

Suffering of Bahá'u'lláh, The

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Whoso ariseth among you to teach the Cause of his Lord, let him, before all else, teach his own self, that his speech may attract the hearts of them that hear him. Unless he teacheth his own self, the words of his mouth will not influence the heart of the seeker. Take heed, O people, lest ye be of them that give good counsel to others but forget to follow it themselves. The words of such as these, and beyond the words the realities of all things, and beyond these realities the angels that are nigh unto God, bring against them the accusation of falsehood.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 277

Dearly-loved Friends, this is the theme we must pursue in our efforts deepen in the Cause. What is Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race? For what ends did He submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him? What does He mean by "a new race of men"? What are the profound changes which He will bring about? The answers are to be found in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in their interpretation by `Abdu'l-Bahá and our beloved Guardian. Let the friends immerse themselves in this ocean, let them organize regular study classes for its constant consideration....

-- The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1967, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 114

The remembrance of God and His praise, and the glory of God and His splendor, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art His Beauty! I bear witness that the eye of creation hath never gazed upon one wronged like Thee. Thou wast immersed all the days of Thy life beneath an ocean of tribulations. At one time Thou wast in chains and fetters; at another Thou wast threatened by the sword of Thine enemies. Yet despite all this, Thou didst enjoin upon all men to observe what had been prescribed unto Thee by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. May my spirit be a sacrifice to the wrongs Thou didst suffer, and my soul be a ransom for the adversities Thou didst sustain.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Visitation, in Bahá'í Prayers, pp. 228-229

The Announcement

The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures. Behold how, notwithstanding such an announcement, mankind hath strayed from its path and shut out itself from its glory.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 5

This is the Day, O my Lord, which Thou didst announce unto all mankind as the Day whereon Thou wouldst reveal Thy Self, and shed thy radiance, and shine brightly over all thy creatures. Thou hast, moreover, entered into a covenant with them, in Thy Books, and Thy Scriptures, and Thy Scrolls, and Thy Tablets, concerning Him Who is the Day Spring of Thy Revelation, and hast appointed the Bayán to be Herald of this Most Great and all-glorious Manifestation, and this most resplendent and most sublime Appearance.

And when the world's horizon was illumined, and He Who is the Most Great name was manifested, all disbelieved in Him and in His signs, except such as have been carried away by the sweetness of Thy glorification and praise. There befell Him what must remain inscrutable to everyone except Thee, Whose knowledge transcendeth all who are in Thy heaven and all who are on Thy earth.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 87

The Imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál

Bahíyyih Khánúm, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh known as the Greatest Holy Leaf, was just a child when her Father was arrested at their country home and imprisoned in Tihrán, the capital of Persia. In her later years she related her memories of this event to a fellow Bahá'í:

"One day I remember very well, though I was only six years old at the time...

"My father was away at his country house in the village of Níyávarán which was his property....

"Suddenly and hurriedly a servant came rushing in great distress to my mother.

"The master, the master, he is arrested! I have seen him! He has walked many miles! Oh they have beaten him! They say he has suffered the torture of the bastinado! His feet are bleeding! He has no shoes on! His turban has gone! His clothes are torn! There are chains upon his neck!"

"My poor mother's face grew whiter and whiter.

"We children were terribly frightened and could only weep bitterly.

"Immediately everybody, all our relations, and friends, and servants fled from house in terror, only one man-servant, Isfandíyár, remained and one woman. Our palace, and the smaller houses belonging to it were very soon stripped of everything; furniture, treasures, all were stolen by the people."

Bahíyyih Khánúm quoted in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 40-41
Nabíl-i-A'zam, in his narrative history of the early days of the Faith, *The Dawn-Breakers*, gives this account of the treatment of Bahá'u'lláh after His arrest in the district of Shimírán:

From Shimírán to Tihrán, Bahá'u'lláh was several times stripped of His garments, and was overwhelmed with abuse and ridicule. On foot and exposed to the fierce rays of the midsummer sun, He was compelled to cover, barefooted and bareheaded, the whole distance from Shimírán to the dungeon already referred to. All along the route, He was pelted and vilified by the crowds whom His enemies had succeeded in convincing that He was the sworn enemy of their sovereign and the wrecker of his realm. Words fail me to portray the horror of the treatment which was meted out to Him as He was being taken to the Síyáh-Chál of Tihrán. As He was approaching the dungeon, and old and decrepit woman was seen to emerge from the midst of the crowd, with a stone in her hand, eager to cast it at the face of Bahá'u'lláh. Her eyes glowed with a determination and fanaticism of which few women of her age were capable. Her whole frame shook with rage as she stepped forward and raised her hand to hurl her missile at Him. "By the Siyyidu'sh-Shuhada, I adjure you," she pleaded, as she ran to overtake those into whose hands Bahá'u'lláh had been delivered, "give me a chance to fling my stone in his face!" "Suffer not this woman to be disappointed," were Bahá'u'lláh's words to His guards, as He saw her hastening behind Him. "Deny her not what she regards as a meritorious act in the sight of God."

-- Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 606-608

Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, has left us this description of the Síyáh-Chál, where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned for four months:

"The prison into which my father had been cast was a terrible place, seven steps below the ground; it was ankle-deep in filth, infested with horrible vermin, an of an indescribable loathsomeness. Added to this, there was glimmer of light in that noisome place. Within its walls forty Bábís were crowded; murderers and highway robbers were also imprisoned there.

"My noble father was hurled into this black hole, loaded were chained to him night and day, and here he remained for four months. Picture to yourself the horror of these conditions.

Any movement caused the chains to cut deeper and deeper not only into the flesh of one, but of all who were chained together; whilst sleep or rest of any kind was not possible. No food was provided, and it was with the utmost difficulty that my mother was able to arrange to get any food or drink taken into that ghastly prison."

Bahíyyih Khánum quoted in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 41-42
After we turn to the same interview with the Greatest Holy Leaf for this insight into the suffering of Bahá'u'lláh in Tihrán:

"[The Blessed Beauty] spoke very little of the terrible sufferings of that time! We, who saw the marks of what he had endured, where the chains had cut into the delicate skin, especially that of his neck, his wounded feet so long untended, evidence of the torture of the bastinado, how we wept with my dear mother.

"He, on his part, told of the steadfast faith of the friends, who had gone forth to meet their death at the hands of their torturers, with joy and gladness, to attain the crown of martyrdom."

Bahíyyih Khánum quoted in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 44-45

Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád

During the last years of Bahá'u'lláh's exile in Baghdád, He spoke many times of the period of trial and hardship that was to come. One such warning was revealed to Him in dream which He describes as follows:

"I saw," He wrote in a Tablet, "the Prophets and the Messengers gather and seat themselves around Me, moaning, weeping and loudly lamenting. Amazed, I inquired of them the reason, whereupon their lamentation and weeping waxed greater, and they said unto me: `We weep for Thee, O Most Great Mystery, O Tabernacle of Immortality!' They wept with such a weeping that I too wept with them. Thereupon the Concourse on high addressed Me saying: `...Erelong shalt Thou behold with Thine own eyes what no Prophet hath beheld.... Be patient, be patient.'... They continued addressing Me the whole night until the approach of dawn."

-- Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 147

The Banishment of Bahá'u'lláh to Akká

Bahá'u'lláh, referring to His Own suffering during the first nine years of His banishment to the prison-city of Akká, has written:

"Know thou," Bahá'u'lláh, wishing to emphasize the criticalness of the first nine years of His banishment to that prison-city, has written, "that upon Our arrival at this Spot, We chose to designate it as the `Most Great Prison.' Though previously subjected in another land (Tihrán) to chains and fetters, We yet refused to call it by that name. Say: Ponder thereon, O ye endued with understanding!"

-- Bahá'u'lláh quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 185

The Greatest Holy Leaf was with Bahá'u'lláh and the little band of Bahá'ís that followed Him into exile during the journey from Adrianople to Akká. In her later years she recorded these memories of their arrival at the prison-city:

"...at last we reached Akká, the end of our journey.

"All the townspeople had assembled to see the arrival of the prisoners. Having been told that we were infidels, criminals, and sowers of sedition, the attitude of the crowd was threatening. Their yelling of curses and execrations filled us with fresh misery. We were terrified of the unknown! We knew not what the fate of our party, the friends and ourselves would be.

Bahíyyih Khánúm quoted in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 66

Again we call upon an interview with the Greatest Holy Leaf for a vivid description of the suffering of the exiles during the first weeks of their imprisonment in the fortress of Akká:

"When we had entered the barracks the massive door was closed upon us and the great iron bolts thrown home. I cannot find words to describe the filth and stench of that vile place. We were nearly up to our ankles in mud in the room into which we were led. The damp, close air and the excretions of the soldiers combined to produce horrible odours....

"The followers [of Bahá'u'lláh] were all brought to the barracks together and lodged on the ground floor. Among them were the women and children, almost dying with hunger and parched with thirst. My brother [`Abdu'l-Bahá] begged to

be permitted to go out for food and water. The soldiers replied: "You cannot put a foot outside of this room.

If you do, we will kill you....' Then he asked permission to send out a servant guarded by soldiers. This was refused....

"The season was summer...and the temperature was very high. All our people were huddled together on the damp earth floor of the barracks; with little water to drink, and that very bad, with no water with which to bathe, and scarcely enough for washing their faces. Typhoid fever and dysentery broke out among them. Every one in our company fell sick excepting my brother, my mother, an aunt, and two others of the believers. We were not allowed a physician; we could not procure medicine. My brother had in his baggage some quinine and bismuth. With these two drugs and his nursing, he brought us all through with the exception of four, who died. These were two months of such awful horror as words cannot picture. Imagine it, if you can. Some seventy men, women and children packed together, hot summer weather, no proper food, bad water, the most offensive odours from purging and excretions, and a general attack of the terrible diseases of dysentery and typhoid.

Bahíyyih Khánum quoted in Myron H. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, pp. 57-63

The Purpose of His Suffering

I swear by Thy glory! I have accepted to be tried by manifold adversities for no purpose except to regenerate all that are in Thy heaven and on Thy earth. Whoso hath loved Thee, can never feel attached to his own self, except for the purpose of furthering Thy Cause; and whoso hath recognized Thee can recognize naught else except Thee, and can turn to no one save Thee.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 198

The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness. This is of the mercy of your Lord, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful. We have accepted to be abased, O believers in the Unity of God, that ye may be exalted, and have suffered manifold afflictions, that ye might prosper and flourish. He Who hath come to build anew the whole world, behold, how they that have joined partners with God have forced Him to dwell within the most desolate of cities!

-- Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 99-100

Say: We have accepted to be tried by ills and troubles, that ye may sanctify yourselves from all earthly defilements. Why, then, refuse ye to ponder Our purpose in your hearts? By the righteousness of God! Whoso will reflect upon the tribulations We have suffered, his soul will assuredly melt away with sorrow. Thy Lord Himself beareth witness to the truth of My words. We have sustained the weight of all calamities to sanctify you from all earthly corruption, and ye are yet indifferent.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 307

In bearing hardships and tribulations and in revealing verses and expounding

proofs, it has been the purpose of this oppressed One to extinguish the fire of hate and animosity, that, haply, the horizons of the hearts of mankind be illumined with the light of concord and attain real tranquility.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 208

The Purpose of His Suffering

Was it necessary for Bahá'u'lláh to endure the tribulations that were heaped upon Him? Could He have accomplished His purpose without such suffering? Why? How will Bahá'u'lláh's chains release mankind from bondage? Why should His sorrow cause us joy and gladness? How will His afflictions cause us to prosper and flourish?

What kinds of sorrows and tribulations did Bahá'u'lláh endure? What afflictions caused Him the most pain?

What does Bahá'u'lláh mean when He says "ye are yet indifferent"? What does the suffering of Bahá'u'lláh mean to you personally?

Why do you suppose that The Universal House of Justice has asked the Bahá'ís of the world to study this particular subject? What difference does it make?

For What Ends Did He Submit?

As my tribulations multiplied, so did my love for God and for His Cause increase, in such wise that all that befell Me from the hosts of the wayward was powerless to deter Me from My purpose. Should they hide Me away in the depths of the earth, yet would they find Me riding aloft on the clouds, and calling out unto God, the Lord of strength and might. I have offered Myself up in the way of God, and I yearn after tribulations in love for Him, and for the sake of His good-pleasure. Unto this bear witness the woes which now afflict Me, the like of which no other man hath suffered. Every single hair of Mine head calleth out that which the Burning Bush uttered on Sinai, and each vein of My body invoketh God and saith: "O would I had been severed in Thy path, so that the world might be quickened, and all its peoples be united!" Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

Bahá'u'lláh in Bahá'í Revelation, p.16

A few days before His passing, `Abdu'l-Bahá gave a talk in His home in Haifa to some Persian Bahá'ís who had gathered there for a meeting with Him. These notes of `Abdu'l-Bahá's address were taken down in Persian at that meeting and later translated:

"His Holiness the Christ loved both his disciples and believers to such an extent that he sacrificed his life for them. His holiness the Supreme (the Báb), loved the friends to such an extent that he gave his life for them. The Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) loved the friends so much that for their sakes he accepted a thousand difficulties and afflictions. Four times he was exiled. He was banished from one place to another. His properties were confiscated. He gave all his family, his relatives, his possessions. He accepted imprisonment, chains, and fetters. His holy person was imprisoned in the fortress of Akká....He was made to suffer more calamities, afflictions and difficulties

than could be enumerated. He had not a moment's rest. He had not an hour's comfort. He was continually under the greatest hardships and ordeals. What great persecutions he endured from his enemies! What great afflictions he bore from his own relatives!

"He accepted all these trials for our sakes so that he might educate us, so that he might make us heavenly, so that he might change our character, change our lives, so that he might illumine our inmost self. All these troubles he accepted for our sakes. He did indeed sacrifice his life for us. This love is the real love. This is the inner attachment and the genuine friendship. This love is the love which sacrifices one's all, one's life. This is the reality of love...."

`Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in "The Universal Language of the Spirit," *Star of the West*, 13, no. 7 (October 1922), 163-164

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh endured ordeals and hardships sixty years. There was no persecution, vicissitude or suffering He did not experience at the hand of His enemies and oppressors. All the days of His life were passed in difficulty and tribulation; at one time in prison, another in exile, sometimes in chains. He willingly endured these difficulties for the unity of mankind, praying that the world of humanity might realize the radiance of God, the oneness of humankind become a reality, strife and warfare cease and peace and tranquillity be realized by all. In prison He hoisted the banner of human solidarity, proclaiming Universal Peace, writing to the kings and rulers of nations summoning them to international unity and counselling arbitration....

Therefore we also must strive in this pathway of love and service, sacrificing life and possessions, passing our days in devotion, consecrating our efforts wholly to the cause of God, so that, God willing, the ensign of universal religion may be uplifted in the world of mankind and the oneness of the world of humanity be established.

-- `Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í World Faith*, pp. 230-231

Thou hast known how grievously the Prophets of God, His Messengers and Chosen Ones, have been afflicted. Meditate a while on the motive and reason which have been responsible for such a persecution. At no time, in no Dispensation, have the Prophets of God escaped the blasphemy of their enemies, the cruelty of their oppressors, the denunciation of the learned of their age, who appeared in the guise of uprightness and piety. Day and night they passed through such agonies as none can ever measure, except the knowledge of the one true God, exalted be His glory.

Consider this wronged One.... God grant that, with a penetrating vision and radiant heart, thou mayest observe the things that have come to pass and are now happening, and, pondering them in thine heart, mayest recognize that which most men have, in this Day, failed to perceive.

-- Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 57-58

For What Ends Did He Submit?

Why did Bahá'u'lláh submit to the injustice that was heaped upon Him? And upon His followers? Did He have any choice?

What effect did this suffering have upon Bahá'u'lláh? What effect will have

His suffering have upon mankind? How?

What effect does studying the tribulations suffered by Bahá'u'lláh have upon you as an individual? Does it make you joyous or sorrowful? Or both? Does it have any other effect?

Why does Bahá'u'lláh say "I yearn for tribulations in My love for Him"? What does this mean?

What is "the reality of love"? How is it shown? What is sacrifice? Why is it necessary?

Why have all the Prophets of God had to suffer? Is the reason the same for all of Them?

— Suffering of Bahá'u'lláh, The (Used by permission of the curator)