

The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

The Báb

Volume One



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The substance wherewith
God hath created Me
is not the clay out of which
others have been formed.
He hath conferred upon Me
that which the worldly-wise
can never comprehend,
nor the faithful discover. . . .

— **The Báb**, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 11



The Childhood of the Báb

Written by John Hatcher
Illustrated by Barbara Trauger

On October 20, 1819, in the Persian town of Shíráz, a special Child was born. The Child's father was Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḏá and His mother was Fátimih-Bagum. The family lived in a modest home, and the father was a humble merchant.

The birth of this Child was a most blessed event, a time for joy and celebration, because He was their only child. But something else made this event special. Both the mother and the father believed in their hearts that this Child would have a great purpose in life. Therefore, they gave Him a special name—*'Alí-Muḥammad*.

They named Him *Muḥammad* because the Prophet of their religion of Islám was named Muḥammad. They named the infant 'Alí after the first Imám or leader of Islám. And there was something else that would be special about the Boy's name. The Boy's father, Muḥammad-Riḏá, was called a *siyyid*, a title that meant he was descended from the Prophet Muḥammad. So when the Child came of age He, too, would have this title.

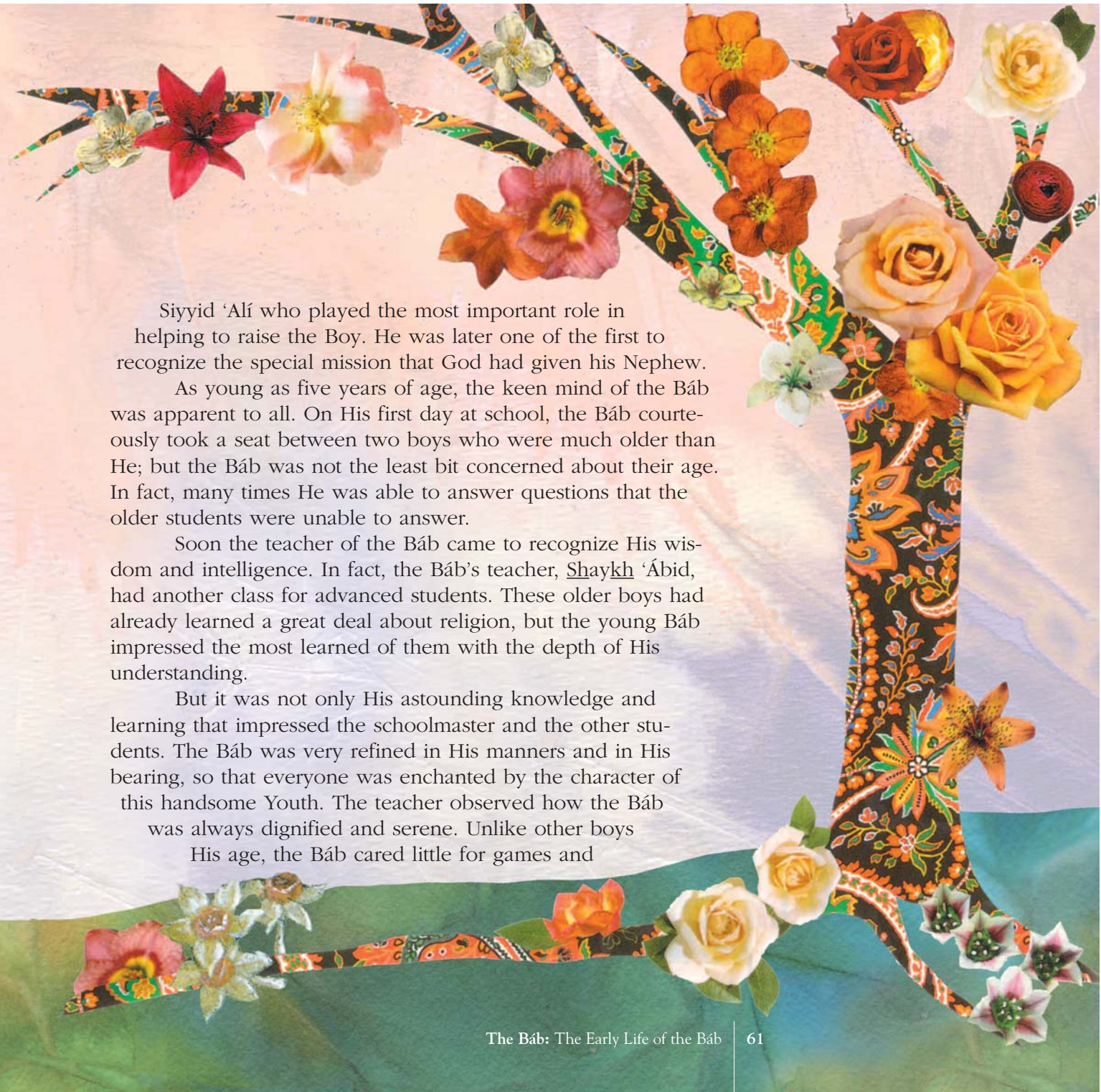
He would be called *Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad*, and later, *Siyyid-i-Báb*.



The family was humble, and it was very spiritual. The Child's mother and father were both descended from Imám Ḥusayn, the third Imám or leader of Islám. Thus the name of the Child, Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad, was a sign of His close spiritual relationship to the Muslim religion.

Because of the mission that God had given this Child, the Boy would grow up to become known as "the Báb," which means "the Gate." He would become known as "the Gate" because in 1844, at the age of 24, He would tell the world about the special mission God had for Him: He was supposed to prepare everyone for the coming of the Prophet who would change the entire world. This new Prophet was to be named Bahá'u'lláh, the same Prophet who became the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

But even while still a Child and later as a young Boy, 'Alí-Muḥammad was aware that He had a special purpose in life. Everyone around Him also knew He was special, especially His family. Sadly, when the Boy was nine years old, His beloved father, Muḥammad-Riḍá, passed away. But His loving mother, Fáṭimih-Bagum, received help from her three brothers in teaching and taking care of her precious Child, especially from Hájí Mírzá



Siyid 'Alí who played the most important role in helping to raise the Boy. He was later one of the first to recognize the special mission that God had given his Nephew.

As young as five years of age, the keen mind of the Báb was apparent to all. On His first day at school, the Báb courteously took a seat between two boys who were much older than He; but the Báb was not the least bit concerned about their age. In fact, many times He was able to answer questions that the older students were unable to answer.

Soon the teacher of the Báb came to recognize His wisdom and intelligence. In fact, the Báb's teacher, Shaykh 'Ábid, had another class for advanced students. These older boys had already learned a great deal about religion, but the young Báb impressed the most learned of them with the depth of His understanding.

But it was not only His astounding knowledge and learning that impressed the schoolmaster and the other students. The Báb was very refined in His manners and in His bearing, so that everyone was enchanted by the character of this handsome Youth. The teacher observed how the Báb was always dignified and serene. Unlike other boys His age, the Báb cared little for games and




other ordinary childhood pastimes. Instead, He wanted to concentrate on learning, especially on prayer and meditation.

Then a strange thing began to occur. On some mornings the Báb would come late to school. Naturally, the teacher wondered why this excellent Student would be tardy, and he decided to ask the young Báb what was wrong. The Báb politely declined to answer.

His lateness continued until one morning, when the Báb was again late, Shaykh 'Ábid decided to send some of the Báb's fellow-students to the Báb's home to ask Him to come to school. Naturally, the teacher was very curious about why his best student would be late.

When the students returned to the class, they had startled expressions on their faces. When the teacher asked them to tell him what had happened, they told him that to their surprise, they had discovered the Báb deeply immersed in His morning prayers and devotions.

Now the teacher told the Báb that such a young boy did not need to be so intense in his devotions, that he did not have to be so serious all the time. So it was that several days later, when the Báb was late again, Shaykh 'Ábid asked Him why He had come late to school. The Báb answered meekly that He had been in His Grandfather's house.

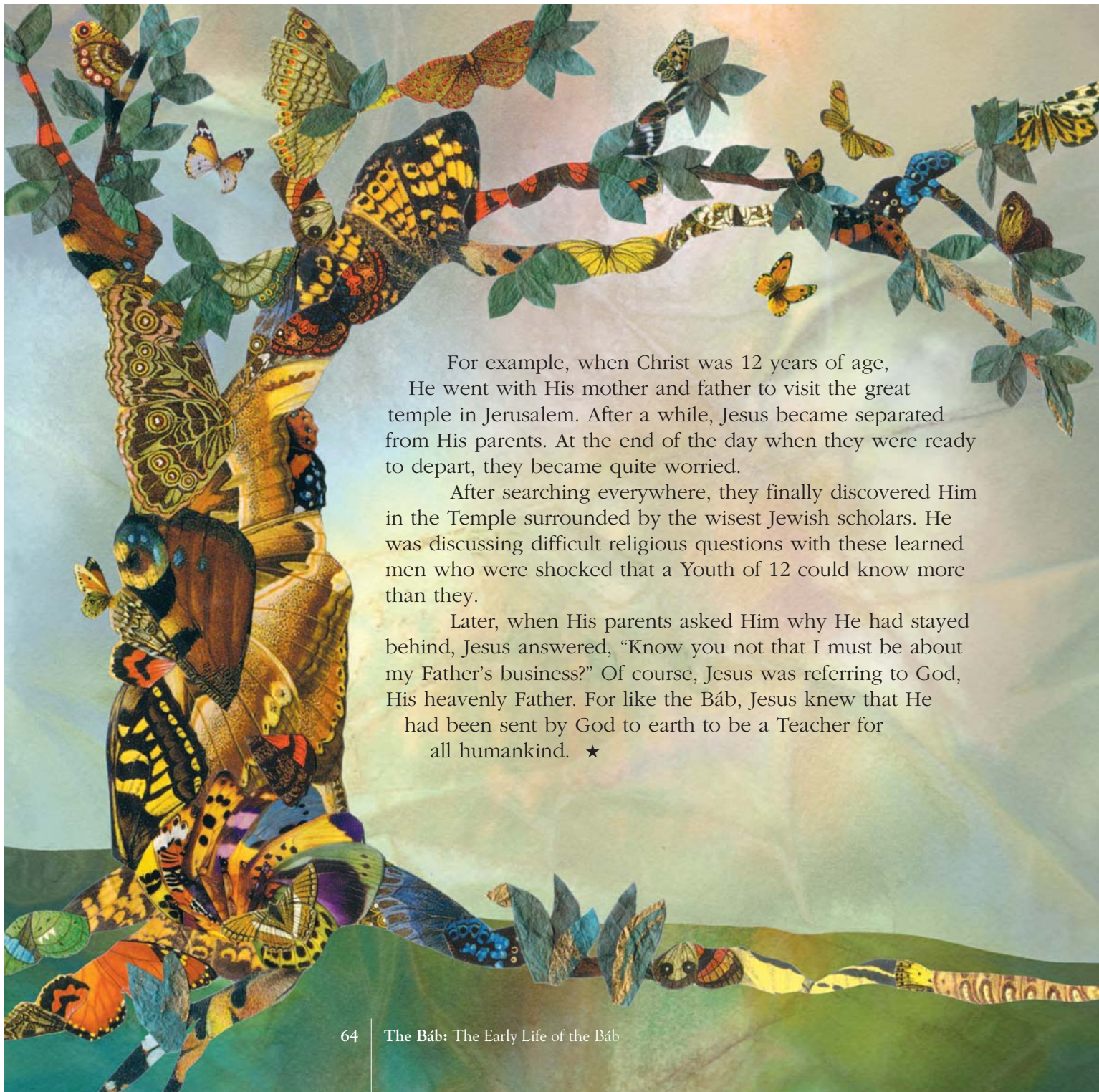


The students looked perplexed—they knew the Báb had no living grandfather. At first the teacher was also confused. Then suddenly he understood what the Báb meant. When a descendant of Muḥammad, a siyyid, refers to his “Grandfather,” he is sometimes talking about the Prophet Muḥammad from Whom he is descended. The teacher knew that the young Boy was a siyyid, so he also knew the Báb meant that He had been praying, meditating, and communing with the soul of the Prophet Muḥammad.

The teacher thought this a marvelous answer, but he was still concerned that a boy of 10 should be so serious all the time. He looked at the Báb and said with a smile that a boy His age was also free to play, to have fun like other boys.

The Báb looked back at the teacher’s smiling face and, once again, startled him with His answer. “I wish to be *like* My Grandfather,” He said. The teacher was moved by the Boy’s reverence.

What he may not have understood is that the Báb already knew that it would be His station in life to be a Prophet chosen by God. And all of Them are aware of this special mission from the beginning of Their lives.



For example, when Christ was 12 years of age, He went with His mother and father to visit the great temple in Jerusalem. After a while, Jesus became separated from His parents. At the end of the day when they were ready to depart, they became quite worried.

After searching everywhere, they finally discovered Him in the Temple surrounded by the wisest Jewish scholars. He was discussing difficult religious questions with these learned men who were shocked that a Youth of 12 could know more than they.

Later, when His parents asked Him why He had stayed behind, Jesus answered, “Know you not that I must be about my Father’s business?” Of course, Jesus was referring to God, His heavenly Father. For like the Báb, Jesus knew that He had been sent by God to earth to be a Teacher for all humankind. ★