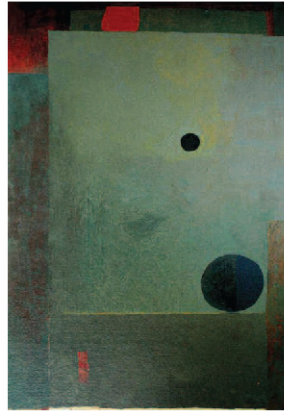


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures
The Báb
Volume Two



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O My beloved friends!
You are the bearers
of the name of God
in this Day.

— The Báb, quoted in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 92

Ṭáhirih

Ṭáhirih was born into a part of the world and at a time in history when girls had almost no advantages, and certainly no rights. She came into a very distinguished family in Iran, known then as Persia, around 1819–20.

She was a gifted child and loved to spend her time studying. Already she showed signs of being a great teacher. She planned to teach everything that she was taught to the little girls that she knew.

Her noble father, Ḥájí Mullá Sálíh, was an unusual man because he encouraged his very brilliant daughter to learn. But he often said he wished she had been a boy.

Ṭáhirih quickly mastered the arts of reading and writing. She was to become one of the leading poets of Iran, “a woman chaste and holy, a sign and token of surpassing beauty. . . .”¹

Most of Ṭáhirih’s lessons came from the Muslim Holy Book, the Qur’án. She awoke each day eager to find some new and wonderful truth in that Great Book.

¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 190

*Written by Beverly Collins
Illustrated by Carla Trimble*



She asked her father, who loved his daughter dearly, if she could be permitted to listen to the Muslim priest as he gave his weekly lessons on the Islámic Faith in her home. Her father was surprised. This was an unusual request coming from a young girl. He quickly reminded himself—Ṭáhirih was not like most girls. Mullá Sálíh looked into Ṭáhirih's big black sparkling eyes and saw eager anticipation. All he could say was yes.

It was against Persian habits for a girl or woman to be in the same room with men. Ṭáhirih would have to listen to the sermons while seated behind a heavy curtain, a veil covering her face. Ṭáhirih listened to the mullás, and she learned. But she did not always agree with what she heard.

It was the custom in those days for parents to choose the one their child would marry. Her parents agreed that when the time came, her cousin Muḥammad would be her husband. Ṭáhirih did not look forward to leaving the warm and loving home she shared with her sister, Marḍíyyih, her parents, and her brothers.

While on a visit to the home of one of her favorite relatives, her cousin Javád, Ṭáhirih discovered books that held her interest. She could not put them down. She begged her cousin to let her borrow them. He hesitated because he knew Ṭáhirih's father would not approve. But Ṭáhirih had the gift of persuasion, and her cousin could not say no.

Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim wrote books about the coming of the Promised One in a way that Ṭáhirih could understand. How different were their explanations from those given by some of the mullás!

Ṭáhirih's heart overflowed with joy and longing—longing to meet the ones who explained these ideas so well. She imagined herself sitting at the feet of Shaykh Aḥmad or Siyyid Kázim, taking in their wisdom and asking endless questions.

Ṭāhirih visited Siyyid Kāẓim in Karbilá and later began to write, asking for his views on various religious topics. Siyyid Kāẓim told Ṭāhirih that, according to his study of the Holy Qur'án, the time of the coming of the Promised One was very near. She could hardly sleep!

Ṭāhirih told one of her uncles she wished to be the first woman to serve the Promised One. But the sudden passing of Siyyid Kāẓim filled Ṭāhirih's heart with pain. To ease her suffering, she fasted for 40 days. She spent her nights praying that God would send someone else to guide her, now that Siyyid Kāẓim was gone.

When Ṭāhirih heard that her sister's husband, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, was setting out to find the Promised One, she knew her prayers had been answered. She prepared a beautiful message that she asked Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí to give to Him. Her brother-in-law told her he was not sure he would find the Promised One. But Ṭāhirih had faith—she was certain he would. Part of her message said:

The effulgence of Thy face flashed forth,
and the rays of Thy visage arose on high.
Then speak the word, "Am I not your Lord?"
And "Thou art, Thou art!" we will all reply.

Just as Ṭāhirih predicted, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí found the Promised One—the Báb. He accepted the message Ṭāhirih sent and declared her one of His first 18 disciples, one of the Letters of the Living. She was the only woman to receive this great honor.

Until she died Ṭāhirih fearlessly taught the Faith of the Báb. She was violently attacked and arrested many times because of her devotion to God and His Cause. She gave her life for His Precious Faith so that we may teach His Cause in freedom. ★

