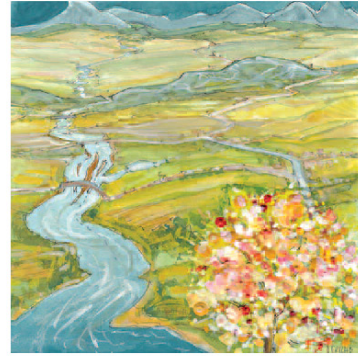


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Two



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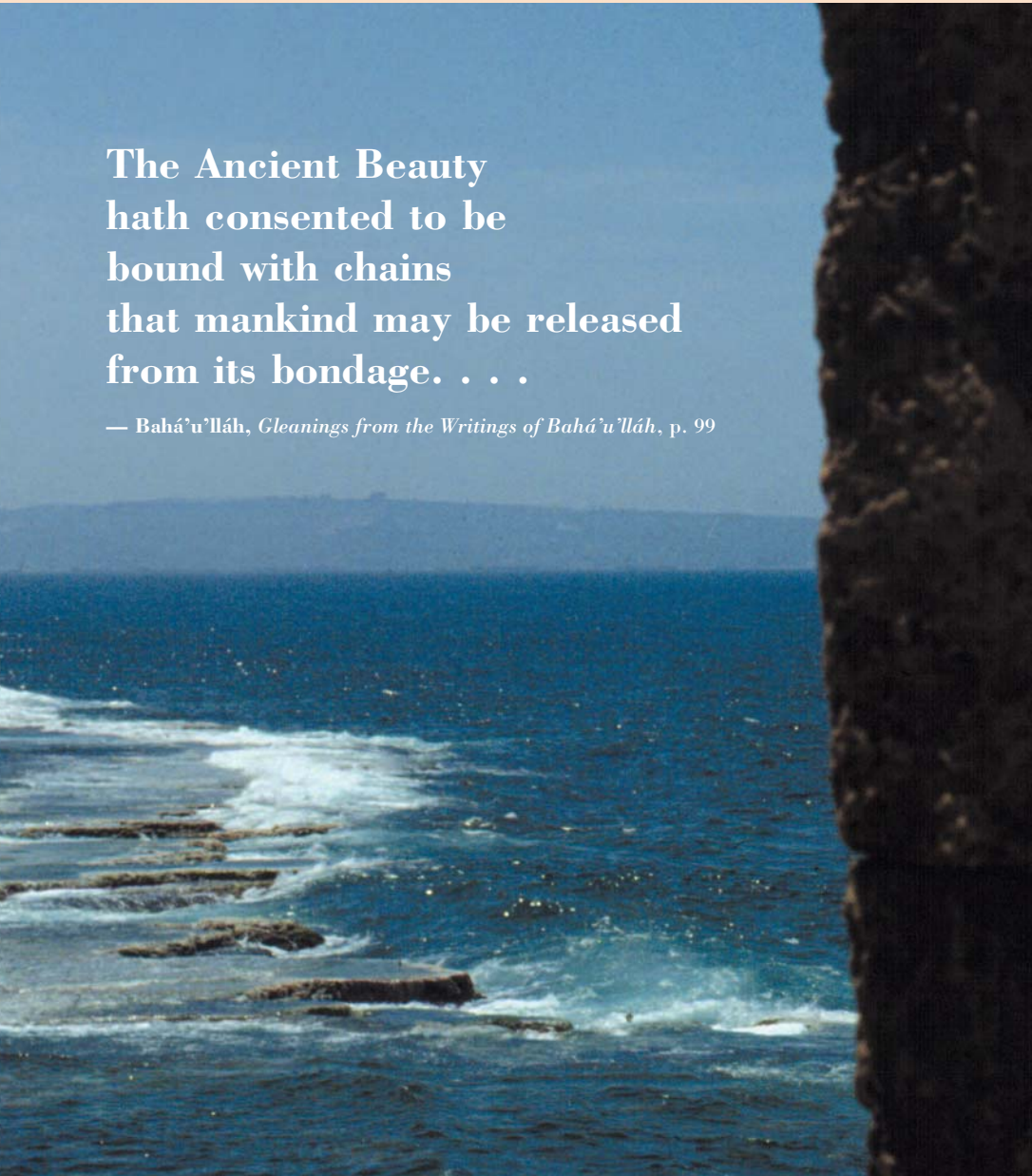
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The Ancient Beauty
hath consented to be
bound with chains
that mankind may be released
from its bondage. . . .

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 99

A Most Great Exchange

In the many months since Bahá'u'lláh had been exiled to Palestine, many of His followers had tried to enter the city to visit Him, but, without fail, they were turned away at the gate.

Mírzá Mihdí was the younger brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'u'lláh called him the Purest Branch. Mírzá Mihdí grieved continuously over the lovers of Bahá'u'lláh who traveled hundreds of miles to see their Beloved in 'Akká. Always they were forced to leave without a glimpse of Him. He knew how they felt. Tiny and frail, he had been left with his grandmother in Tíhrán twenty years earlier. The rest of his family was exiled to Baghdád in the middle of winter. Seven years later, he was finally able to join them. He knew what joy awaited those who might get their wish to pass beyond the gates of 'Akká. There they might enter the presence of the Ancient Beauty.



Mírzá Mihdí

*Photograph of Mírzá Mihdí
courtesy of the Audio-Visual Department
of the Bahá'í World Center*

Written by Jean Gould

Photography by Pepper Oldziej



Mírzá Mihdí

*Photograph of Mírzá Mihdí
courtesy of the Audio-Visual Department
of the Bahá'í World Center*

In 'Akká in 1870, Mírzá Mihdí was 22 years old. For some time he had been able to fulfill his heart's desire: to serve his Father, his family, and his fellow exiles. He sat with them at their gatherings and read them his Father's words. From him they learned courtesy and patience, dignity and joyful submission to the Will of God. Always in his thoughts were the unlucky ones beyond the gate.

One hot evening, Mírzá Mihdí was feeling unwell. His beloved Father suggested that he go to the rooftop of the prison barracks and walk about as he often did. There he could breathe deeply of the fresh salty air. He could listen to the gentle sweep of the cool waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Alone and quiet, he could say his prayers in peace.

There was an open, unguarded skylight on that rooftop. He always counted his steps in the dark so he wouldn't fall through the opening. He knew when to stop and turn. But this night, he made a mistake. He miscounted. He stepped into space and fell to the room below. At the end of his horrible flight, he crashed onto a jagged wooden crate.



The noise and terror of his fall brought those nearby racing from their rooms. Kneeling over him, they tore the clothes from his chest. They saw the jagged points of wood sticking through his body. Blood poured from his wounds.

The Italian physician who attended the exiles did what he could for the terrible injury. But it was beyond the help of human hands.

Mírzá Mihdí, though, understood exactly the power in his Father's hands. He knew Bahá'u'lláh could grant him the gift of life. He was the Manifestation of God. He could do as He wished.

Bahá'u'lláh asked of His son, "Áqá, what do you wish? Tell me."

Mírzá Mihdí spoke through his pain, past the blood flowing from his mouth. He asked for a gift, an exchange. He said, "I wish the people of Bahá to be able to attain Your presence."

The skylight was on top of the roof above the smaller curved window of this section of the prison barracks.

Once more Bahá'u'lláh had to put away a father's grief. He had to put away His wish to keep His beautiful boy by His side. Once more, He had to let His son go. He also had to counsel 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who knelt beside Him. Tears streamed from His eyes. He begged Bahá'u'lláh to save His brother's life. "O my Greatest Branch," He said, "leave him in the hands of God."

Bahá'u'lláh dismissed the others and remained alone with His dying son. He gave him His answer: "And so it shall be. God will grant your wish." Later, He said to God: "Glorified art Thou, O Lord, My God! Thou seest ... My son blood stained before Thy face I have, O my Lord, offered up that which Thou hast given me, that Thy servants may be quickened and all that dwell on earth be united."

Twenty-two hours after his fall, the spirit of the Purest Branch slipped out of his human temple. It was 23 June 1870.

"Mihdí! O Mihdí!" cried Bahá'u'lláh. He had granted the plea of His martyr-son to exchange his life for the opening of the gates. The travelers, the pilgrims, would surely come now. But His beloved boy was gone.

Later, the broken body of the Purest Branch was lovingly cleansed and prepared for burial. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood guard, weeping as if His heart would break. He and His helpers laid His beloved brother to rest beyond the prison walls next to a small shrine. Even the fortress guards who escorted them were watchful and quiet.

Eventually 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His companions turned, grieving and weary from their awful task. It was then that the ground began to quiver and shake. They watched and waited. In a few minutes, the restless stir and rumble quieted. All was still again. They continued on their way.



Later, Bahá'u'lláh said of Mírzá Mihdí: "When thou wast laid to rest in the earth, the earth itself trembled in its longing to meet thee. . . . Thou art the trust of God and His treasure in this Land. Erelong will God reveal through thee that which He hath desired."

Within four months, Mírzá Mihdí's dying request was granted. The gates of the prison were flung open. The pilgrims did indeed pass beyond the prison gates and enter the presence of the Ancient Beauty. First they came in a steady trickle, then in a mighty river of humanity. Finally they could rest their eyes on the face of the Lord of the Age. At last, they could hear the voice of God with their own ears.

Surely, they also heard the story of the young man who made it possible for them to be there. Surely they visited his resting place by the city gate. How could they fail to say prayers for the progress of his soul and thank him in their hearts for his great gift?

Today, pilgrims pay their respects at his beautiful monument on Mount Carmel. It was placed there by his kinsman, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian, the great grandson of the Ancient Beauty, in loving tribute to one who freely gave his life to ensure the happiness of others. ★



Mírzá Mihdí is buried under his monument in the gardens of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel. He is buried to the left of his mother, Ásíyih Khánúm. Their monuments stand side by side.