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*The Central Figures*

# *Bahá'u'lláh*

*Volume Three*



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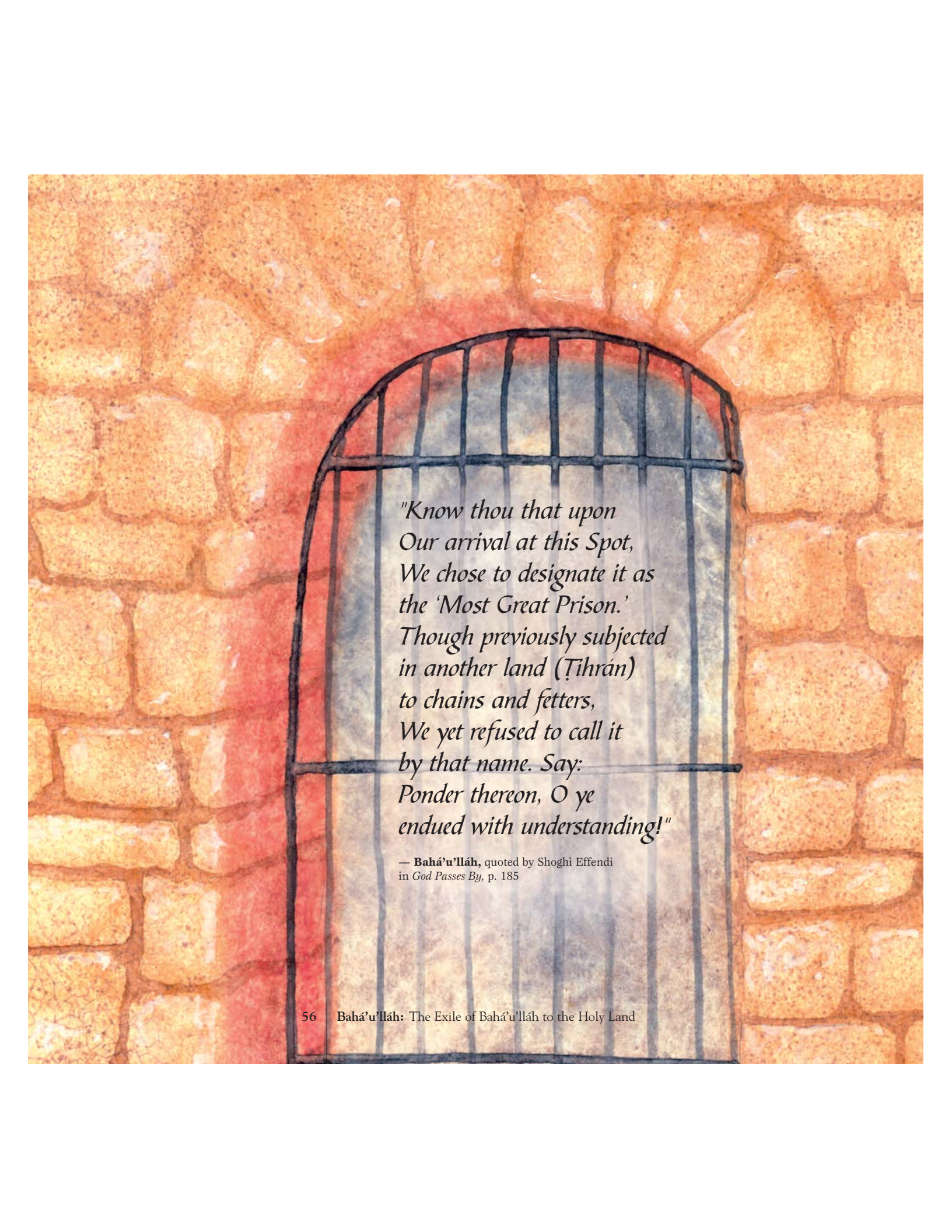
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*"Know thou that upon  
Our arrival at this Spot,  
We chose to designate it as  
the 'Most Great Prison.'  
Though previously subjected  
in another land (Ṭīhrán)  
to chains and fetters,  
We yet refused to call it  
by that name. Say:  
Ponder thereon, O ye  
endued with understanding!"*

— Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi  
in *God Passes By*, p. 185

# The Last Exile


Written by Jean Gould  
Illustrated by Carrie Kneisler

Much had happened in the five years Bahá'u'lláh, His family, and His followers had lived in Adrianople. The authorities of the Ottoman Empire were growing increasingly alarmed by Bahá'u'lláh's powerful words and the way He was winning the hearts and minds of all who knew Him. People from all over the empire, including some of the most learned, had come to join Him in exile and hardship. The authorities were frightened by this amazing devotion.

In their fear, the authorities were more than willing to listen to the evil words of Bahá'u'lláh's enemy, Siyyid Muḥammad. He said that large numbers of Bahá'ís were assembling in Adrianople and that Bahá'u'lláh was conferring with the Bulgarian revolutionaries and about to make trouble. The men in power decided to do something about it.

These authorities began to detain and question the Bahá'ís in Adrianople. The friends were becoming very anxious and confused, only wanting to peacefully return to their homes. They didn't know what was happening, but Bahá'u'lláh had long felt the coming of another banishment. He told some of His companions to leave Adrianople immediately. **“Why should all be imprisoned and no one be left to teach the Cause of God?”** He asked.






Finally, the Ottoman authorities made their decision. Bahá'u'lláh and company were to go to 'Akká, while Mírzá Yahyá and his dependents were to go to Cyprus. For some reason, they ordered some of the faithful, to their horror, to go with Mírzá Yahyá. The Váli of Adrianople refused to enforce the imperial edict. He packed his bags and left the job to his deputy.

Early one morning, soldiers surrounded the house of the Blessed Beauty. No one was allowed to leave or enter. In the market, shops run by Bahá'ís were closed. Their goods were then stolen and sold at extortionist's prices. The shop owners were interrogated to force them to admit to being Bahá'ís. This way, they could be further targeted and intimidated.

The people of Adrianople were amazed and agitated. "What has happened that these people are thus treated? We never saw anything in them but truthfulness, trustworthiness, and piety." The citizens were truly sympathetic. Some wept openly, both Muslim and Christian. A number of foreign consuls banded together and went as one body to Bahá'u'lláh. If only He would command them, they said, they would inform their governments and stop such behavior. Bahá'u'lláh was gracious and kind, but He said, "**My relief lies in the hands of God . . . to Him alone do I turn.**"

The authorities made a list of the Bahá'ís who were to be exiled. Those on the list quickly prepared for their hasty departure. They bought what they could and assembled their provisions. The entire company planned to travel to Gallipoli, where Bahá'u'lláh and His companions would depart for 'Akká. Mírzá Yahyá and his group were destined for Cyprus. Soon the day arrived. The horse-drawn wagons drew up, belongings were loaded, and the Bahá'ís took their seats. As He prepared to leave, Bahá'u'lláh turned to His friends and neighbors. Sorrowful and grieving, they had gathered to bid Him farewell. One by one,

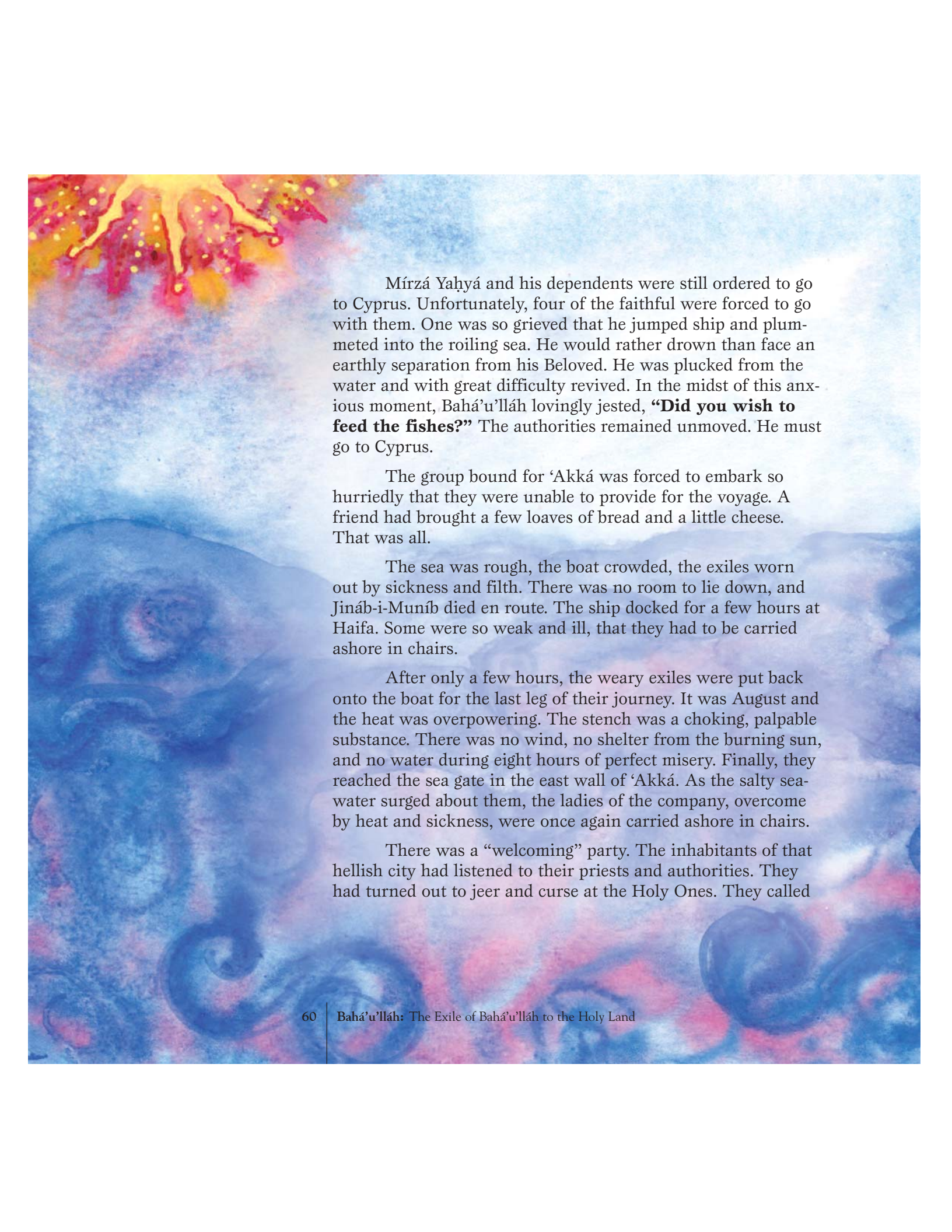


they kissed His hand and the hem of His garment. Áqá Ridá said, “Indeed that was a strange day. Methinks the city, its very walls and gates bemoaned their separation from Him.” It was August 12, 1868.

They reached Gallipoli in five days, but there they were detained. Apparently, there was still some question about their final destinations. There were rumors that Bahá’u’lláh and the members of His family would be sent to ‘Akká. Others of the faithful might be separated and sent elsewhere. Maybe they would have to return to Iran. Maybe they would be executed. Always, it was the threat of separation that caused the most distress.

The captain who had accompanied them from Adrianople came humbly and respectfully to take his leave of Bahá’u’lláh. After bidding him a warm farewell, Bahá’u’lláh gave him an assignment. **“Tell the king that this territory will pass out of his hands,”** He said. He should have investigated and asked for proofs; he should have prevented such wrongdoing, such injuries. The captain stood silent and submissive and listened intently to these and other vehement and powerful words. He promised to report what he had heard.

After three anxious days, the verdict was read: Bahá’u’lláh and His family and all but a few of the faithful were to go together to the same destination. They were headed for the pestilential prison-city of ‘Akká, a place so foul that birds in flight over the city were said to fall from the sky. Bahá’u’lláh warned His companions: **“This journey will be unlike any of the previous journeys”** and that whoever did not feel himself **“man enough to face the future”** had best **“depart to whatever place he pleaseth, and be preserved from tests, for hereafter he will find himself unable to leave.”** They all chose to remain, of course. The authorities were amazed.



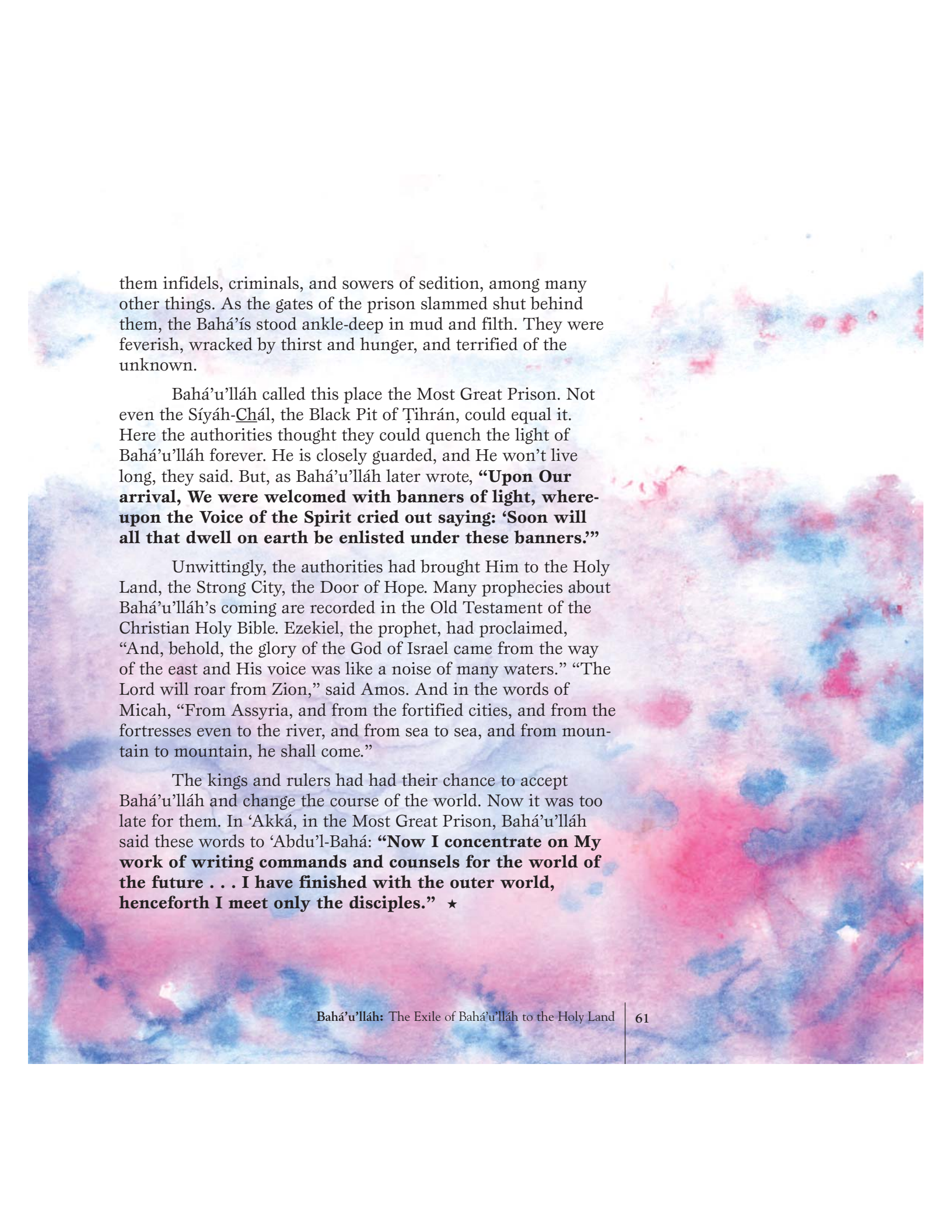
Mírzá Yahyá and his dependents were still ordered to go to Cyprus. Unfortunately, four of the faithful were forced to go with them. One was so grieved that he jumped ship and plummeted into the roiling sea. He would rather drown than face an earthly separation from his Beloved. He was plucked from the water and with great difficulty revived. In the midst of this anxious moment, Bahá'u'lláh lovingly jested, **“Did you wish to feed the fishes?”** The authorities remained unmoved. He must go to Cyprus.

The group bound for 'Akká was forced to embark so hurriedly that they were unable to provide for the voyage. A friend had brought a few loaves of bread and a little cheese. That was all.

The sea was rough, the boat crowded, the exiles worn out by sickness and filth. There was no room to lie down, and Jináb-i-Muníb died en route. The ship docked for a few hours at Haifa. Some were so weak and ill, that they had to be carried ashore in chairs.

After only a few hours, the weary exiles were put back onto the boat for the last leg of their journey. It was August and the heat was overpowering. The stench was a choking, palpable substance. There was no wind, no shelter from the burning sun, and no water during eight hours of perfect misery. Finally, they reached the sea gate in the east wall of 'Akká. As the salty seawater surged about them, the ladies of the company, overcome by heat and sickness, were once again carried ashore in chairs.

There was a “welcoming” party. The inhabitants of that hellish city had listened to their priests and authorities. They had turned out to jeer and curse at the Holy Ones. They called



them infidels, criminals, and sowers of sedition, among many other things. As the gates of the prison slammed shut behind them, the Bahá'ís stood ankle-deep in mud and filth. They were feverish, wracked by thirst and hunger, and terrified of the unknown.

Bahá'u'lláh called this place the Most Great Prison. Not even the Síyáh-Chál, the Black Pit of Tíhrán, could equal it. Here the authorities thought they could quench the light of Bahá'u'lláh forever. He is closely guarded, and He won't live long, they said. But, as Bahá'u'lláh later wrote, **“Upon Our arrival, We were welcomed with banners of light, whereupon the Voice of the Spirit cried out saying: ‘Soon will all that dwell on earth be enlisted under these banners.’”**

Unwittingly, the authorities had brought Him to the Holy Land, the Strong City, the Door of Hope. Many prophecies about Bahá'u'lláh's coming are recorded in the Old Testament of the Christian Holy Bible. Ezekiel, the prophet, had proclaimed, “And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east and His voice was like a noise of many waters.” “The Lord will roar from Zion,” said Amos. And in the words of Micah, “From Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortresses even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain, he shall come.”

The kings and rulers had had their chance to accept Bahá'u'lláh and change the course of the world. Now it was too late for them. In 'Akká, in the Most Great Prison, Bahá'u'lláh said these words to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: **“Now I concentrate on My work of writing commands and counsels for the world of the future . . . I have finished with the outer world, henceforth I meet only the disciples.”** ★