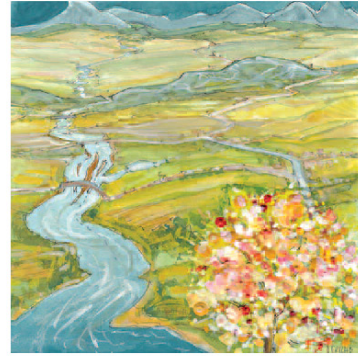


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Two



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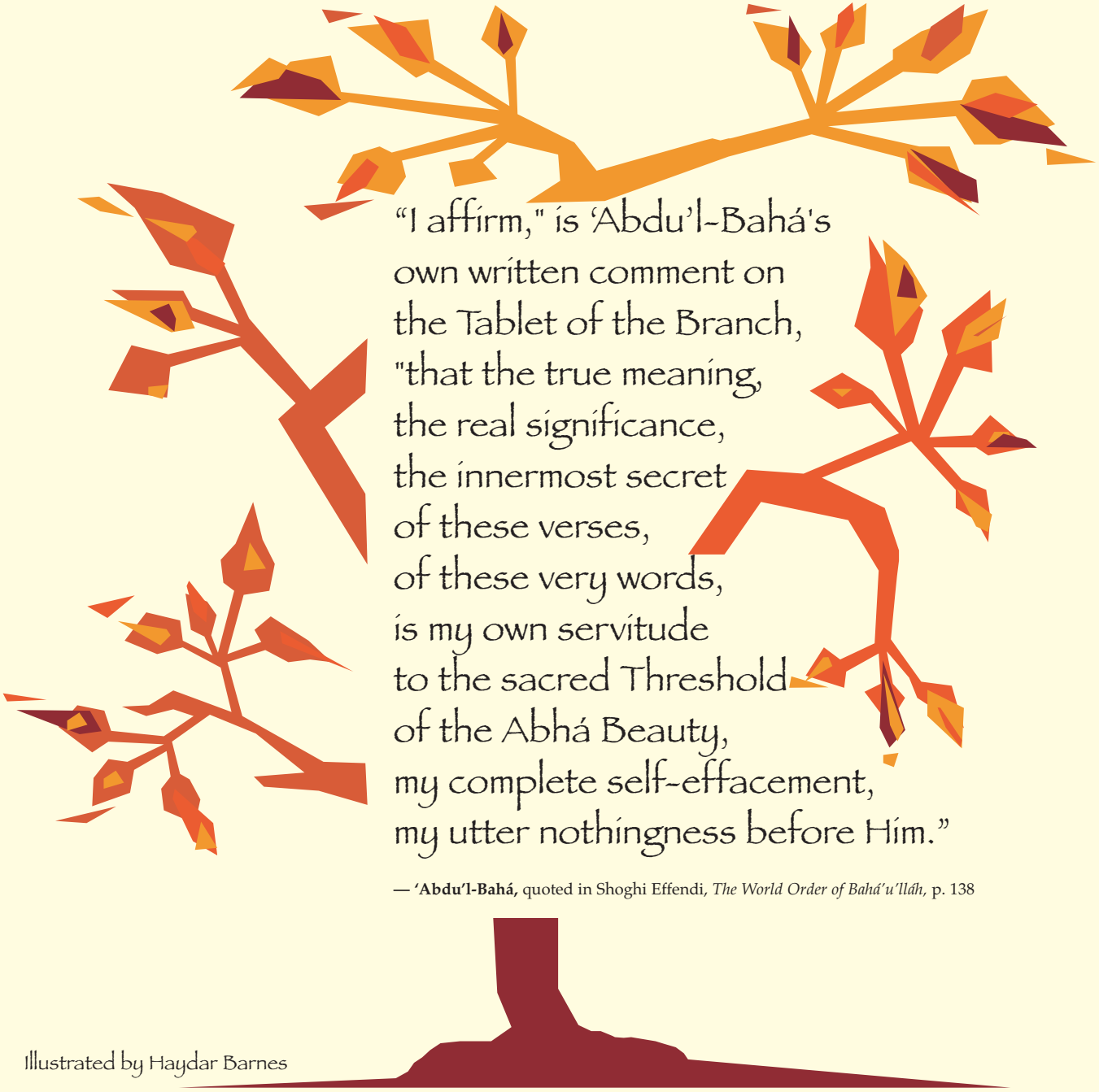
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“I affirm,” is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own written comment on the Tablet of the Branch, “that the true meaning, the real significance, the innermost secret of these verses, of these very words, is my own servitude to the sacred Threshold of the Abhá Beauty, my complete self-effacement, my utter nothingness before Him.”

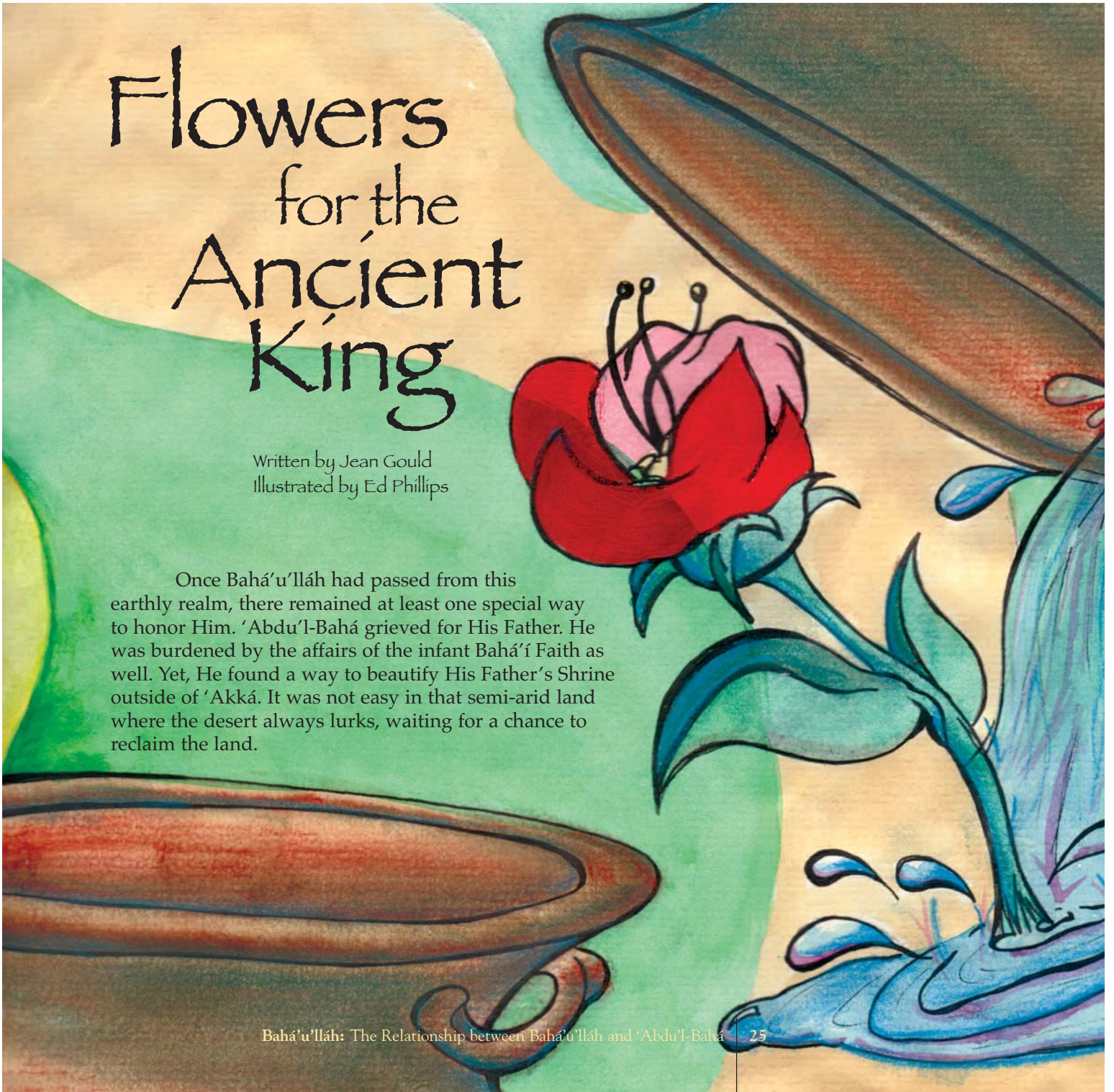
— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 138

Illustrated by Haydar Barnes

Flowers for the Ancient King

Written by Jean Gould
Illustrated by Ed Phillips

Once Bahá'u'lláh had passed from this earthly realm, there remained at least one special way to honor Him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá grieved for His Father. He was burdened by the affairs of the infant Bahá'í Faith as well. Yet, He found a way to beautify His Father's Shrine outside of 'Akká. It was not easy in that semi-arid land where the desert always lurks, waiting for a chance to reclaim the land.





Focused and determined, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made a flower garden for Bahá’u’lláh. It adorned the path to the Shrine next to the mansion of Bahjí. Many, many times He filled His cloak with fresh, fertile soil. Then He gathered up its corners, swung it onto His strong shoulder, and paced steadily to the appointed place. There He dropped His heavy load and spread the precious soil into place.

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá carefully planted the flowers in a perfect arrangement of color and fragrance. It was a good way to honor the spirit of the Ancient King Who so loved the natural world, particularly flowers.

Of course, a garden has to be continually watered. Water is especially important in a land where dry rock and sand are the natural order of things. For this task, the Master collected 100 large copper pots. The many pilgrims in the Holy Land were delighted to be of service. They often formed a human stream, carrying water from the nearby spring to the garden. The Master could often be seen among His army of water carriers, His copper vessel perched on His shoulder. Eventually He, too, emptied it slowly and gently at the base of the thirsty plants.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá carefully supervised the distribution of the precious water. He knew that flowers are like people—you have to watch them closely. Sometimes a drop will suffice them. Usually a regular and moderate drink will do. Occasionally, only an immediate and thorough soaking will sustain them.

On one Holy Day, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá decided that flowers on the pathway to His Father’s Shrine were not enough. There must be more. Some of the believers in ‘Akká filled many pots with colorful blooms and brought them to the Master’s house. At two hours before sunset, the savage heat of the sun had been defeated for the day. It was then that the pilgrims came. Each one took up his burden of love. Two by two, they formed a procession and began their four-mile march to the resting place of the Ancient King.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, their commander-in-chief, strode in front of His army of flower-bearers. His own pot of blooms resting on His broad shoulders. Often he dropped back to issue commands to a few lucky believers blessed with heavenly voices: “Sing! Chant!”

Slowly, their hearts filling with an incomprable joy, the procession made its way to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. When the Shrine came into view, the Master halted His Holy Day soldiers. He chose from out of the ranks one special voice to represent them all. They stood with bowed heads and in absolute silence. Soon the chosen voice soared into the waiting air and reverberated in their hearts.

Once the procession resumed its forward motion, it wasn't long before the company reached the holy place. There they handed over their precious flowers to those who would place them within the Shrine. Then the army of pilgrims stepped into a separate room. There they were refreshed by food and a little rest after their long, hot march. There they prepared themselves to cross the Holy Threshold.

One by one, in complete silence, they passed into the Shrine. 'Abdu'l-Bahá waited to pour rose water into their palms. The heady scent flowed over their hands and faces while they waited patiently for all to enter.

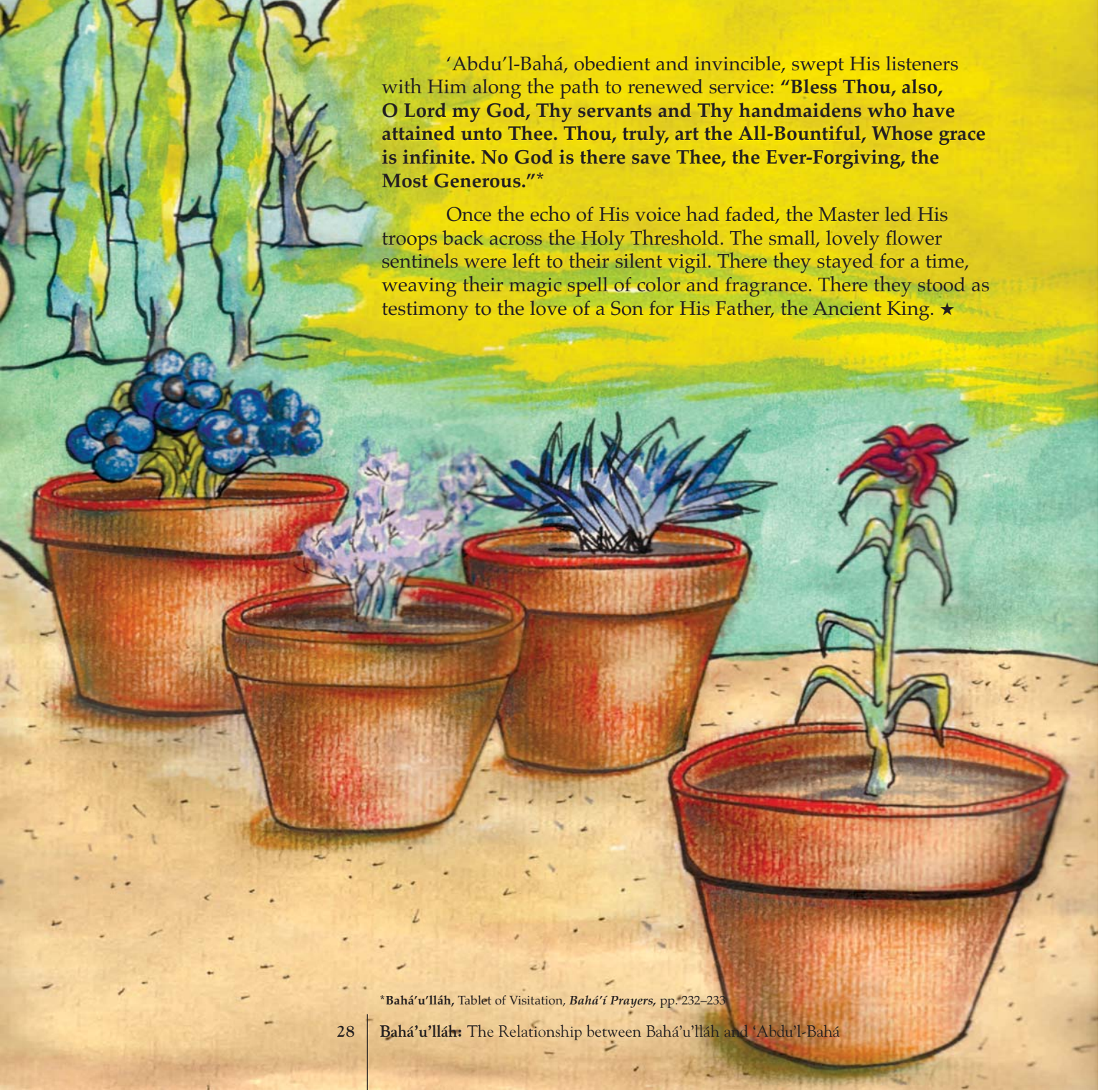
When all was ready, the Master took His place. He stood tall and straight. His clear voice enchanted His listeners with the music of His Father's words from The Tablet of Visitation: **"The praise which hath dawned from Thy most august Self, and the glory which hath shone forth from Thy most effulgent Beauty, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art the Manifestation of Grandeur, and the King of Eternity, and the Lord of all who are in heaven and on earth!"***

Once again the much-loved Son honored His Father. Those who were assembled with Him were transported, for the moment, to another realm.

"I bear witness that the eye of creation hath never gazed upon one wronged like Thee. Thou wast immersed all the days of Thy life beneath an ocean of tribulations . . . May my spirit be a sacrifice to the wrongs Thou didst suffer, and my soul be a ransom for the adversities Thou didst sustain . . ."*

*Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Visitation, *Bahá'í Prayers*, pp. 232–233





‘Abdu’l-Bahá, obedient and invincible, swept His listeners with Him along the path to renewed service: **“Bless Thou, also, O Lord my God, Thy servants and Thy handmaidens who have attained unto Thee. Thou, truly, art the All-Bountiful, Whose grace is infinite. No God is there save Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.”***

Once the echo of His voice had faded, the Master led His troops back across the Holy Threshold. The small, lovely flower sentinels were left to their silent vigil. There they stayed for a time, weaving their magic spell of color and fragrance. There they stood as testimony to the love of a Son for His Father, the Ancient King. ★

*Bahá’u’lláh, Tablet of Visitation, *Bahá’í Prayers*, pp. 232–233