

The following story is from the book

*The Central Figures*

# *The Báb*

*Volume One*



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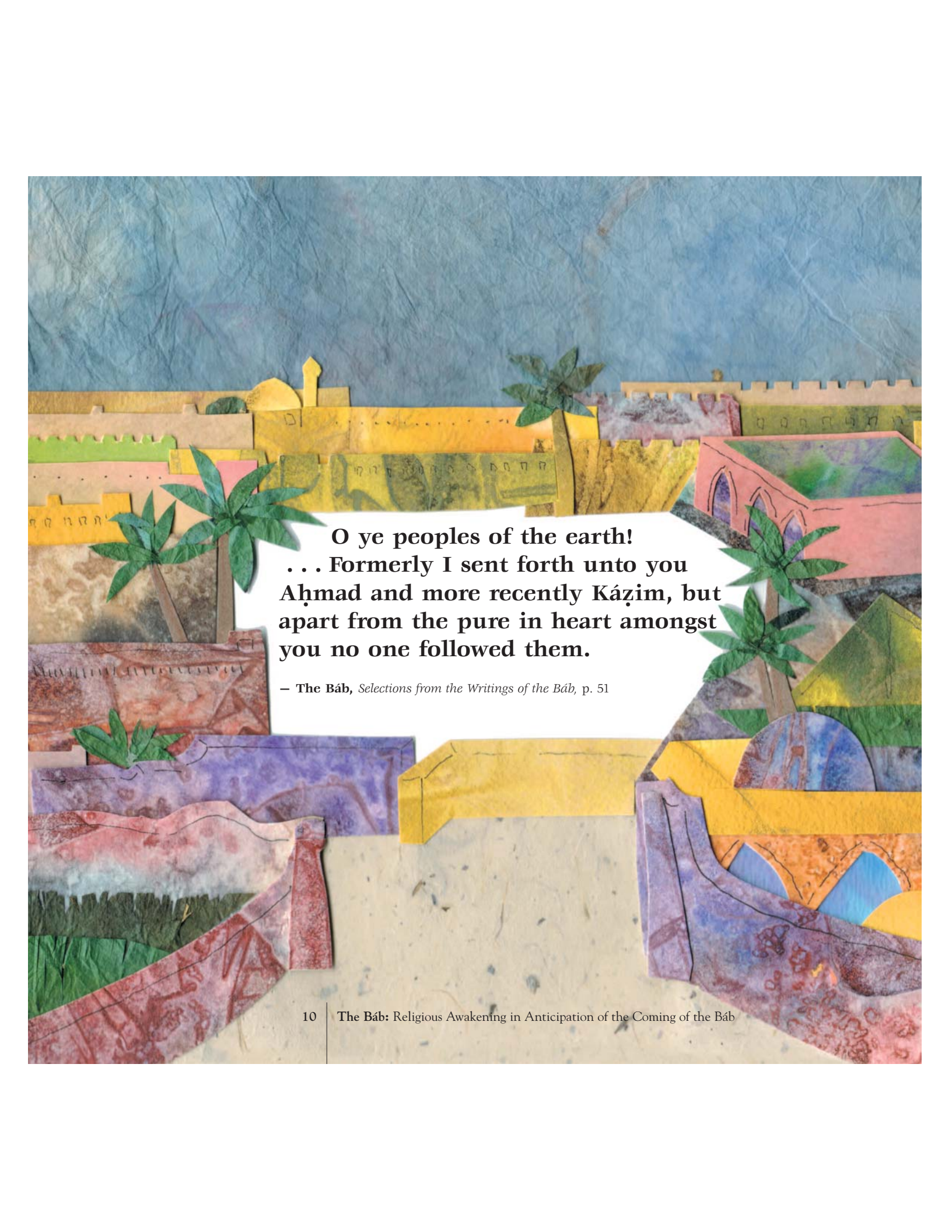
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**O ye peoples of the earth!  
... Formerly I sent forth unto you  
Aḥmad and more recently Kázim, but  
apart from the pure in heart amongst  
you no one followed them.**

– *The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 51*





# A Time of Earthquakes

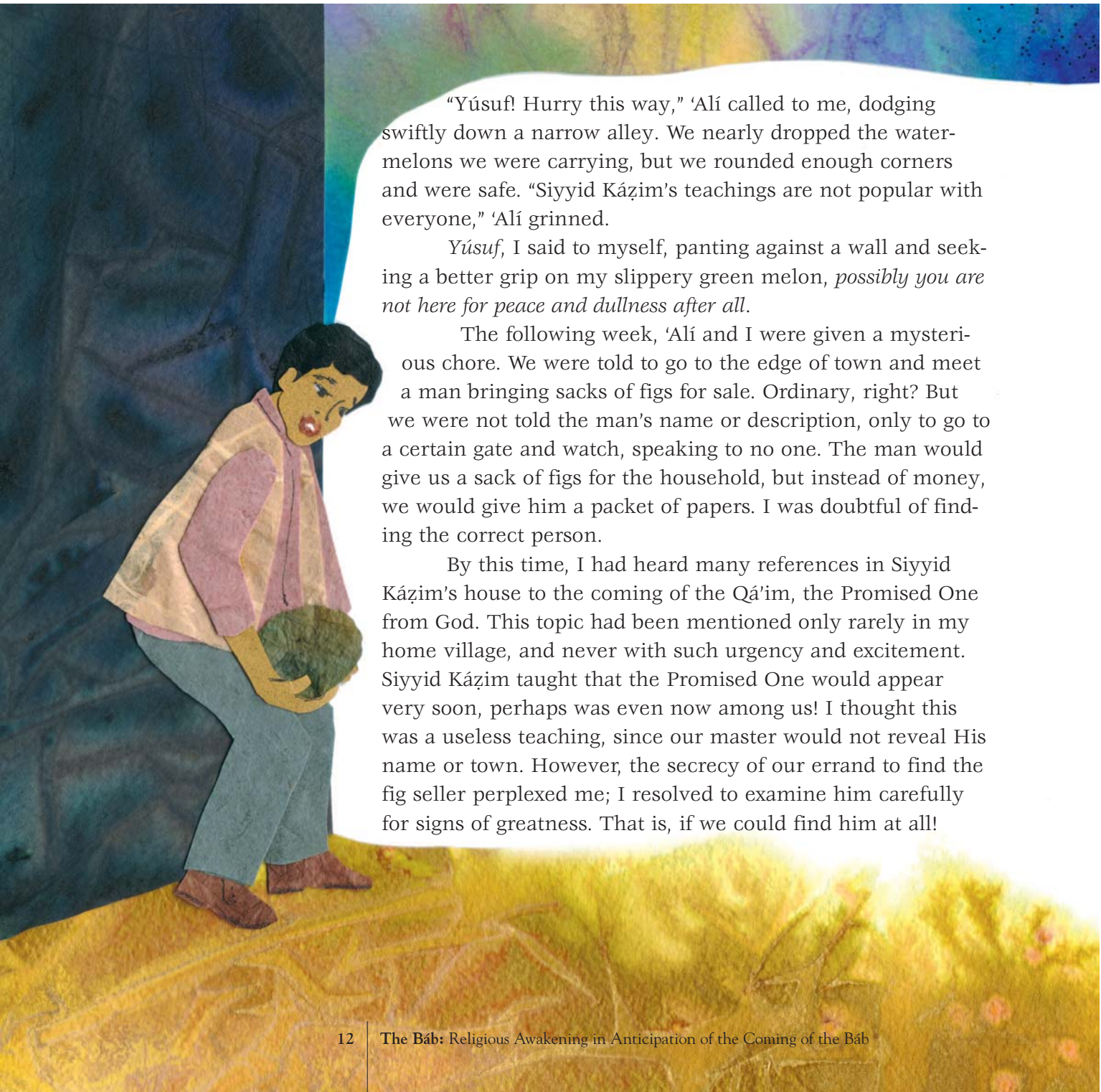
Written by Theo Gustafson

Illustrated by Barbara Trauger

After my village was destroyed in an earthquake, I, Yúsuf, hoped only to live in a quiet, peaceful place. I would mourn my family and try to forget that the earth can suddenly tremble and collapse. When they told me a distant kinsman, Siyyid Kázim, would take me into his household in Karbilá, I thought, *God be praised! A small town of religious scholars sounds blessedly dull.*

It was only my second day here when rocks were thrown at me in the street.

“Heretics! Infidels! Begone, you dogs!” Such harsh voices! A rock stung my ear.



“Yúsuf! Hurry this way,” ‘Alí called to me, dodging swiftly down a narrow alley. We nearly dropped the watermelons we were carrying, but we rounded enough corners and were safe. “Siyyid Kázim’s teachings are not popular with everyone,” ‘Alí grinned.

Yúsuf, I said to myself, panting against a wall and seeking a better grip on my slippery green melon, *possibly you are not here for peace and dullness after all.*

The following week, ‘Alí and I were given a mysterious chore. We were told to go to the edge of town and meet a man bringing sacks of figs for sale. Ordinary, right? But we were not told the man’s name or description, only to go to a certain gate and watch, speaking to no one. The man would give us a sack of figs for the household, but instead of money, we would give him a packet of papers. I was doubtful of finding the correct person.

By this time, I had heard many references in Siyyid Kázim’s house to the coming of the Qá’im, the Promised One from God. This topic had been mentioned only rarely in my home village, and never with such urgency and excitement. Siyyid Kázim taught that the Promised One would appear very soon, perhaps was even now among us! I thought this was a useless teaching, since our master would not reveal His name or town. However, the secrecy of our errand to find the fig seller perplexed me; I resolved to examine him carefully for signs of greatness. That is, if we could find him at all!



'Alí and I waited in midmorning behind a piece of old broken wall. We saw many people trudging through the dust, as well as camels, squeaky carts, and donkeys. Time passed slowly, as I counted the drops of sweat on my nose. Suddenly a man pulled his loaded donkey apart from his fellow travelers so that he passed very near us. Before I realized what was happening, he took the packet from 'Alí, shuffled a very large lumpy sack over to us, and merged smoothly again with his fellows as though he did not wish them to notice his movements.

While we wrestled the scratchy, awkward sack home, I laughed at my hopes. The seller of figs had been very small, old, and shriveled, with few teeth. Even I knew that among Siyyid Kázim's clues about the Promised One were these facts: He was young, of medium height, and free of physical flaws.

That afternoon 'Alí and I finished the lines of poetry we had been assigned to copy. He excelled at memorization, but I was better at calligraphy. While we put away our tools, he laughed at my morning's suspicions. He leaned forward to whisper, "I myself think it's likely that Mullá Ḥusayn is the Promised One. When he returns to Karbilá, you shall judge for yourself."

"Everyone speaks so highly of him," I said, "of his astonishing speaking ability, his courage, and his splendid character. I can hardly believe he is real!"



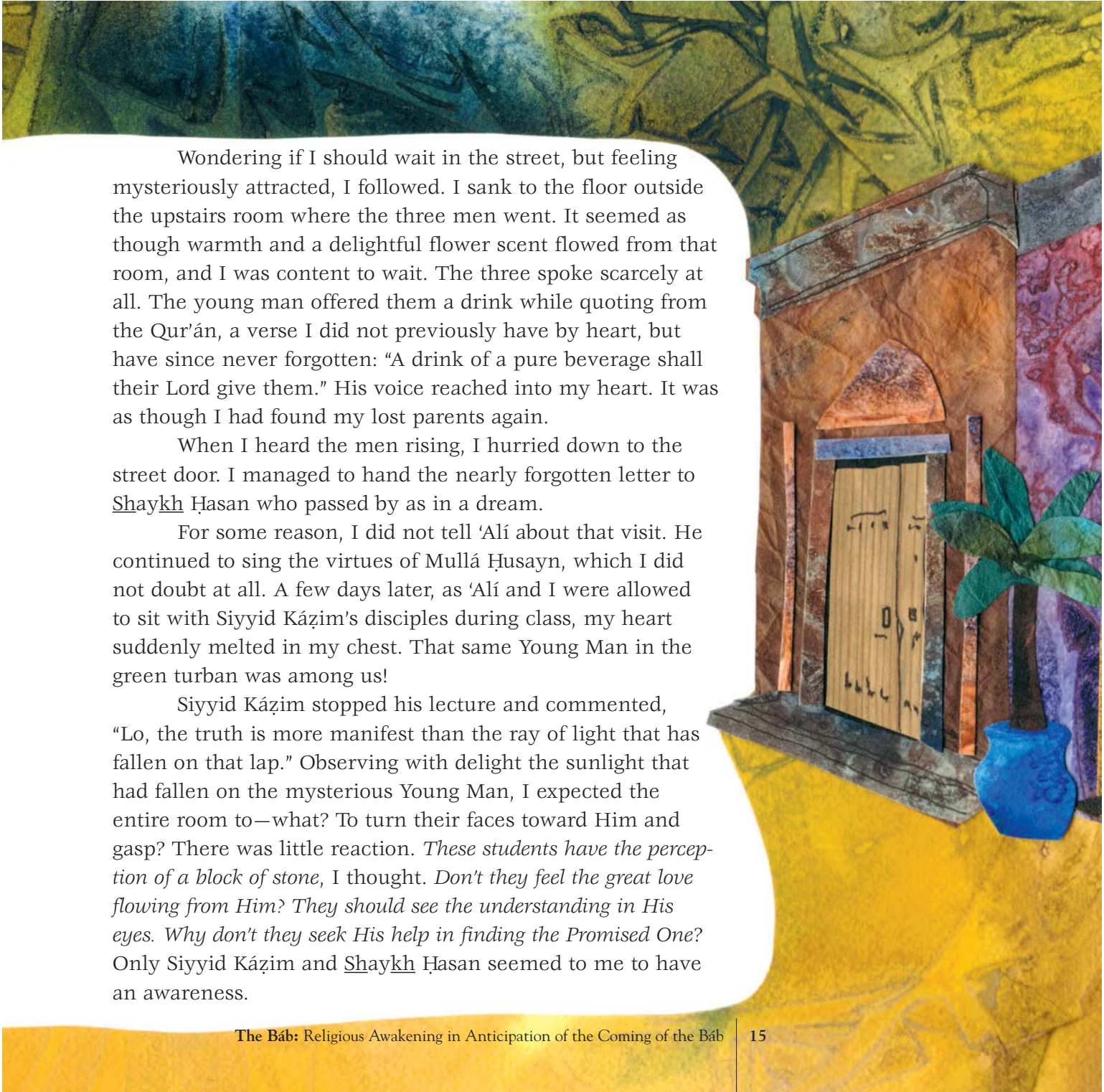


Everyone in Karbilá, it seemed to me, had his opinion about finding the Promised One, but Siyyid Kázim said that purity of heart is the most important quality in a seeker. It was silly to think that He would come to me so easily. Siyyid Kázim was the center of a huge web of communication, all of which was haunted with danger. This was no game; many people would try to stop the Promised One before He could change their world. The fig seller's smoothly secretive movements made me realize the importance of my humble role as messenger. That day I began to take the situation seriously—and resolved to avoid jumping to conclusions.

One morning I was awakened at dawn by soft sounds in the next room. I thought I recognized the voice of Shaykh Ḥasan, for whom I had a letter to deliver. Quickly I grabbed my shoes and the letter, but I arrived at the street door just as Siyyid Kázim and Shaykh Ḥasan were disappearing around the corner.

Thinking I would easily catch up and deliver the letter, I followed. But strangely, I could not reach them, even though both were elderly. As they approached a house unknown to me, they were welcomed by a Young Man in a green turban. With great love and warmth, He took them inside.



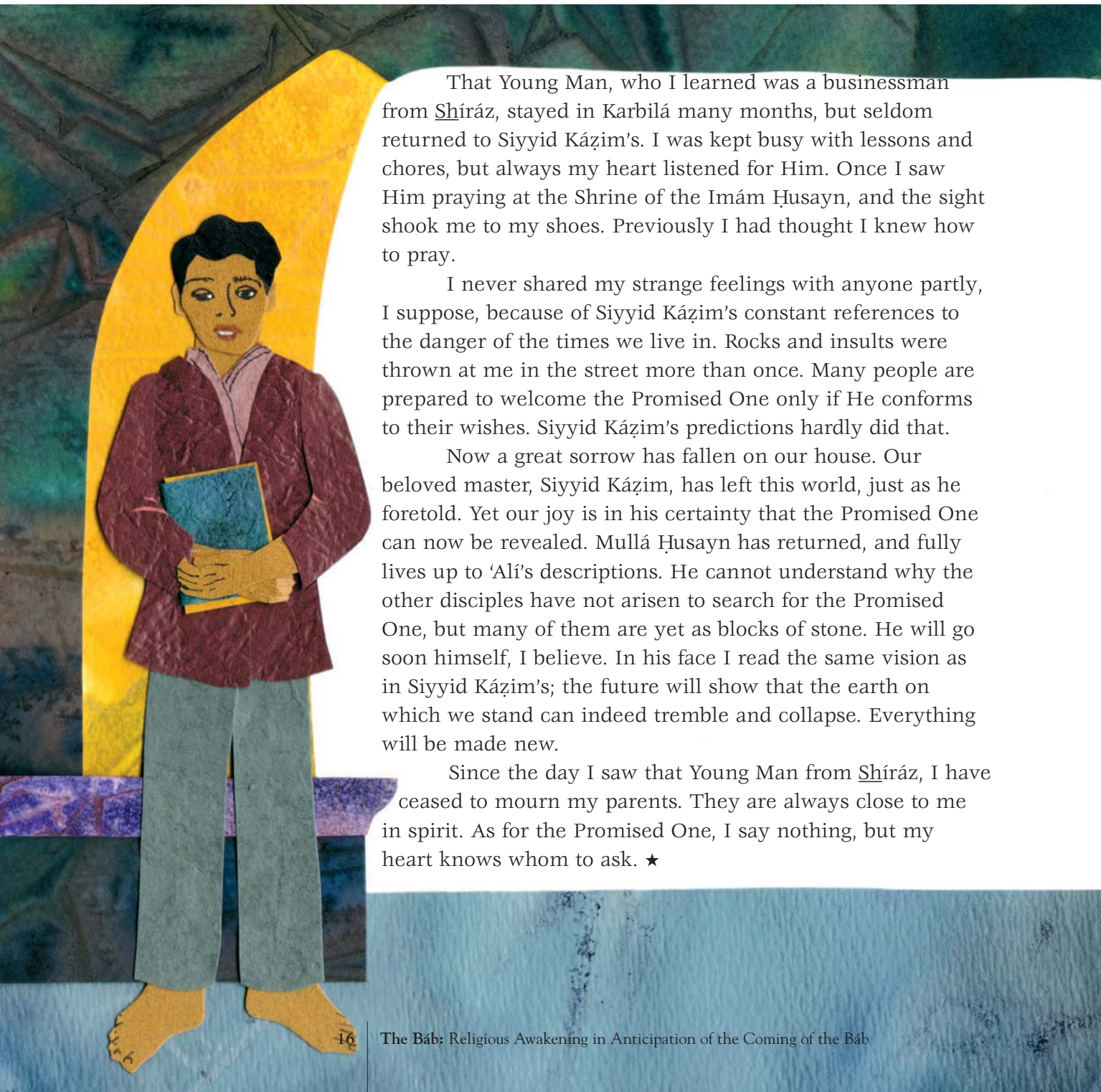


Wondering if I should wait in the street, but feeling mysteriously attracted, I followed. I sank to the floor outside the upstairs room where the three men went. It seemed as though warmth and a delightful flower scent flowed from that room, and I was content to wait. The three spoke scarcely at all. The young man offered them a drink while quoting from the Qur'án, a verse I did not previously have by heart, but have since never forgotten: "A drink of a pure beverage shall their Lord give them." His voice reached into my heart. It was as though I had found my lost parents again.

When I heard the men rising, I hurried down to the street door. I managed to hand the nearly forgotten letter to Shaykh Ḥasan who passed by as in a dream.

For some reason, I did not tell 'Alí about that visit. He continued to sing the virtues of Mullá Ḥusayn, which I did not doubt at all. A few days later, as 'Alí and I were allowed to sit with Siyyid Kázim's disciples during class, my heart suddenly melted in my chest. That same Young Man in the green turban was among us!

Siyyid Kázim stopped his lecture and commented, "Lo, the truth is more manifest than the ray of light that has fallen on that lap." Observing with delight the sunlight that had fallen on the mysterious Young Man, I expected the entire room to—what? To turn their faces toward Him and gasp? There was little reaction. *These students have the perception of a block of stone*, I thought. *Don't they feel the great love flowing from Him? They should see the understanding in His eyes. Why don't they seek His help in finding the Promised One?* Only Siyyid Kázim and Shaykh Ḥasan seemed to me to have an awareness.



That Young Man, who I learned was a businessman from Shíráz, stayed in Karbilá many months, but seldom returned to Siyyid Kázim's. I was kept busy with lessons and chores, but always my heart listened for Him. Once I saw Him praying at the Shrine of the Imám Ḥusayn, and the sight shook me to my shoes. Previously I had thought I knew how to pray.

I never shared my strange feelings with anyone partly, I suppose, because of Siyyid Kázim's constant references to the danger of the times we live in. Rocks and insults were thrown at me in the street more than once. Many people are prepared to welcome the Promised One only if He conforms to their wishes. Siyyid Kázim's predictions hardly did that.

Now a great sorrow has fallen on our house. Our beloved master, Siyyid Kázim, has left this world, just as he foretold. Yet our joy is in his certainty that the Promised One can now be revealed. Mullá Ḥusayn has returned, and fully lives up to 'Alí's descriptions. He cannot understand why the other disciples have not arisen to search for the Promised One, but many of them are yet as blocks of stone. He will go soon himself, I believe. In his face I read the same vision as in Siyyid Kázim's; the future will show that the earth on which we stand can indeed tremble and collapse. Everything will be made new.

Since the day I saw that Young Man from Shíráz, I have ceased to mourn my parents. They are always close to me in spirit. As for the Promised One, I say nothing, but my heart knows whom to ask. ★