

The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

The Báb

Volume One



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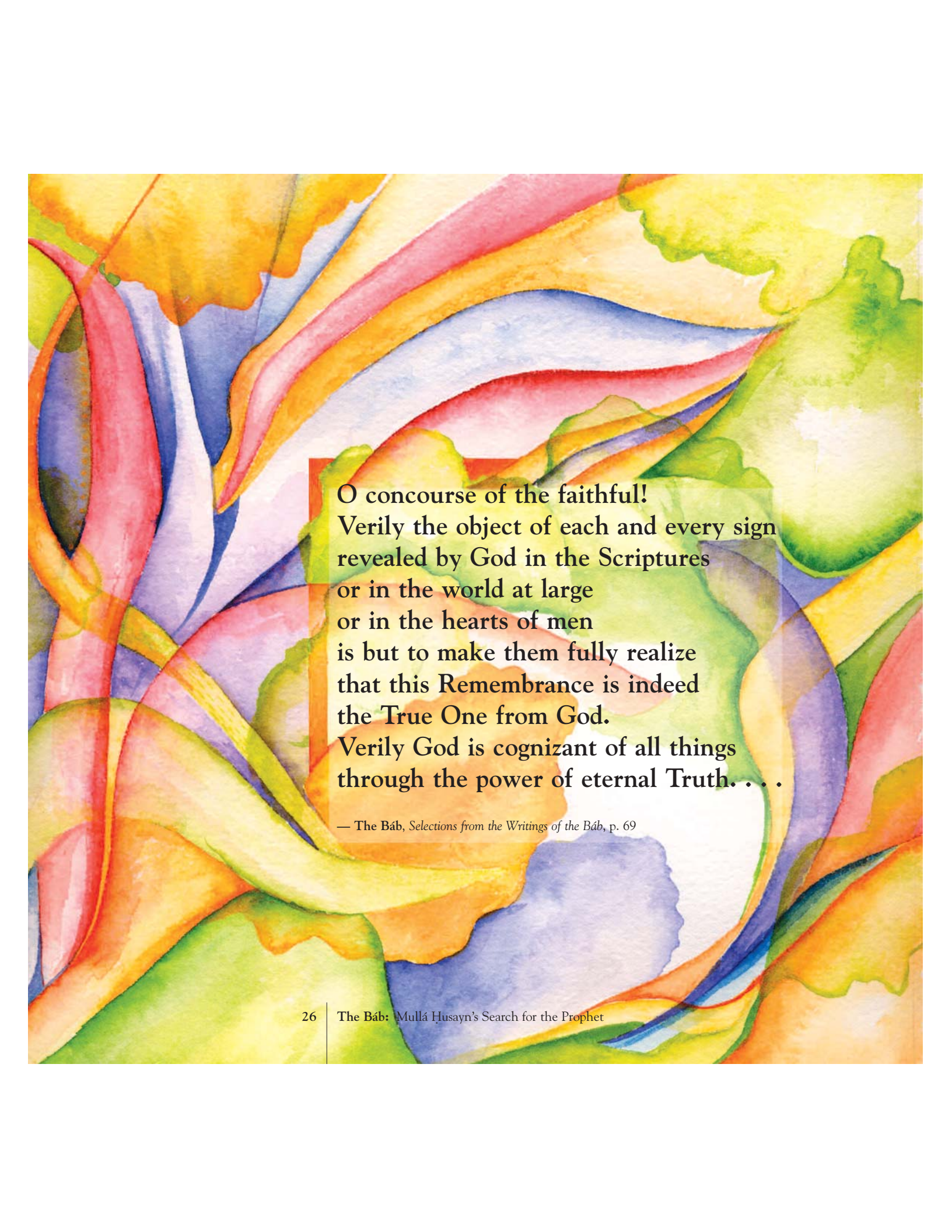
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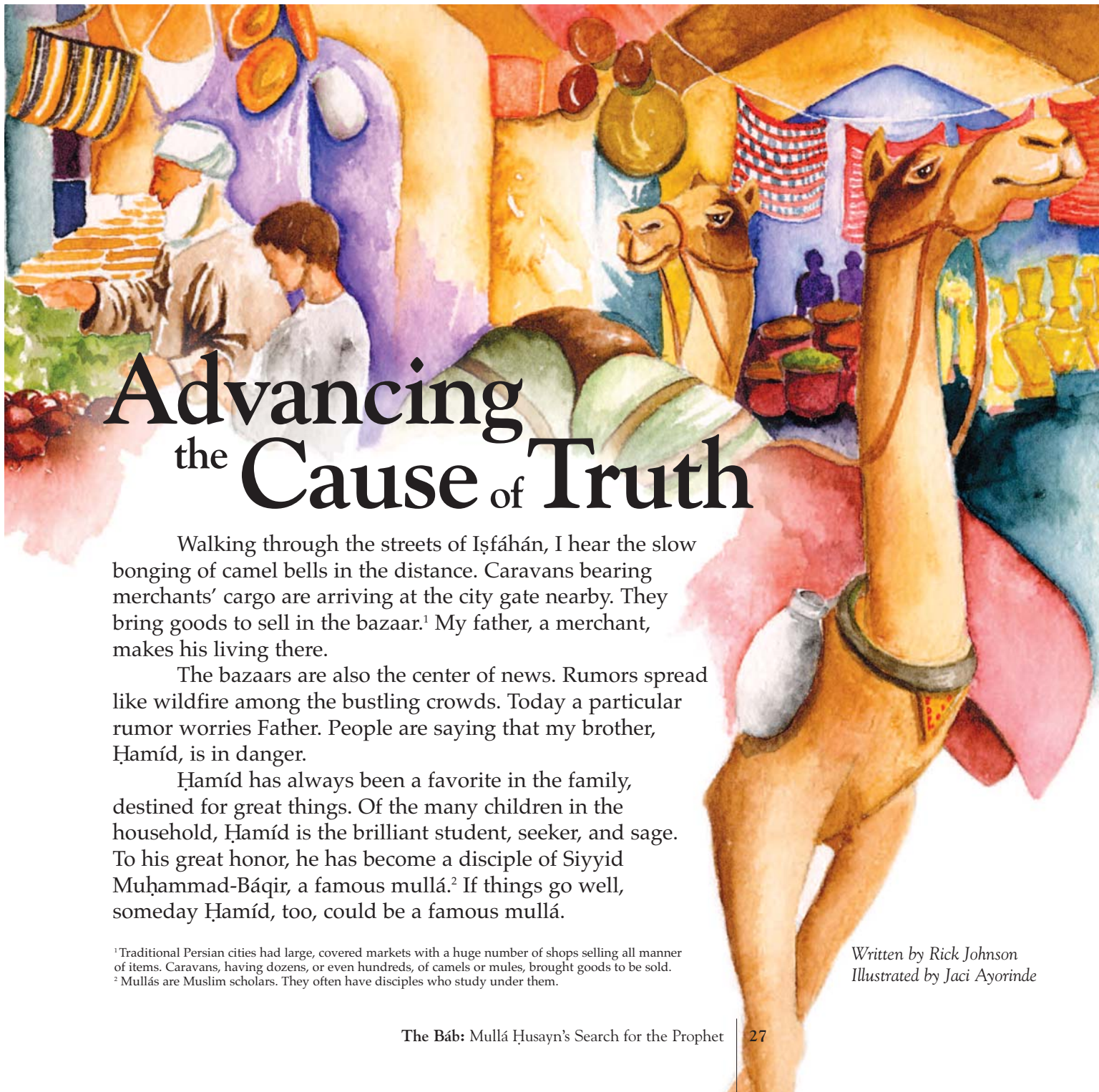
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**O concourse of the faithful!
Verily the object of each and every sign
revealed by God in the Scriptures
or in the world at large
or in the hearts of men
is but to make them fully realize
that this Remembrance is indeed
the True One from God.
Verily God is cognizant of all things
through the power of eternal Truth. . . .**

— The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 69



Advancing the Cause of Truth

Walking through the streets of Işfáhán, I hear the slow bonging of camel bells in the distance. Caravans bearing merchants' cargo are arriving at the city gate nearby. They bring goods to sell in the bazaar.¹ My father, a merchant, makes his living there.

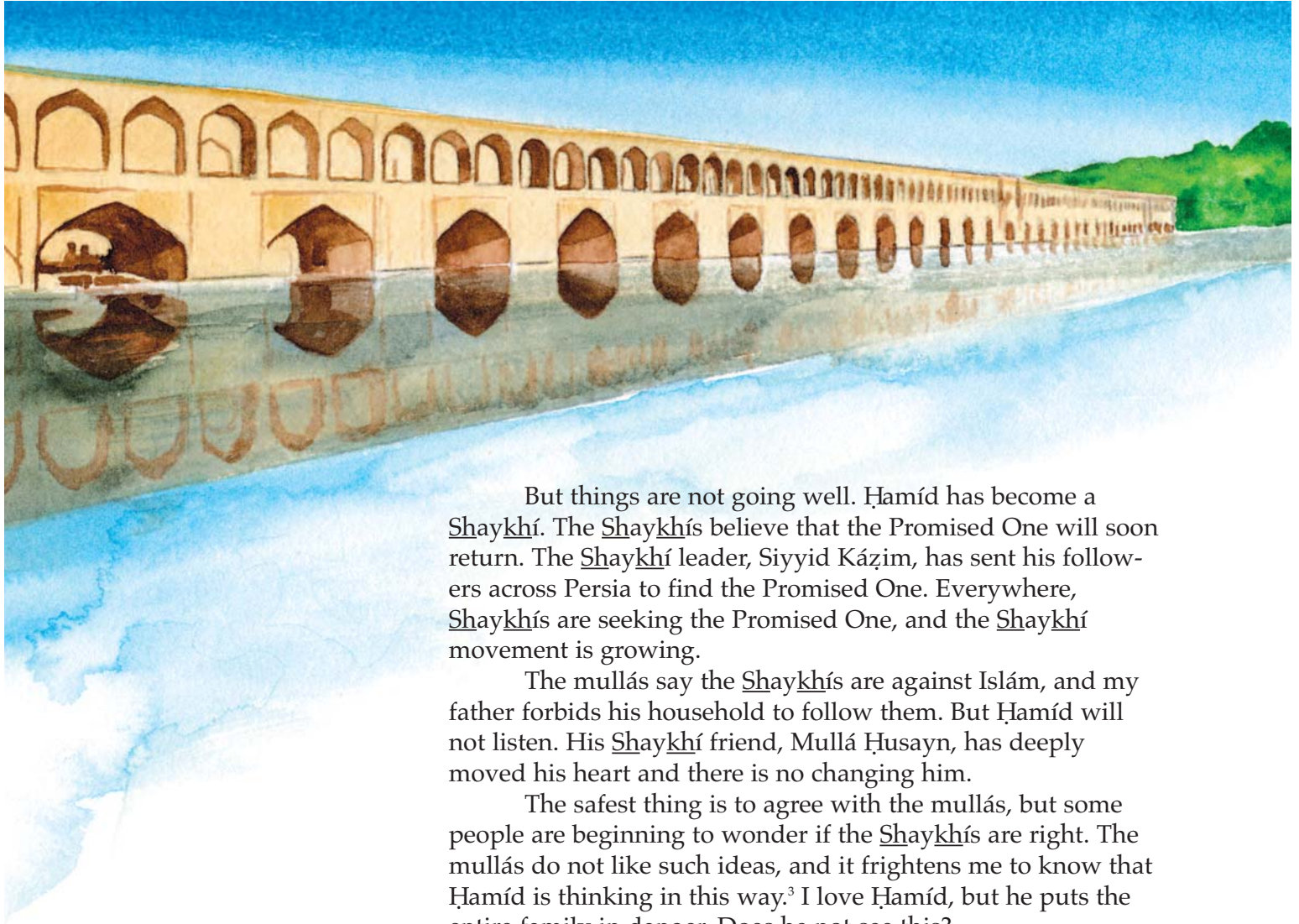
The bazaars are also the center of news. Rumors spread like wildfire among the bustling crowds. Today a particular rumor worries Father. People are saying that my brother, Ḥamíd, is in danger.

Ḥamíd has always been a favorite in the family, destined for great things. Of the many children in the household, Ḥamíd is the brilliant student, seeker, and sage. To his great honor, he has become a disciple of Siyyid Muḥammad-Báqir, a famous mullá.² If things go well, someday Ḥamíd, too, could be a famous mullá.

¹Traditional Persian cities had large, covered markets with a huge number of shops selling all manner of items. Caravans, having dozens, or even hundreds, of camels or mules, brought goods to be sold.

²Mullás are Muslim scholars. They often have disciples who study under them.

Written by Rick Johnson
Illustrated by Jaci Ayorinde



But things are not going well. Ḥamíd has become a Shaykhí. The Shaykhís believe that the Promised One will soon return. The Shaykhí leader, Siyyid Kázim, has sent his followers across Persia to find the Promised One. Everywhere, Shaykhís are seeking the Promised One, and the Shaykhí movement is growing.

The mullás say the Shaykhís are against Islám, and my father forbids his household to follow them. But Ḥamíd will not listen. His Shaykhí friend, Mullá Ḥusayn, has deeply moved his heart and there is no changing him.

The safest thing is to agree with the mullás, but some people are beginning to wonder if the Shaykhís are right. The mullás do not like such ideas, and it frightens me to know that Ḥamíd is thinking in this way.³ I love Ḥamíd, but he puts the entire family in danger. Does he not see this?

Everyone in the family depends on Father for food, help, and protection. Outside the family, even Father is dependent on others for help. As a merchant, Father is at the mercy of the mullás. If enough popular mullás preach against Ḥamíd, or spread rumors about him in the bazaars, Father's business is ruined.

³ Not all mullás were close-minded, but the vast majority were.

Ḥamíd says the mullás are only jealous and do not investigate the truth honestly. In Işfáhán, it is not safe to think such thoughts and, besides, it is madness for Ḥamíd to defy Father. It simply is not done. I serve as my father’s secretary and often conduct business for him. Now he has sent me to find Ḥamíd and warn him, once again, to leave the Shaykhís alone.

I know where to find Ḥamíd. He will be at the Si-o-Se-Pol Bridge.⁴ He goes there daily to drink tea and await the arrival of his friend, Mullá Ḥusayn. Mullá Ḥusayn is returning to Işfáhán. He has been searching for the Promised One in other cities.

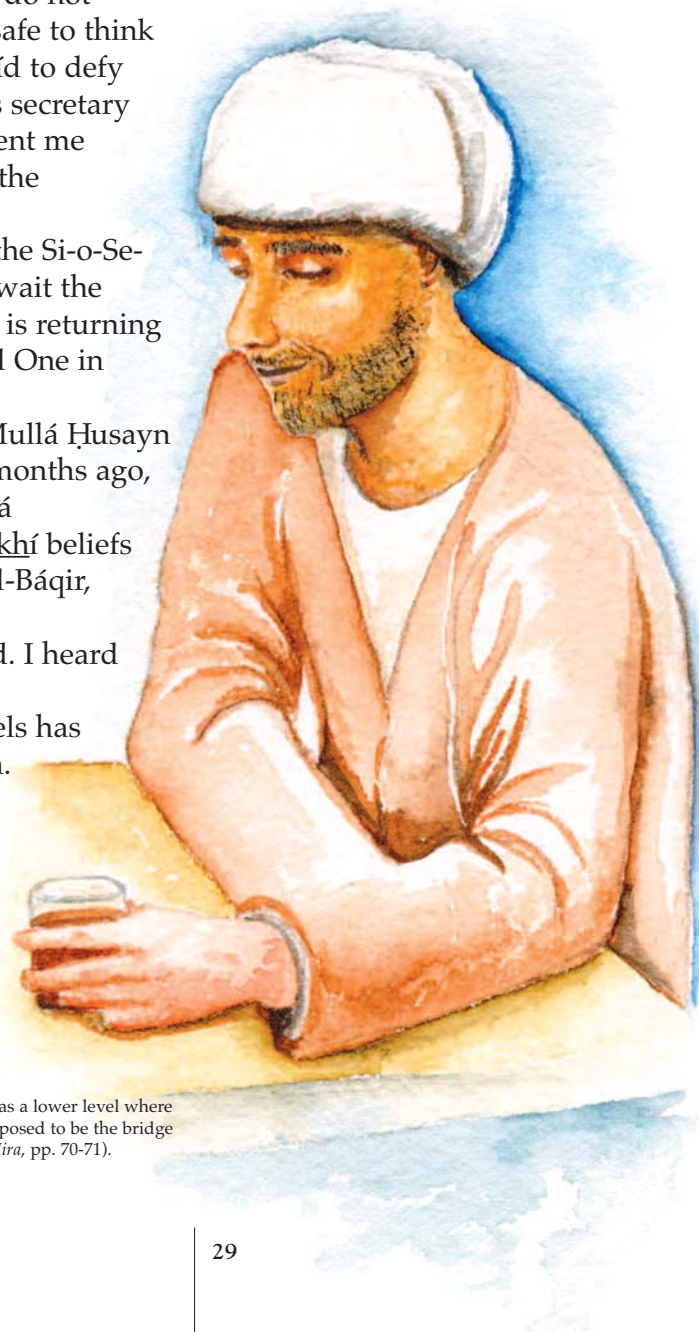
Walking toward the bridge, I think of this Mullá Ḥusayn and how he has so deeply affected Ḥamíd. Many months ago, Mullá Ḥusayn came to Işfáhán to speak with Mullá Muḥammad-Báqir. He wanted to explain the Shaykhí beliefs to him. Ḥamíd, with other disciples of Muḥammad-Báqir, witnessed that meeting.

After the meeting, Father questioned Ḥamíd. I heard Ḥamíd relate what happened:

“I understand that one of the Shaykhí infidels has addressed Mullá Muḥammad-Báqir,” Father began. “You were there. Tell me what you think of this belief.” He leaned back on the carpet where we sat, waiting.

“Thank you, sir,” Ḥamíd began, “for taking time to hear my thoughts, but I fear that my answer will not please you.”

Father’s face darkened, but he waited politely for Ḥamíd to continue.



⁴ A famous bridge across the Zayandeh Rood River with 33 arches. Its unique design has a lower level where numerous vendors offer tea. It is a popular place for conversation and debate. It is supposed to be the bridge crossed by Mullá Ḥusayn as he entered Işfáhán (see Marzieh Gail, *Dawn Over Mount Hira*, pp. 70-71).



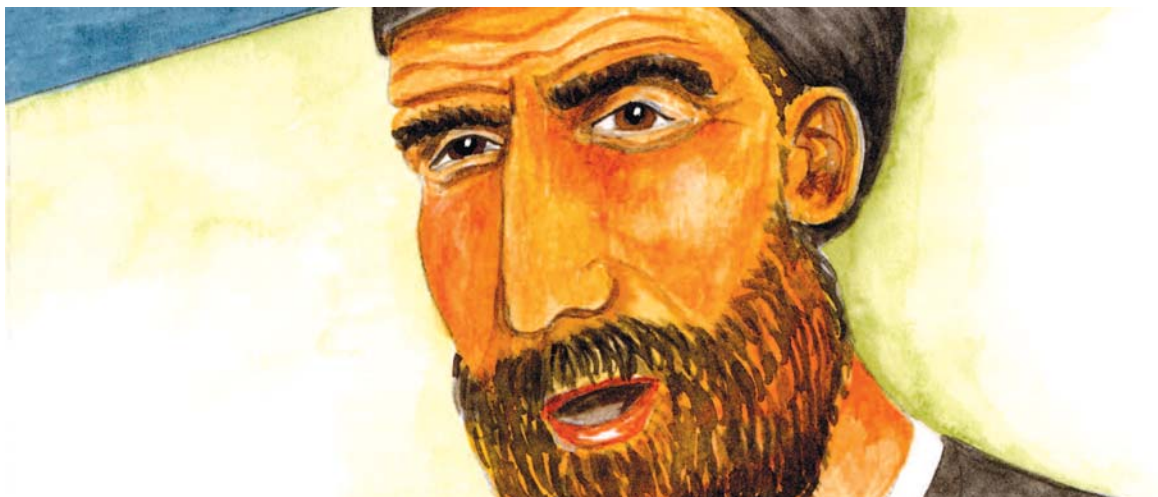
“The Shaykhí visitor is a youth,” Ḥamíd continued, “who braved terrible suffering and danger to come here. The street urchins laughed as he passed and cried: ‘Ah! Look! A ragged student has arrived!’ Yet despite hardship and extreme danger, this youth—Mullá Ḥusayn—was remarkable. He was more spiritually alive than anyone I’ve seen before.”

“No!” father protested. “The Shaykhís are attacking Islám! You are too inexperienced to understand.”

“Respected Father, Muḥammad-Báqir himself was impressed with Mullá Ḥusayn. He apologized for the rudeness that people have shown the Shaykhís. You know that Muḥammad-Báqir is not a fool. Mullá Ḥusayn asked only for fair consideration of the Shaykhí beliefs. Clearly, he was trying to advance the cause of truth, not attack Islám.”

“And Muḥammad-Báqir accepted this?”

“The youth’s sincerity, courage, and perseverance moved Muḥammad-Báqir to tears,” Ḥamíd replied. “He studied the Shaykhí writings with Mullá Ḥusayn. I and my fellow disciples observed silently as Mullá Ḥusayn cleared away all the doubts from our teacher’s mind.”



“And Muḥammad-Báqir did not argue?” Father asked.

“Muḥammad-Báqir gave many arguments, but his youthful visitor answered well. At last, Muḥammad-Báqir gave up arguing. He declared that he found no harm in the Shaykhí teachings. He promised, from now on, to defend the Shaykhís against attacks from other mullás.”

“This Mullá Ḥusayn must be a genius,” my father murmured. “A youth, a mere student, defeating an eminent religious scholar? It is unheard of!”

“Sir,” Ḥamíd replied, “Muḥammad-Báqir⁵ thought he would defeat Mullá Ḥusayn easily. Instead he ended by praising him. He said, ‘Such is the strength with which this youth seems to be endowed that if he were to declare the day to be night, I would still believe him able to deduce such proofs as would conclusively demonstrate . . . the truth of his statement.’ You have sent me to study with Muḥammad-Báqir, Father. Is it just to be angry with me for agreeing with him?”

Father sighed, “I cannot condemn you for agreeing with this esteemed mullá. But I will not praise you for it. Go, and speak no more to me about it.”

⁵ Hájjí Siyyid Muḥammad-Báqir remained a staunch supporter of Siyyid Kázim until his death. He died, however, before the declaration of the Báb (*The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 21-24). He is not to be confused with the infamous Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir, also of Isfáhán, who Bahá’u’lláh denounced as “the Wolf” for his persecution of the Bahá’ís.



Thinking back on that interview between Father and Ḥamíd, I marvel at how deeply this Mullá Ḥusayn has affected Ḥamíd. Ḥamíd is brilliant. He is not a fool, either. Could this Mullá Ḥusayn's words be true? How else could a youth defeat such a famous mullá? Like my father, I cannot condemn Ḥamíd. But, on the other hand, it is dangerous to praise him. He should be silent and keep his thoughts to himself!

Ḥamíd is not afraid of the mullás. He keeps talking about the Shaykhí teachings. It is hard to miss him. Walking now on the bridge, I can easily pick out his voice nearby: "Soon the earth will be a paradise. Soon the people will see the Promised One they have awaited! At this very hour, the light of the Promised One is breaking! Dear friends, we shall live to behold that Day of days!"

During his last visit to Işfáhán, Mullá Ḥusayn convinced Ḥamíd that the Promised One is coming soon. Now that Mullá Ḥusayn is returning, Ḥamíd is even more inflamed with these ideas.

Mullá Ḥusayn is well-known in Işfáhán from his last visit. Travelers arriving from other cities, who have seen him, say that he is now even more inspired. He is on fire with his search for the Promised One. Rumors fly that Mullá Ḥusayn has perhaps found Him.

In a teahouse, I find Ḥamíd arguing: "Dear friend, we must search eagerly. I am certain that Mullá Ḥusayn brings thrilling news. The Promised One will soon appear. We must be ablaze with this search! Mullá Ḥusayn spent 40 days in prayer and meditation to prepare for his search for the Promised One. Can we not prepare and seek also? I yearn for the Promised One to be revealed!"

Ḥamíd's face is shining with joy. His words ring out, and a crowd has gathered around him.

Heads are turning all around—people are listening. It will soon be too late to stop this dangerous movement. . . . ★