

SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

Nabíl-i-A'zam (1831–1892)



Much of what we know about early Bahá'í history we owe to the poet and historian Nabíl-i-A'zam.

Nabíl was born in Zarand, Persia (now Iran) in 1831. He received a simple education and worked as a shepherd in his youth. But he was keenly interested in religion. He meditated at night under the stars, and while herding his sheep, he prayed for God to lead him to truth.

When Nabíl was about 16, he learned about the Báb, a Messenger of God Who taught that a new Messenger would soon appear. Nabíl embraced the Bábí Faith.

Spreading the Word

Nabíl transcribed the Báb's writings and traveled to share His peaceful message. But religious and government leaders felt threatened by the growing Bábí Faith. Like thousands of Bábís, Nabíl was soon imprisoned for his beliefs.

The Báb Himself was imprisoned for about two years, and then His execution was ordered. The Báb was martyred on July 9, 1850.

The Bábís were distraught and confused. For a time, Nabíl thought *he* was the Báb's successor and claimed leadership of the community. But when Nabíl encountered Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád, he realized that Bahá'u'lláh was the Promised One. Nabíl withdrew his claim and became a devoted follower. In 1863, Bahá'u'lláh announced that He was the Messenger that the Báb had foretold.

Nabíl traveled far and wide, sharing the Bahá'í Faith. In 1868, he tried to negotiate the release of Bahá'í prisoners in Egypt, but he was imprisoned

himself. After his release, he traveled to 'Akká (in what is now Israel) to be near Bahá'u'lláh.

Nabíl was a gifted poet, and he wrote many poems for Bahá'u'lláh. He described the divine love between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, though the Messengers never met in person: "If the branches of every tree were turned into pens, and all the seas into ink, and earth and heaven rolled into one parchment, the immensity of that love would still remain unexplored, and the depths of that devotion unfathomed."

Chronicler of Bahá'í History

Nabíl is best known for his moving accounts of Bábí and Bahá'í history. Writing in 'Akká in 1887–88, he recorded stories of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and their followers, including many who suffered persecution and martyrdom. Some of these heroic tales were translated as *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early History of the Bahá'í Revelation*. Nabíl's full account has not yet been published in English.

When Bahá'u'lláh passed away in 1892, Nabíl became terribly sad. His anguish and grief overtook him, and he drowned himself in the sea. In the Bahá'í Faith, like other religions, suicide is forbidden. It is up to God to determine the length of a person's life.

Still, Bahá'u'lláh's son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, praised Nabíl's life, saying, "This distinguished man was erudite, wise, and eloquent of speech. His native genius was pure inspiration, his poetic gift like a crystal stream. . . Upon him be abundant blessings; upon him be tender mercies."