

Celebration of  
Ridván

by  
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## RIDVAN

At either end of the stage stand the two Narrators. Off to the side sits a third actor, writing. This is Nabil.

### NARRATOR I

In 1863, Bahá'u'lláh and the other Bábís were in exile in Baghdad. There, the half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh became a cause of dissension. Mirza Yahyá spread false accusations about Bahá'u'lláh. He told the Bábís that Bahá'u'lláh was undermining the Báb's teachings. He lied to the Iraqi government, saying that Bahá'u'lláh was organizing the Bábí community for political reasons. These wild rumors were in total contrast to the truth. But they succeeded in causing bitter controversies, dissension, and division among the believers... For this reason, Bahá'u'lláh retired to the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih, where He lived in seclusion in the wilderness for two years. As Bahá'u'lláh Himself explained:

Narrator II will read from a book when quoting Bahá'u'lláh's Words, so that it is clear that there is no attempt to dramatically portray the Manifestation of God.

### NARRATOR II

"The one object of our retirement was to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto Our companions, the means of injury to any soul, or the cause of sorrow to any heart." 1

### NARRATOR III

During Bahá'u'lláh's absence, the Bábí community completely deteriorated. The Bábís were divided among themselves. In one town alone, four different Bábí sects started up, each bearing a different name. Meanwhile, no less than 25 different individuals proclaimed themselves to be "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest" -- the Promised One Whose advent the Báb had foretold. Even Nabil, the famous historian, made this claim...

Narrator II indicates the actor who is seated and writing. Nabíl looks sheepish at this reference to a time he would like to forget.

NARRATOR I

Some of these claimants were cunning, conniving men, some were simple, misguided souls, and some saw themselves as spiritually standing head and shoulders above Mirza Yahyá, who was asserting leadership. Later, Nabíl would beg forgiveness from Bahá'u'lláh for his presumptuous claim... But meanwhile, there was such a decline in the fortunes of the Bábí community that the Bábís hardly dared show themselves in public. Kurds and Persians vied with one another when encountering Bábís in the streets to see who could heap the most abuse upon the Bábís, and who best insult their new religion. Most of the Bábís were dispirited. Unlike the early heroes and martyrs who, only a decade before, had demonstrated with their life's blood the staunchness of their faith and the depth of their love, the Bábís were now spiritually as dead. Finally, spurned and rejected by a number of stalwart Bábís, Mirza Yahyá himself even wrote to Bahá'u'lláh, begging Him to return to Baghdád.

(indicates another actor)

Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh:

BAHIYYIH KHANUM

At last! At last! As my mother, my brother, and I sat in a breathless state of expectancy, we heard a step. It was a dervish. Through the disguise we saw the light of our beloved one's presence...

(indicating the divan upstage center)

We hardly knew Him; his beard and hair were long and matted -- He really was a dervish in appearance... Our joy cannot be described as we clung to Him.

NARRATOR III

The young 'Abdu'l-Bahá had fallen into great despondency during his Father's two-year absence. He would go away by himself, and, when sought for, be found weeping, falling into such a state of

(MORE)

NARRATOR III  
 grief that no one could console him. 45  
 (indicating actor)  
 Bahíyyih Khánum:

BAHIYYIH KHANUM

The meeting between my brother and father was the most touching and pathetic sight I have ever seen. Abbás Effendi threw himself on the floor before Him and kissed and embraced His feet, weeping and crying, "Why did You leave us, why did You leave us?" while the great uncouth dervish wept over his boy. I could never forget that scene. 2

NARRATOR I  
 Once again Bahá'u'lláh took the reins of the Cause into His hands. However...

NARRATOR II  
 (quoting Bahá'u'lláh)  
 "We found no more than a handful of souls, faint and dispirited, nay utterly lost and dead. The Cause of God had ceased to be on any one's lips, nor was any heart receptive to its message."  
 Bahá'u'lláh. 3

NARRATOR III  
 Through His counsels and encouragement Bahá'u'lláh began to rebuild the Bábí community and restore its self-respect and prestige. The clouds of uncertainty that had hung over the Bábís during His absence now began to lift. They could now hold their heads high, and were no longer the butt of every foul abuse. Bahá'u'lláh breathed a new life into the dying community.

The SOUND of telegraph tapping.

NARRATOR I  
 The British Consul in Baghdád, Captain  
 Sir Arnold Kemball:

The British consul comes forward. He bows stiffly and formally. He gestures toward the divan upstage center as he refers to Bahá'u'lláh.

BRITISH CONSUL  
 (British accent)  
 Having had occasion to allude to the  
 (MORE)

## BRITISH CONSUL

Bábís in Baghdád I may mention that...  
 their chief is a certain Mirza Husayn  
 Ali... this individual enjoys a  
 consideration which partakes of absolute  
 devotion and reverence on the part of his  
 followers... 4

A procession of admirers and believers file in from both  
 sides of the off-stage wings. The procesion is ceremonial  
 and stylized. The believers take their places at the foot of  
 the divan. Some sit on their heels; some stand with heads  
 bowed. They form a V-shaped phalanx.

## NARRATOR III

(as procession enters)

Bahá'u'lláh had scarcely begun to revive  
 the Bábís in Baghdád, when the admirers  
 He had left behind in the wilderness of  
 Sulaymáníyyih began to flock to the  
 capital, looking for Him. Then the  
 religious leaders of Baghdád sought His  
 presence. Some became His followers...

More and more people enter and approach the divan.

## NARRATOR I

... Government officials were moved to  
 extol the character and conduct of  
 Bahá'u'lláh. The Governor of Baghdád  
 called Him one of the "Lights of the Age"  
 and came to Him for advice on matters of  
 state. Persian princes living in Baghdád  
 were likewise drawn into Bahá'u'lláh's  
 Bahá'u'lláh ever-widening circle of  
 admirers.

(indicating one near the divan)

Persan Prince Zaynu'l-Abidim Khan:

A Persian prince steps out of the tableau of admirers and  
 addresses the audience.

## PERSIAN PRINCE

I cannot explain it. I do not know how  
 it is, but whenever I feel gloomy and  
 depressed, I have only to go to the house  
 of Bahá'u'lláh to have my spirit  
 uplifted. 5

The Persian prince rejoins Bahá'u'lláh's admirers.

## NARRATOR III

The British Consul in Baghdád, Captain  
 Sir Arnold Kemball called upon

(MORE)

## NARRATOR III

Bahá'u'lláh and offered Him British citizenship and protection...

The British Consul takes two steps toward the divan and bows stiffly, as if to say, "at your service."

## NARRATOR III

(cont'd)

... He volunteered to transmit to Queen Victoria any communication Bahá'u'lláh wished to forward to her. He even expressed his readiness to arrange for Bahá'u'lláh's transfer of residence to India – or to anywhere He so desired.

The British Consul rejoins the admirers poised before the divan. One by one the admirers now approach the divan, take a scroll or tablet of Scripture from it, and cross to the opposite side of the stage, exiting in procession.

## NARRATOR I

The number and diversity of people flocking to the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád was amazing enough, but equally remarkable was the enormous expansion in the scope and volume of Baha'u'llah's Writings, after His return from Sulaymáníyyih. To the magnificence of His rising power and prestige was now added a prodigious body of Writings that streamed day and night from His pen.

The procession of believers and admirers, their drooping souls uplifted by the visitation and receipt of the Tablets, now has exited the stage. Except for two, who linger suspiciously near the wings, whispering to each other.

## NARRATOR III

But this only served to fan the flame of hatred smoldering in the hearts of His jealous enemies. A certain mischievous priest allied himself with the Persian consul in Baghdád. Together they strove to persecute, banish, and finally to murder Bahá'u'lláh. Hired assassins were employed...

One of the plotters exits. The other ruffian stands, leaning back, as if in a doorway, concealing something under his cloak.

NARRATOR III

(cont'd)

One would-be murderer, lurking in a doorway -- upon witnessing the majestic sight of Bahá'u'lláh walking in the street -- dropped his gun and fell speechless.

NARRATOR III

(cont'd)

...Bahá'u'lláh instructed His own brother to pick up the man's pistol and to hand it back to him. "Show him the way to his house," Bahá'u'lláh is reported as saying. "He seems to have lost his way."

NARRATOR I

Another assassin burst into the public bath with knives drawn...

A ruffian, with knife drawn, bursts through the upstage partition and rushes the divan.

NARRATOR I

(cont'd)

..but then turned and fled trembling.

The would-be assassin backs off-stage as if in shock.

NARRATOR III

A period of more intense suffering and turmoil had begun for Bahá'u'lláh. A dream He had at the time revealed as much to Him.

The theme MUSIC that signals Bahá'u'lláh's revealed Words commences.

NARRATOR II

(reading from book)

"I saw the Prophets and 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....' They continued addressing Me

(MORE)

## NARRATOR II

the whole night until the approach of dawn." 6

Again we see the two plotters, whispering in the wings.

## NARRATOR I

Finally, the plotting of Bahá'u'lláh's enemies bore fruit. They convinced the Shah of Persia that it was in his nation's best interests to have Bahá'u'lláh moved even farther from Persia's borders. They told the Shah that too many Persians were still being attracted to the new Faith. The Shah petitioned the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, and the Sultan consented to banish Bahá'u'lláh to Constantinople.

The two plotters pat each other on the back and exit, gloating.

## NARRATOR I

(cont'd)

(indicating actor)

Bahíyyih Khánum, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh:

## BAHIYYIH KHANUM

When it became known that this departure was to take place, great was the consternation among the friends. We had to make preparations for a journey, we knew not how long, to a place we knew not where. The friends came weeping helplessly, "What shall we do? What is going to happen to our Beloved? What?" There was such turmoil that we could not proceed with our preparations. At this juncture, the Governor of Baghdád, a fervent admirer of Bahá'u'lláh, who was supposed to be enforcing the Prisoner's exile, invited Bahá'u'lláh to bring some of the friends and come and stay in his garden, a short distance outside of Baghdád. 7

## NARRATOR III

When Bahá'u'lláh appeared in the courtyard of His house, His companions, who were grief-stricken and despairing over the notion of separation, prostrated themselves at His feet. Bahá'u'lláh stood there, amid all the weeping and sobbing, speaking words of comfort. He

(MORE)

NARRATOR III  
 promised to receive each one of the  
 believers later in the Garden of Ridvan.

NARRATOR III  
 (cont'd)  
 The Baha'i coppersmith, Asadu'llah  
 Kashani:

ASADU'LLAH  
 KASHANI  
 (gruff Persian accent)  
 All the city came, friends and others, to  
 see Him leave for the Ridvan. There was a  
 great crowd. Weeping women pressed  
 forward and laid their babes and young  
 children at His feet. He tenderly raised  
 those infants, one by one, blessing them,  
 gently and lovingly replacing them in  
 their sorrowing mothers' arms, and  
 charging them to bring up those dear  
 flowers of humanity to serve God in  
 steadfast faith and truth... What a soul-  
 stirring day! Men threw themselves in  
 His path; if only His blessed feet might  
 touch them as they passed. Our Beloved  
 One got into a boat to cross the river,  
 the people pressing round Him waiting,  
 not to lose one of the remaining chances  
 of being in His Presence.

NARRATOR I  
 Bahá'u'lláh was then ferried across the  
 river accompanied by three of His sons.  
 With them also was His amanuensis, Mirza  
 Aqa Jan.

ASADU'LLAH  
 KASHANI  
 At length the boat put off, and we  
 watched it with sorrowing hearts. Then  
 we were aware of an extraordinary  
 exhilaration, some marvelous exaltation  
 in the atmosphere of that day.

There is the distant SOUND of a muezzin's call to prayer --  
 or perhaps the faint chanting of "Ya Baha'ul'Abha."

ASADU'LLAH  
 KASHANI (cont'd)  
 The reason for this phenomenon we were in  
 due time to learn. 8

Asadu'llah Kashani indicates the actor reading Bahíyyih  
 Khánum's words.

## NARRATOR I

Bahíyyih Khánum, daughter of Bahá'u'lláh:

## BAHIYYIH KHANUM

It was during Bahá'u'lláh's stay in this garden that the declaration was made... that He was "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest." 9

## NARRATOR III

The call to afternoon prayer was just then being raised from the mosque. The muezzin's melodious chant of "God is Most Great" floated across the river, escorting Bahá'u'lláh to the Garden of Ridvan. There He disembarked, and appearing in the utmost joy, began to pace majestically down the paths lined with flowers and fruit trees, the call to prayer still echoing in the air around Him.

Theme MUSIC, which accompanies the reading of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed Words, starts up.

## NARRATOR II

(reading from a book)

"The Divine Springtime is come... 10  
Springtime which autumn will never  
overtake... Day which shall never be  
followed by night... 11 Mighty,  
inconceivably mighty is this Day! 12  
a day so blest that past ages and  
centuries can never hope to rival it...13  
The purpose underlying all creation is  
the revelation of... this most holy Day,  
the Day known as the Day of God, in His  
Books and Scriptures -- the Day which all  
the Prophets, and the Chosen Ones, and  
the holy ones, have wished to witness."  
14

## NARRATOR I

The hour had struck. To that select group, Bahá'u'lláh revealed Himself as the One foretold by the Báb, the One Whose coming had been promised in all the Books of God... A deep silence fell upon the audience. They understood the immensity of that Declaration: the inauguration of the kingdom of heaven on earth. The sorrow of exile had suddenly become an ecstasy of hope. Bahá'u'lláh

(MORE)

## NARRATOR I

had turned a sad occasion into the most joyous event imaginable.

Theme MUSIC builds.

## NARRATOR II

(reading from a book)

"Verily, I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised... It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation... His voice is calling you unto that which shall profit you." 15

From either side of the stage, a procession of believers enters, each bearing a single long-stemmed rose. They approach the divan and set the roses down in a heap in front of it.

## NARRATOR III

For twelve days and nights Bahá'u'lláh remained in the Garden of Ridvan, hosting the great numbers who came to pay their respects to Him. Each day a constant stream of people came from Baghdád to visit Bahá'u'lláh. They could not bear being parted from Him.

## NARRATOR I

The historian, Nabíl:

Nabíl, who has been on the outer perimeters of the performance, as if recording the historical events, now steps forward.

## NABIL

Every day, ere the hour of dawn, the gardeners would pick the roses which lined the four avenues of the garden, and would pile them in the center of the floor of His blessed 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. All these roses Bahá'u'lláh would, with His own hands, entrust to those whom He dismissed from His presence every morning to be delivered, on His behalf, to His Arab and Persian friends in the city." 16

The two columns of believers now cross the stage, moving back to the side from which they each entered, first removing a single rose from the heap as they pass the divan. They exit processionally. Nabíl, meanwhile, circumambulates the divan, cradling his book under his arm.

NABIL (cont'd)

For three successive nights I watched and circled round His blessed tent. Every time I passed by the couch whereon He lay, I would find Him wakeful, and every day, from morn till eventide, I would see Him ceaselessly engaged in conversing with the stream of visitors who kept flowing in from Baghdád.

The two columns of believers with roses re-enter. They cross in front of the divan and then sink to the floor.

NARRATOR II

(reading from a book)

"What hath become of creation?... Whither are gone all created things?... Lo, the entire creation hath passed away!... Verily, We have caused every soul to expire by virtue of Our all-subduing sovereignty. We have then called into being a new creation... 17 The Word of God hath been made manifest... 18 No sooner had the first Word proceeded... than the whole creation was revolutionized... Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing... entities of a new creation." 19

The warbling SOUND of nightingales commences.

NABIL

One night, the ninth night of the waxing moon, I happened to be one of those who watched beside His blessed tent. As the hour of midnight approached, I saw Him issue from His tent, pass by the places where some of His companions were sleeping, and begin to pace up and down the moonlit, flower-bordered avenues of the garden. So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him could hear distinctly His voice. He continued to

(MORE)

NABIL (cont'd)  
walk until, pausing in the midst of these  
avenues, He observed:

NARRATOR I  
(reading from a book)  
"Consider these nightingales. So great is  
their love for these roses, that  
sleepless from dusk till dawn, they  
warble their melodies and commune with  
burning passion with the object of their  
adoration. How then can those who claim  
to be afire with the rose-like beauty of  
the Beloved choose to sleep?" 20

The theme MUSIC now rises gradually over the SOUND of the  
nightingales.

NARRATOR II  
(reading from a book)  
"Verily, I say, this is the Day in which  
mankind can behold the Face, and hear the  
Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of  
God hath been raised... It behoveth every  
man to blot out the trace of every idle  
word from the tablet of his heart, and to  
gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on  
the signs of His Revelation... 21 His  
voice is calling you unto that which  
shall profit you." 15

The sleeping believers begin to stir. The MUSIC builds.

NARRATOR III  
(reading from a book)  
"Take heed that you do not vacillate in  
your determination to embrace the truth  
of this Cause... This is the changeless  
Faith of God, eternal in the past,  
eternal in the future..." 22

Slowly the resurrected believers take up the long-stemmed  
roses, and approach the audience with them.

NARRATOR II  
(reading from a book)  
"In this Day a great festival is taking  
place in the Realms above, for whatsoever  
was promised in the sacred Scriptures  
hath been fulfilled. This is the Day of  
great rejoicing..." 23

NARRATOR I  
(reading from a book)  
"Oh, how I long to announce unto every  
(MORE)

## NARRATOR I

spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation.." 24

The procession of believers presents roses to the members of the audience, as if passing the torch of the Word of God. During the following recitation of the "Ridvan Tablet" they should encourage the audience to "arise" and to "guide" and to "attract," transforming the audience from passive to active participants.

## NARRATOR II

(reading from a book)

"The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching. Bestir thyself, and magnify, before the entire creation, the name of God, and celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be regenerated and made new. Speak, and hold not thy peace... Arise before the nations of the earth, and arm thyself with the power of this Most Great Name, and be not of those who tarry..."

## NARRATOR III

(reading from a book)

"...Arise, and proclaim unto the entire creation the tidings that He Who is the All-Merciful hath directed His steps towards the Ridvan and entered it..."

## NARRATOR II

(reading from a book)

"... Guide, then, the people unto the garden of delight which God hath made the Throne of His Paradise. We have chosen thee to be our most mighty Trumpet, whose blast is to signalize the resurrection of all mankind...."

## NARRATOR I

(reading from a book)

"... Attract the hearts of men, through the call of Him, the one Beloved. Say: This is the Voice of God, if ye do but hearken. This is the Day Spring of the Revelation of God, did ye but know it. This is the Dawning-Place of the Cause of God, were ye to recognize it. This is the Source of the commandment of God, did ye but judge it fairly. This is the manifest and hidden Secret; would that ye might perceive it..."

## NARRATOR II

(reading from a book)

"...O peoples of the world! Cast away, in My name that transcendeth all other names, the things ye possess, and immerse yourselves in this Ocean in whose depths lay hidden the pearls of wisdom and of utterance, an ocean that surgeth in My name, the All-Merciful. Thus instructeth you He with Whom is the Mother Book."

MUSIC peaks and fades. The final passage of "The Ridvan Tablet" is read in silence.

## NABIL

(reading from a book)

"Rejoice with exceeding gladness, O people of Baha, 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 from which He shed upon the whole of creation the splendors of His name, the All-Merciful. God is Our witness. Were We to reveal the hidden secrets of that Day, all they that dwell on earth and in the heavens would swoon away and die, except such as will be preserved by God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise." 25

There is a pause. Then, the ensemble of actors begins chanting "Allah-u'Abha, Allah'u'Abha..." The melody is picked up by the members of the audience and fills the hall.

\* \* \*

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ENDNOTES

1. Iqan 251
2. The Chosen Highway 53
3. King of Glory 122

4. The Bábi & Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944 -- 180-82
5. King of Glory 124
6. God Passes By 147
7. The Chosen Highway 57-8
8. ibid 122-23
9. ibid 58
10. Gleanings 27
11. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. I 308
12. The Advent of Divine Justice 65
13. Gleanings 14
14. ADJ 65
15. Gleanings 29
16. Iqan - frontispiece
17. GPB 153
18. Iqan - frontispiece
19. Revelation, Vol. I 277-78
20. GPB 153
21. Gleanings 10-11
22. ibid 13
23. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh 78
24. Gleanings 16
25. ibid 27-35 (The "Ridvan Tablet")