

## 'The Gate' to an Era of Maturity by Druzelle Cederquist

The light is as clear and crisp as the air this October morning. Beads of rain, now past, cling to bare branches like gems, their prisms of color dazzling in the sunrise as they warm and finally let go. For as long as the seasons allow I begin my day here, on a porch overlooking the woods. In this space of transition between human structure and natural order, in the hour between dreams and the waking day, my breath warms the words that come to life upon my lips. They are words of prayer, and today it is the prayers of the Bab that kindle my soul and create a "ladder between heaven and earth."

Today's sun is the same sun that rose, over a century ago, on the Kurdish villagers of Mah-Ku in a remote corner of Persia, where, in the summer of 1847, a mountain-fortress kept a new prisoner, the Bab, whose name means "gate" in Arabic. Mah-Ku's villagers knew nothing about the Bab's claim to be a Messenger of God. They had not heard about His Mission: to prepare the way for the Promised One of all religions. What they did hear, reverberating from that fortress-prison set in a pocket of the mountain, was the voice of the Bab, strong and melodious, as He chanted verses of such soul-stirring beauty that the villagers were captivated. Surely this must be a holy man, they said to one another, and they gathered at the foot of the mountain to begin each day with a blessing from the Bab.

For nearly a year the Bab was kept in Mah-Ku, housed in a mud-walled cell without even a lamp for light, through the sweltering summer when the sun baked the rocky mountain, through the harsh winter when water froze in droplets on the Bab's face as He washed. But the Bab let nothing deter Him. Day after day He revealed new divine teachings – 8,000 verses – and woven throughout, a myriad allusions to the great Divine Messenger soon to appear – "Him Whom God will make manifest" – eventually known to humanity as Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith.

Two Messengers from God in one lifetime: because humanity was about to step over a critical threshold and enter a whole new era – the maturity of the human race. It was 'Ali Muhammad of Shiraz, Persia, Who by divine appointment took the title "the Bab" meaning "the Gate" and opened the way.

Maturity? Our own human wisdom acknowledges that maturity does not visit us overnight, on a particular birthday. So it should not be surprising to learn that maturity of the human race does not appear instantly, in one historical moment. Maturity by its nature is the fruit of process, with its own cycles and seasons. And just as the sun is the source of life to every living thing on earth, the source of spiritual life – the "ever-lasting, ever-shining Sun" – is, in every age, the Word of God, say the Baha'i writings. The Word of God is "the cause of the education of souls and the source of the enlightenment of hearts."

This Sun of Reality is one Sun, which appears in different dawning places: the Messengers of the heavenly religions known to us by different names. Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Christ, Muhammad, and now the Bab and Baha'u'llah. The stories of these holy Ones may be different, yet they are also remarkably alike. At heart, each One summoned humankind to one Reality, "to embrace the light of God." Each One "scattered the darkness of ignorance" and generated a "springtime of the inner world," reflected in the advances and flourishings of civilizations.

We are all too familiar with the signs of spiritual winter: the growing materialism, hatreds and violence, wars and catastrophes; the Sun of Truth so hidden by "clouds and mists of imitation (and) superstition" that it seems to have gone for good. Yet we are destined to emerge from this desperate winter. In every age as humanity responds to the Messenger of God, "minds are developed, hopes brighten, aspirations become spiritual, and the virtues of the human world appear with freshened power of growth."

"You are the witnesses of the Dawn of the promised Day of God," the Bab had told His first disciples. As Baha'is throughout the world celebrate the birth of the Bab on October 20<sup>th</sup>, we are reminded to "strive with heart and soul" to "dispel the clouds and mists" of old patterns that do not serve us well, and to have the courage to enter a new "springtime of the inner world."

Sources for Baha'i Quotations: Paragraph 6: Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p.80; Promulgation of Universal Peace (PUP), p. 95; Paragraph 8 Dawnbreakers, pp. 260, 262; Other Quotes from PUP, p.94-96.

Note: This episode can be found in Chapter 12 of *The Story of Baha'u'llah: Promised One of All Religions*, as well as more on the life of the Bab.