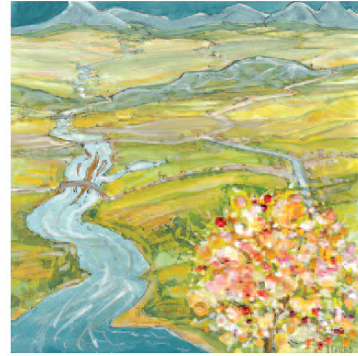


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Two



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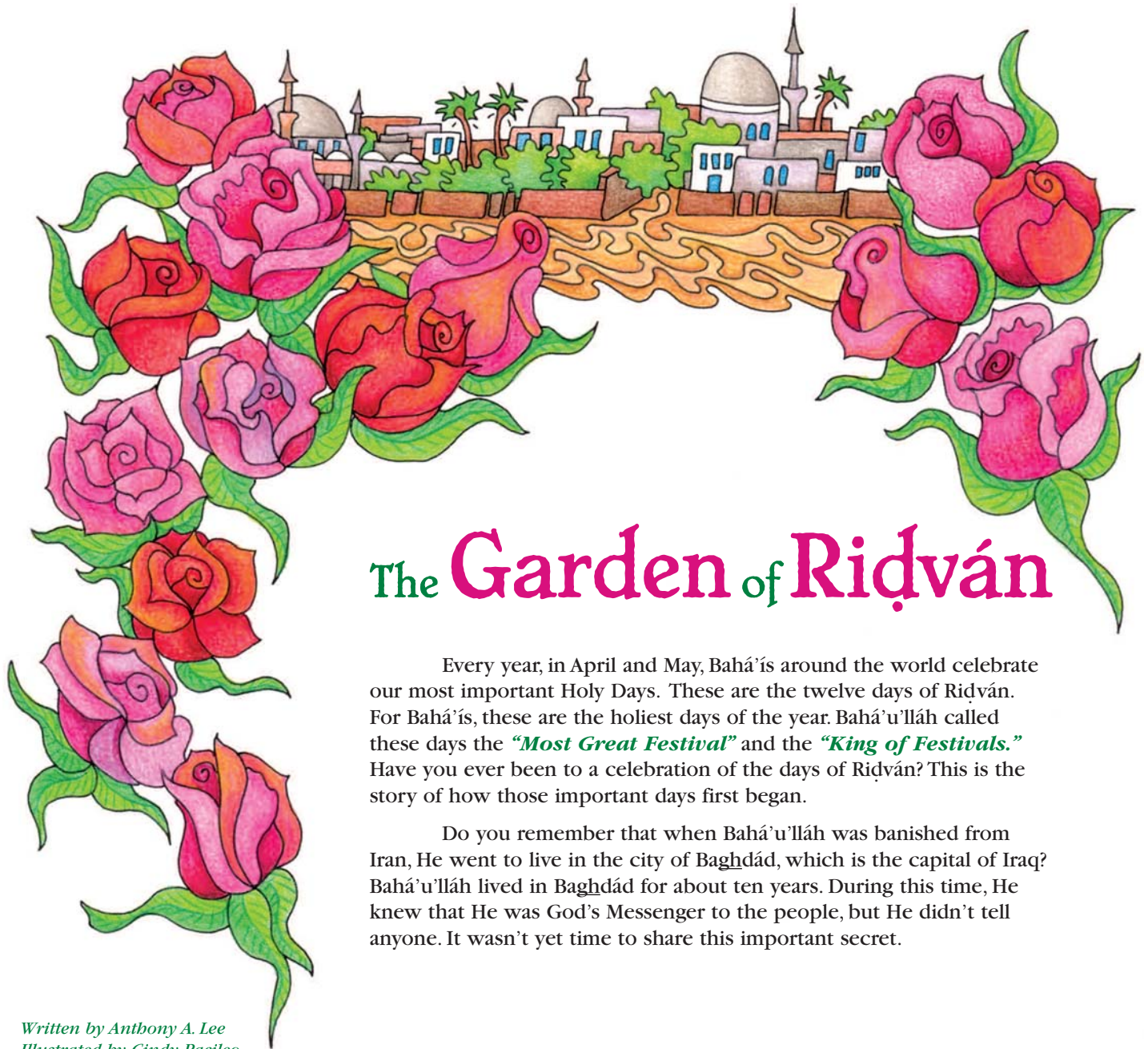
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The Garden of Ridván

Every year, in April and May, Bahá'ís around the world celebrate our most important Holy Days. These are the twelve days of Ridván. For Bahá'ís, these are the holiest days of the year. Bahá'u'lláh called these days the *“Most Great Festival”* and the *“King of Festivals.”* Have you ever been to a celebration of the days of Ridván? This is the story of how those important days first began.

Do you remember that when Bahá'u'lláh was banished from Iran, He went to live in the city of Baghdád, which is the capital of Iraq? Bahá'u'lláh lived in Baghdád for about ten years. During this time, He knew that He was God's Messenger to the people, but He didn't tell anyone. It wasn't yet time to share this important secret.

*Written by Anthony A. Lee
Illustrated by Cindy Pacileo*

Bahá'u'lláh knew that He would have to leave Baghdád one day. During His last years in the city, He became sad and unhappy. He spoke of a time of trials, of hardship, and of turmoil that was soon to come. The believers, Bahá'u'lláh's friends and companions, worried about this.

One day, during this time, He told His friends of a dream that He had. Bahá'u'lláh told them:

“I saw 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.

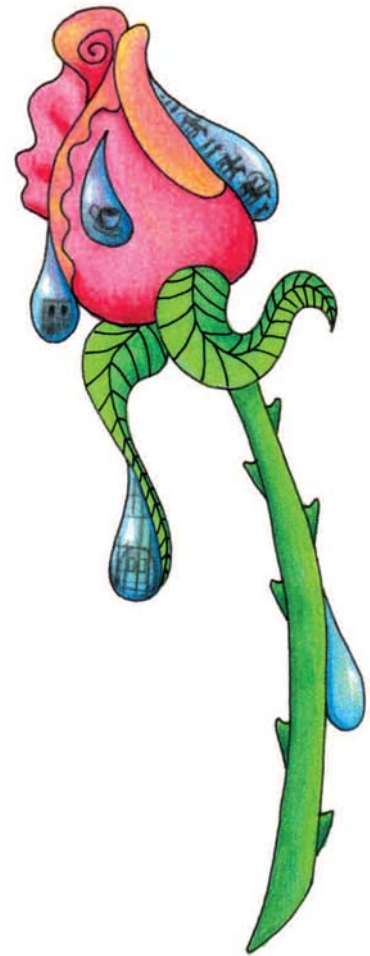
Thereupon the Concourse on high addressed Me saying:

‘. . . Erelong shalt Thou behold with Thine own eyes what no Prophet hath beheld. . . . Be patient, be patient!’ ”

Of course, no one knew exactly what Bahá'u'lláh's dream meant. But they knew that a time of trouble was coming. They continued to worry.

One day, a message arrived from the Governor of Baghdád that informed Bahá'u'lláh that He was to be banished from the city forever. He was ordered to Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman empire. Bahá'u'lláh and His family had to make ready to leave immediately.

The friends and companions of Bahá'u'lláh were shocked when they heard this news. They were afraid that they would never see Bahá'u'lláh again. The people of the city did not know that Bahá'u'lláh was a Prophet of God, but they knew that He was a wise and holy Man. They rushed to His house in Baghdád, crying and weeping, just like the messengers in His dream. “What shall we do?” they cried. “What is going to happen to our beloved Master?” They did not want Bahá'u'lláh to leave them, but, of course, there was no choice.





Everyone came to say good-bye to Bahá'u'lláh. His house became so crowded with guests and commotion that the family could not make preparations for the long journey ahead. So, it was decided that Bahá'u'lláh should move to a garden outside of the city and say farewell to all of His guests there. This garden the believers named the Garden of Riḍván, meaning the Garden of Paradise.

In the Garden of Riḍván, several tents were raised where Bahá'u'lláh and His friends and companions could sleep. They remained in the garden for twelve days. During all this time, Bahá'u'lláh received His guests with great kindness. His words calmed them, but they were all still sad.

But it was at this time, in the Garden of Riḍván, during those twelve days, that Bahá'u'lláh—for the first time—revealed His Mission to a few of His followers. He told some of His closest companions that He was a Prophet of God. He told them that He had come with a Message from God, to bring new laws and teachings to all the people of the world. This was Bahá'u'lláh's first declaration of His religion, and His first announcement of a New Day.

Only a few people knew about Bahá'u'lláh's great announcement. But still, the mood and atmosphere in the Garden of Riḍván was changed. The sorrow and sadness of those early days was turned into joy and happiness. Everyone in the garden was delighted to be in Bahá'u'lláh's company and enjoy the peace and excitement of those days.

Nabíl, one of the close companions, was with Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Riḍván. He said that every morning the gardeners would pick roses from the bushes in the garden and pile them in the center of the floor in Bahá'u'lláh's tent. "So great would be the heap that when His companions gathered to drink their morning tea in His presence, they would be unable to see each other across it," Nabíl wrote later. Every day, Bahá'u'lláh would give the roses away as presents to His friends. Nabíl remembered that the birds in the garden sang constantly at night. He wrote: "So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him [Bahá'u'lláh] could hear distinctly His voice." He says that Bahá'u'lláh was awake, day and night, speaking with visitors and saying good-bye to friends. There was a feeling of happiness in the air. Nabíl remembered those days as a magical time.

And indeed it was. Bahá'u'lláh remained in the Garden of Riḍván for twelve days, from April 21 to May 2 in the year 1863. This is when He first declared His Mission. Bahá'u'lláh said that during those days “all created things were immersed in the sea of purification.” And He said again that during that time “the breezes of forgiveness were wafted over the entire creation.”

We know that most people who saw Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Riḍván were not told that He was a Prophet of God. Most of His friends and companions still did not know that He was God's new Messenger for all the people. This was the most important news in the whole world. But still, it remained a secret.

Only the few whom Bahá'u'lláh had chosen learned the secret. But those few Bahá'ís found a new faith and discovered a new religion. The days in the Garden of Riḍván mark the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith. The sorrow and grief of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment was turned into gladness and exaltation with the announcement of a New Day. This shows us how the power of the Prophet of God can create good out of evil, can bring light into darkness, and can win a victory in the midst of seeming defeat.

And now, every year, Bahá'ís all over the world gather together during the days of Riḍván to remember Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration. We remember especially the nightingales and the roses, and Bahá'u'lláh's great and wonderful announcement that He was a Prophet of God. The Festival of Riḍván is a time of joy and celebration. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that these are days when all the Bahá'ís should be happy. He writes:

“Rejoice, with exceeding gladness, O people of Bahá! as ye call to remembrance the Day of supreme felicity, the Day whereon the Tongue of the Ancient of Days hath spoken, as He departed from His House proceeding to the Spot [Riḍván] from which He shed upon the whole of creation the splendors of His Name, the All-Merciful . . .” ★

