfulness and upright character. When he makes such a firm statement definitely it is founded on truth." Well, they did not comply, fearing Baha'u'llah's power, but it gave them something to think and talk about.

Let us leave this behind, and attend a very exciting encounter where, with his utterance, our Mulla Rida tore away the veils of superstition and ignorance. The purpose of these gatherings was not fact-finding or search for the truth. It was for mockery and insult to whatever the Faith stood for.

Every logic, tradition, or quotes from the Qur'an presented by the believers in support of their claim were either ignored or rejected. Farhad Mirza, the learned prince and uncle of the king, turned to Mulla Rida, and said, "Mulla, you cannot so easily fool us by referring only to those traditions which support your claim, and let the other important traditions slip by. Throughout your arguments this has been the major flaw." You can imagine how anxious Mulla Rida, the encyclopedia of Islamic traditions and verses, was to see what magic the prince would pull out of his sleeve. The poor prince had no idea in whose claws he was caught, and how his own web would strangle himself.

The prince, feeling in full command for a decisive strike, said, "The well-accepted tradition states that the Qa'im will come from the two cities of Jabulqa and Jabulsa where he has been hiding for more than one thousand years." The prince continued, "You and your friends, against such obvious and clear tradition, claim that the Bab, who is your Qa'im, was a young merchant from Shiraz, a city in our own country, which is far from that tradition." Mulla Rida calculatingly approached the subject. He said, "Your

Honor, you recently published the latest comprehensive book of geography." The prince proudly nodded his head, and was pleased that Mulla Rida made mention of it. Mulla continued, "There are also traditions which clearly state that these two cities of Jabulqa and Jabulsa have anywhere between seventy to one hundred thousand gates. Now compared to the large city of Tehran which has only a few gates, these two cities should be enormous in size." So far no one disagrees. Now comes the blow, "Your Honor, in your book in which continent have you mentioned such a massive city?" The prince was quite bold, and tried to keep his composure. He did not know the checkmate was approaching fast. You realize that this was not a private conversation. The reputation of the prince, in front of all the dignitaries who were well below his rank and knowledge, was at stake.

These encounters remind me of the rounds of a championship match. The two princes are quite large and boasting, heavily decorated with precious stones. The Baha'is are pale, thin, and simply clad, but sharp and fast. The tyrants have learned their mastery in the best schools of the royal realm; the believers in the school of faith and detachment. Both sides are well armed for the final blow. One has the visible sword, the other the force of certitude. Will they use them? Why not?

Let the final rounds begin. Prince Farhad Mirza, whose bearing and knowledge had impressed the royal circles, cleared his throat. Leaning on his jewel-studded cane, he read a few verses from Baha'u'llah's writings, and criticized the wrong use of a certain Arabic word in that particular content. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl immediately quoted poems from different Arab poets using the same word in the same context.

The miserable prince, unable to bear the force of such successive poundings, resorted to the last dangerous maneuver, not realizing that he was in quicksand, and that any move would sink him deeper. Now you can hold your breath, and watch the mastery and presence of mind of that blessed soul, Mulla Rida. It is very hard for us to capture the tense mood in that gathering. The sword-happy princes in that gathering could strike at any moment. An average person would have been dumbfounded with fear, but Mulla Rida's courage knew no bounds.

Badly shaken, the desperate prince could no longer keep his anger. While pounding his cane on the floor, he told Mulla Rida, "You wretched and brain-washed followers of Baha'u'llah! It saddens me that with your apparent knowledge you have given allegiance to a man like him. I know Baha'u'llah quite well. Many years ago, when we were young, we were drinking pals."

Did you hear that? It is an outrageous charge about something fifty years earlier. Unless precisely and decisively answered, it would be a definite gain for the prince, with the cheering of his comrades. Just think! What would you or I have answered? Don't forget that the prince has power over everyone's life. We couldn't point our finger at him, and say, "Look prince, you are a desperate dirty liar," or something like that. That would not be prudent. Let us stay out of this altogether, and don't make matters any worse. Leave it in the capable hands of the expert, Mulla Rida.

With such heavy insult to Baha'u'llah, Mulla Rida's blood was boiling, but he never showed it. Such assaults only sharpened his faculties. The immediate grin on his face was not a good sign for the prince. It indicated that the prince's words were suicidal and self-incriminating. Do you have any clue? Do you remember his unmentionable and outrageous words, "Baha'u'llah and I were drinking pals." Well! Mulla Rida's mind worked faster than any computer. It analysed, dissected, and sorted the sentence and the words, and when he tapped his vast memory bank, the answer was clear and ready in a flash.

Although he never feared torture or death, yet he was always very respectful to the officials, and observed proper protocol. He said, "Your Honor, with your learning and knowledge, you are fully cognizant of the laws of Islam." The boasting prince had no idea what a law of Islam had to do with his assertion. Knowing that drinking was a private thing without any witnesses, he was sure that the believers could in no way refute such accusation. So he thought Mulla was going to side-track and bring dismal excuses.

Mulla Rida said, "One law of Islam clearly states (listen to this) that the testimony of a sinner cannot be upheld against the accused. You just confessed to your own sin of drinking, therefore it

happened to them, I let you guess a few possibilities. Definitely with the gravity of the situation, and the fuming of the two princes any resuce appears impossible, but not for the Hand of Providence. Let us hold still, and breathe gently. The thread of pendulum swinging the fate of these innocent believers between execution and freedom is stretched to the limit. The tension is high. You don't have to say what your guesses are. I can tell!

Yes, maybe the governor or the jailer accepts the truth of the Cause, and frees the prisoners in the middle of the night. I am so glad you have listened to the story of Ahmad. Well, it happened to the immortal Ahmad. Why not again? Second guess: could a useful earthquake do it by leveling the prison compound, with only our heroes surviving? A selective wrath of nature is not a bad guess. I hear the clock ticking. Don't worry. We have time for another story.

Among the prisoners there was a poor Jew who was an outcast in the prison. The Muslims would not even let him go to the public bath for the fear of defiling the bath. I cannot imagine anything capable of defiling the putrid water of those public baths, the stench of which could be smelled blocks away. One day Mulla Rida told one of the Baha'i co-prisoners how he felt sorry for the Jew, and asked the believer if he could help him to wash the Jew by the pool in the prison yard. They undressed him by the pool. That believer poured water, and Mulla soaped and scrubbed him, and gave him clean clothes. The Jew was stunned by all of this, and anxiously kept repeating, "Who are these people? Are they angels? I couldn't have washed myself the way they did. I can't understand. They are not even Jews."

Mulla told him, "You wretched fellow. It is nothing but the words of your Heavenly Father that prompted me to wash you and clothe you. But, unfortunately, you don't know your Father, and His words which state, 'Consort with the peoples of all religions in a spirit of love and fellowship.'"

Now what you have so patiently been waiting to hear about the fate of those honorable scholars and distinguished servants of Baha'u'llah. The gallows, or the gate to freedom. At first, it sounds like I am going at a tangent, but please trust me and listen.

that the Cause is great, and therefore it is bound to encounter great opposition, and those who try to defile the fair name of the Cause with abuse and insult surely will never succeed. What they actually do is to let everyone know how stupid they are. Just like the act of a fool who tries in vain to spit at the sun. Well, these words were great, but the believers were not looking for repeated abuse, so they constantly begged and urged Mulla Rida, but of no use. The situation became worse, and with new dangers ahead, anxious believers decided to use an alternate solution. They went to the jailer, and asked him to order Mulla Rida not to speak in public about the Cause.

How wrong. No earthly power, no pain, or punishment could curb his uncompromising spirit. What we call safety and discretion was different in his dictionary. So when Mulla Rida did not comply with the orders, the jailer ordered his men to punish this frail, old man severely. They took Mulla Rida to the prison yard, and most brutally flogged his bare back. He never budged, or raised the faintest cry, nor did his face show the slightest indication of suffering. We can feel the shame and sadness of the believers witnessing this heart-wrenching sight brought on by their doing.

Siyid Asadu'llah states, "Soon after the flogging, I rushed to give my sympathy, and offered to dress his lacerated back. Mulla Rida was greatly surprised by my behavior, and shouted triumphantly, "O, Siyyid Asadu'llah! Do you really think I am hurt? At the time of the flogging, I felt like a drunken elephant, and never felt the slightest pain. I was in the presence of Baha'u'llah, conversing with Him." What a saint!

Among the non-Baha'i prisoners witnessing this was a distinguished Muslim, whose heart was deeply touched by such superhuman endurance. After he was freed, he investigated and became a dedicated believer. Later on, when asked how did he become a Baha'i, he said, "One hundred verses of the Qur'an, or a thousand reasons would not have convinced me about the truth of the Faith the way the unruffled calm of Mulla Rida influenced me. My teacher was the whip."

No, not yet about the mission impossible, and the fate of these doomed innocent prisoners. Amazing! I have not seen anyone as curious as you are. Well, since you are so anxious to know what

Baha'u'llah is the return of Imam Husayn. Last night Mulla Rida told me He is the Supreme Manifestation. What do you have to say?" As was mentioned before, those gatherings of the dignitaries were quite intimidating to average person. This believer answered, "Mulla Rida is like Sufis, and is an extremist. Occasionally, he likes to exaggerate." Mulla, without fear of speaking out of turn, sprang up and said, "Your honor, Baha'u'llah is exactly who I told you last night. These people are spineless. In safety, they say one thing, and when facing danger, another thing."

Later on, when the proceedings of these gatherings were mentioned at the presence of Baha'u'llah, He stated, "We would have answered exactly as Mulla Rida did." Wow! What a privilege to live during the days of Baha'u'llah, when a hero like Mulla Rida could hear the confirmation of his statement straight from the Tongue of Glory.

You heard, or almost watched a few of these encounters. What do you think the sentence would be? The prince governor and the other prince, uncle of the king, had power and authority only next to the king. These helpless Baha'is in the process of defending their Beloved's Cause had severely wounded the pride of their captors. When wounded, they could be quite vicious. The gallows, or blasting them by a cannon? Well, I see the two princes are thinking in the same lines, or even harsher measure. We can't tell which cruelty would appease their fiendish craving. Only a fiend would know. Since the power of the princes is not absolute, will a mysterious twist of events save the doomed prisoners, or not? I will tell you all about it a little bit later.

Please be patient! Imagine all the days that these precious souls patiently spent in prison, not knowing what was next. Martyrdom was their wish, but frequent brutality and foul insults were hard to bear.

You like to hear about couple more incidents in that prison related by a Baha'i co-prisoner, Siyyid Asadu'llah-i-Qumi. He states, "Mulla Rida's public discussions sometimes became highly controversial, and excited the fanatics who looked for opportunity to shower the believers with ridicule and insult. Many believers begged Mulla Rida to cap his audacity in prison since these ignorant people were not seekers, but trouble-makers." Mulla Rida contended

disqualifies you as a witness, and thus Baha'u'llah is clear from such unfounded charges." Bravo, Mulla Rida!

Defense well-executed, the opponent disarmed and temporarily disabled. This was way beyond what the proud prince had asked for. So badly shaken and wounded by the sharpness of the believers, the prince apparently went blank and left the gathering. Really, an honorable death in a frontier war would have been preferable and easier to bear. All he did was to order the men back to the prison. He could easily have opened the chest of Mulla Rida with his sword. That was his privilege in those days. After all, these Baha'is had been arrested for the purpose of execution. Such gatherings were only masquerades for the entertainment of the officials, and by no means, were for fact-fidning or search for the truth.

How I wish I could go into the prison with them, and see the elation of those brave heroes, particularly, Mulla Rida, who so eloquently defended the Cause of God. They were instruments raised by Baha'u'llah to proclaim His Cause in the face of any danger. Now they have come out of another furnace of tests harder and sharper than ever.

The devious governor, Kamran Mirza, who witnessed the humiliation of the king's uncle, made a plan for revenge. That evening he invited Mulla Rida for supper. No doubt, after a day like that, Mulla was quite hungry, so with great joy he accepted the invitation, being tired of miserable food served in prison. At that private dinner, Mulla was concentrating and feasting on the gourmet dishes which he had missed for such a long time, and paid little attention to the foolish conversation of the governor. Only at times, he said a word or two until the name of Baha'u'llah was brought up. His taste buds immediately went numb, but his ears became sharp. The governor said, "Tell me, Mulla Rida, this Baha'u'llah whom you worship, is he an Imam or prophet or what?" Mulla, full of life, said, "Neither! He is the Supreme Manifestation and the Promised One of all the religions of the past." The governor said no more. This was his bait for the next day.

Well, another day; another masquerade. At this gathering, the governor told one of the believers, "You Baha'is state that

The highest leading clergy of Islam, Mirzayih Shirazi, who occupied that seat for many years in Iraq, confided the following to a Baha'i. This was after his retirement from that position. He did not wish that the secret be buried with him. He told the believer that as a student in Isfahan, he met the Bab, and became a believer. Later on, he accepted Baha'u'llah. This believer, rather shocked, asked him, "Why didn't you announce your Faith to cause mass conversion?" He said, "My honorable friend! Was I any higher than Mulla Husayn, Vahid, and the like? What did the fanatic clergy and people do to them. They were all martyred. I, from the highest seat in Islam, helped the Cause." Then he gave a few examples, one of which is the one your are anxious to hear.

He stated, "When I was informed that the most prominent scholars of the Faith were imprisoned in Tehran, I wrote a strong letter to the king, Nasiri'd-Din Shah, and told him, 'Why have you done this without my authorization? Muhammad states that people seek after what is forbidden. It is because of your persecutions that this Cause is flourishing. As soon as you read this letter, free these prisoners with kindness, and stop all of these killings.'" And that was exactly what the king did. He summoned the prisoners, and gave each one a gold coin, and freed them all.

No doubt such a twist of fate puzzled the bewildered and revengeful governor who watched it helplessly. However, one source states that they took revenge by causing the bloodshed of innocent believers elsewhere. Such freedom was a well-deserved bonus for the brave and dedicated believers who needed a little rest until the next tribulation in each one's life.

With your permission, I like to interject an interesting and timely fact. It is rather unusual that during the ministries of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, contrary to the dispensations of the past, many doctors of religion, each one a giant, embraced the Faith. To name a few, Vahid, Hujjat, Mirzayih Shirazi, Fadl-i-Qa'ini, Abu'l-Fadl, and the like. These luminaries, equipped with the armor of faith, became valiant defenders and promoters of the Cause. Their conversion is another indication for the magnitude of the force released in this Dispensation.

After his release, Mulla Rida resided in various cities, and tirelessly taught the Faith.

Then to the delight of his heart, permission came, and he attained the presence of Baha'u'llah in Akka. His soul refreshed and his energy renewed, he returned to Iran to face further trials.

In 1896, four years after the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, the king, Nasiri'd-Din Shah, was assassinated when the fiftieth anniversary of his coronation was being celebrated. You recall that forty-four years earlier, two years after the martyrdom of the Bab, three crazy and revengeful Babi youth unsuccessfully tried to kill the young king. Well, with that in mind, you can see why everyone pointed their fingers at Baha'is. When the assassination occurred, Mulla Rida was at Qum, a fanatically religious city near Tehran. A preacher announced from the pulpit the assassination of the king. Then he added, "Baha'is finally did it." A smear on the name of the Cause which Mulla Rida could not tolerate.

From the middle of the crowd, Mulla Rida shouted, "Preacher, you are mistaken. These people never do an act like this!" The attention of the crowd now was focused on Mulla. People said, "Why are you defending these people? Maybe you are one of them." He boldly answered, "Of course, I am." Let us not forget, he was raised by Baha'u'llah to defend the Faith regardless of any consequences. If that is not selfless devotion, what else could it be.

He received his share of insults and abuse, and was sent to Tehran to be imprisoned. His age was about what you see in his photograph. The officer who received him with pity, said, "This is an old man, and does not look like a Babi. Let him go." No need to ask how many of us would have dashed out at that opportunity. Mulla Rida said, "That is true. I am not a Babi, I am a Baha'i. Everybody knows me. Ask around. I have been in jail many times." The officer said, "Do you wish to go to prison?" Mulla, always content with the will of God, said, "If it is my destiny, I do not mind!"

He was taken to prison, and received his welcoming flogging right after his arrival. Throughout such a painful ordeal, he kept praising the Lord. When it was over, the jailer asked Mulla, "Why did you keep praising the Lord? Did you enjoy the flogging?" He said, "No, I thanked God for not having created me like these mean and cruel attendants who so mercilessly beat upon an innocent man."

You see, he exemplified the teachings when free, under the prison chain, or the whip.

One believer, Mirza Husayn-i-Zanjani, who for sixteen months was in chain with Mulla Rida, relates many stories about him. Prior to that, he was in chain with the two martyrs, Varqa and his son, Ruhu'llah. God willing, their life story will be presented another time. Mirza Husayn considered being in chain with Mulla Rida a bounty. Preparing food for him, washing and mending his clothes, and being his companion, a true privilege.

These are a few incidents during that final imprisonment of Mulla Rida before his soul took its flight to the realm of Glory. Mirza Husayn relates, "Mulla usually asked for properly brewed and good tea. He liked it very sweet. He would fill the cup half-way with sugar, and then put a sugar lump inside his cheek for added sweetness." Mirza Husayn continues, "I used to tell him over and over, this is a prison and everything is rationed. He would answer, 'Borrow, prepare and bring it, God will provide.' Many things I prepared for him was at the cost of other Baha'i prisoner's rations and contributions."

"He seldom thanked anyone, but having his sight focused on Baha'u'llah, frequently thanked Baha'u'llah for the comfort and creating the believers to care for him. Any time Mulla Rida gave anything away as charity, he would say, 'I gave it to Baha'u'llah.' During those prison days, we were frequently reminded about his famous broth recipe of more meat and less water, as well as more deeds and less words."

"One day we were sitting with another believer when suddenly Mulla became quiet and hushed us. He said, 'There is a sound. Can you hear it?' After listening carefully, we said no. He said, 'You must be deaf. I can hear the sound of crying and lamentation from the nearby restaurant by the marketplace.' Now we were alarmed that someone was hurt, and Mulla, with his extra-sensory ability, was perceiving it. Then his charming humor prevailed. He said, 'I hear the dill-rice mourning and lamenting loud. It is supplicating to me, "O my beloved and my purpose for existence. How could I be honored to reach you? O how my highest desire is to be consumed by you." Then Mulla Rida said, 'I feel all I can do for

that poor rice is to recite some verses from Baha'u'llah.' Then he looked at us, and said, 'By the way, how about you fulfilling the rice's wish, and cause our reunion?'" Eloquence, wit, and humor extraordinaire.

Mirza Husayn states, "I asked myself how can I do this? The other believer said, 'We will give up our supper, and with collection from all Baha'i prisoners, we can do it.' So we ordered the dill-rice for him which he ate without offering a bite to anyone else." Maybe Mulla was following the Persian proverb that says one prospering village is much better than one hundred desolate cities, or in other words, one stomach filled, better than many barely fed. Mirza continues, "This was the beginning of many lamentations Mulla Rida heard from various dishes, and we did our best to bring about their reunion."

Another inspiring incidence related by Mirza Husayn, "One day a youth was brought to the prison because of stealing. He had no shirt on. We had one spare shirt among us. Mulla Rida said, 'This man is a servant of Baha'u'llah, though he has not recognized his Master. Since he is half-naked, and a spare shirt is some sort of luxury in prison, it behooves us to give him our spare shirt.'" Mirza Husayn states, "I told Mulla Rida I just washed the spare shirt. You put it on, and I will give him your shirt. You should have seen Mulla Rida losing his temper. He said, 'Do you mean that I put on the clean shirt, and give the dirty one to Baha'u'llah? How do you dare to say such a thing? Aren't you a Baha'i? Don't you know that Baha'u'llah says that it is not charity unless you give away the things you hold dear? I wonder how long it will take you to attain and understand.'" Poor Mirza states, "He really shook me up. I begged God to give me a certitude like Mulla's, or keep me an extra year in prison so he could be freed."

You can see how heartbreaking it was to watch a saintly man like Mulla Rida, in his old age, kept in the harsh environment of prison. Mirza writes, "Sometimes when his full dissertation in answer to a small question from a new prisoner would bring a barrage of insult and ridicule, I tried to persuade him to be brief. I told Mulla, 'My heart aches, and the vulgarity of the criminals brings me sorrow.' His answer was, 'Become a solid believer, so nothing

could hurt you,' and then Mulla would weep intensely which was very hard to take." In essence, he shed his tears of pity for the ignorance of others.

Mirza continues, "I used to pray and beg God either to transform me, or kill me so I would be relieved of having to witness all of this." Mirza Husayn states that events were many and stories numerous, but for brevity he concludes his stories by saying, "A great person like Mulla Rida was way beyond my comprehension. He truly was an extraordinary man."

Habib Taherzadeh writes this about Mulla Rida. I quote him directly, "Mulla Rida was a man of peculiar conduct, and of a trend of thought unusual by our standards. He had attained a station from which he saw in every object a sign or reflection of the Glory of Baha'u'llah, and the love he cherished for Him dominated his whole being, and to it, he subordinated every other impulse." This really says it all.

I wish I could give you a happy ending, but to our standard, it was sad. However, Mulla was happy, and kept his humor to his very last days. After the assassination of Nasiri'd-Din Shah, the crown prince, Muzaffaru'd-Din Mirza, became the king. Of all the kings of the Qajar dynasty, Muzaffaru'd-Din Shah, was the mildest and more tolerant towards the Faith. His father was the most notorious tyrant who was given the title of "Prince of Oppressors" by Baha'u'llah.

Early during the reign of this new king, the believers in Tehran, particularly the women, on several occasions sent petitions to ask for release of the Baha'i prisoners. Eventually the order was given for their transfer to the government building in preparation for their release. Of course, the fiendish officials never missed the opportunity to parade the innocent Baha'is in chains. The government building was at some distance from the prison. It was quite hard to walk after sixteen months of being in chains at one spot with very little movement. Mirza Husayn writes, "Four of us were chained together. The frail and old Mulla Rida was put in lighter chains, and since he could hardly walk, he was carried on the back of a porter which was a sight itself. At times the officer in charge jokingly asked Mulla Rida

about his donkey (meaning the porter), and in answer Mulla Rida would praise the donkey. The porter, quite agitated, would swear, and say as if it were not bad enough that the Babi (meaning Mulla) was defiling him, but how did he dare call him a donkey. With such conversation, the vast crowd on both sides would burst into laughter. Mirza said, "I myself, at times, laughed or cried. However, every time the porter became too rowdy, trying to dump Mulla on the ground, a few whips from the officer would bring him back in line which made the crowd laugh again."

"Among the multitude of onlookers were some Baha'is. The ladies who had sent the petition to the king were following the prisoners behind the crowd. One of these ladies stood at a vantage point, and when Mulla Rida approached, she whispered in his ears, 'For heaven's sake, for next couple hours become deaf and dumb, and please do not spoil the release process.' They all were afraid of Mulla Rida's audacity. He answered loudly, 'Don't worry, I will be deaf and dumb. I am quite obedient.'" Well, soon we shall see whether he kept his promise or not.

This march was quite ceremonious with soldiers and attendants marching along. Many onlookers thought they were being taken to the gallows which was customary in those days. The march took couple of hours, and after many stops for resting, they finally reached the government building. As they got near the building, an official asked Mulla a question. Mulla Rida pointed to the chief attendant to answer for him since he supposedly was deaf and dumb. He was always so jovial. Nothing could dampen his inner peace and spirit.

Upon their arrival, the chains were removed. What relief that was. The clanging noise and the weight of those heavy chains would crush one's very spirit, but these lions of the Cause dragged their chains with pride. The prisoners were given a good meal which was a treat. Miraz Husayn states, "That night the thought of freedom overwhelmed us all. Before we knew it, we woke up at sunrise. With our hopes mounting every minute, we did our ablution and said our prayers. We were told the order for our freedom was on its way. All of a sudden a dark cloud covered the sky, and soon a downpour began. You can tell something will be going wrong. The dark cloud was not a good omen. Well, your intuition is quite right."

A certain evil-minded siyyid, accompanied by his theologian students, was passing by. The door-attendant offered them shelter at the government building until the storm blew over. This brought a different kind of storm to the Baha'is. Mirza Husayn goes on to state, "When this siyyid heard about us being there, and how the release order was on its way, the siyyid sent an attendant to our room. The attendant said, 'Aqa (referring to the siyyid) wishes to meet you. Please accompany me to his room.' We almost unanimously said, 'We are worn out, and are in no condition to do any visiting.' Mulla Rida disregarded his promise to be deaf and dumb, or maybe the couple hours which he had promised had expired. With such a calling, he could not resist the temptation, so he sprang up full of life, and said, 'I am going to see what they have to say.' Our plea and begging failed to dissuade him."

"One of the believers said, 'May God save us from the mischief of Mulla Rida and the siyyid.'" This kind of conduct of Mulla Rida was beyond comprehension of any ordinary and calculating person. His response to the call was not mischief. That saint was way above our way of thinking. Now you can feel the anxiety of the believers. Mirza states, "We could hear their conversation. Mulla was pounding them with proofs, accompanied by a flood of verses from the Qur'an. Being confounded and at a loss, they became abusive and violent. Barely fifteen minutes had passed when we began to hear shouting and curse words from that room. Soon Mulla was thrown out, and while still shouting at them, he returned to our room. We said, 'Mulla, you should have listened to us. Now God know what will be the outcome.'" Listen to Mulla's answer, "Had I failed my duty, that clergyman still would be having the wrong impression. I really straightened that man and his students!"

That evil siyyid wrote to the government that the release of this old Baha'i (meaning Mulla Rida) would be very unwise, and could be detrimental to the name of the official who signs it. Well, that did it. That dark cloud brought the angel of death. So, everyone was freed except Mulla Rida. Maybe he had the intuition that his eternal freedom was at hand. Mirza Husayn writes, "When I heard that Mulla Rida was not released, it was as if a hot rod pierced my heart. I told the attendant, 'Please do something that this old man does not go back to prison.' I promised to give him a good sum of money for his services. I told him if at all possible please take me to prison, and let him go."

"Mulla Rida, quite calm and resigned to the will of God, was eavesdropping. He approached us, and related a story resembling his situation. He concluded with these remarks, 'If you give me half of the money you are offering this attendant, I will be most happy.' That blessed man never lost his sense of humor. Although the attendant pretended that he would not take Mulla Rida back to the prison, when the time came for us to leave, to our sorrow, we saw them taking him back to prison."

Due to old age and lack of proper care, ten days later his blessed soul ascended to the Abha kingdom, joining the souls of other saints in the Sea of Lights, in the World of Mysteries.

Abdu'l-Baha revealed a tablet in his honor, stating how glorious his rank was as a teacher as well as a martyr. Also, He revealed a Tablet of Visitation in his honor. The feeling of ecstasy of being in the presence of Baha'u'llah during each round of his brutal tortures was similar to what the martyrs felt prior to their martyrdom.

Mirza Husayn stated that Mulla Rida frequently said he had two wishes. One was to be near Baha'u'llah in all of the worlds of God; and the other, that Baha'u'llah would be pleased with his deeds. It is safe to say that he achieved both.

It has been a privilege for this servant to be able to relate to you the life-story of this outstanding hero, Mulla Muhammad Rida-i-Muhammad-Abadi.