"In 1852, Bahá'u'lláh experienced brutal tests. Then something happened that changed the world forever."



The Black Pit

Bahá'u'lláh guided the Bábís after the martyrdom of the Báb. But a few confused Bábí youth didn't listen to Bahá'u'lláh. They tried to seek revenge by attacking the sháh. Their actions put all of the Bábís in danger.

Bahá'u'lláh was staying in a village outside of Tihrán. He was known as a Leader of the Bábís. Though He had done nothing wrong, He was arrested and chained. He was forced to walk about 15 miles to Tihrán, with bare feet, in the blazing August sun. His clothes were torn. His hat, then a symbol of a man's dignity, was snatched off. A crowd of people yelled and threw stones at Him.



Prisoners of the "Black Pit" were chained and lead through a dark passageway, then down steep stairs to reach the dreadful dungeon.

In Tihrán, Bahá'u'lláh was taken to the Síyáh-Chál—the Black Pit. Bahá'u'lláh later said, "Upon Our arrival We were first conducted along a pitch-black corridor, from whence We descended three steep flights of stairs to the place of confinement assigned to Us. The dungeon was wrapped in thick darkness, and Our fellow-prisoners numbered nearly a hundred and fifty souls: thieves, assassins and highwaymen. . . . No pen can depict that place, nor any tongue describe its loathsome smell."

> "God alone knoweth what befell Us in that most foul-smelling and gloomy place!"
> —Bahá'u'lláh

The dungeon had once held water for the public baths. It was ice-cold. The filth was ankle-deep and full of vermin. Most of the men did not have clothes or bedding to lie on.

Bahá'u'lláh's feet were placed in stocks. He was chained to five other Bábís. Any movement by one made the chains cut deeper into the flesh of all. One of the two most feared chains in the land was placed around Bahá'u'lláh's neck. These chains were so heavy, they had to be held up with a special wooden fork. The heaviest one weighed 112 pounds.



A place in Southern Tihrán where many Bábí martyrdoms took place. The circled area in the back marks the location of the Síyáh-Chál.

No food was given to the prisoners. Bahá'u'lláh had nothing to eat or drink for the first three days and three nights. Then His Family was able to send some food and drink to Him. But they could not be sure if it would reach Him or if He would agree to eat while others were starving around Him. At one point, His enemies poisoned His food. This hurt His health for years afterward.

The Bábís praised God in the prison. They never complained. Every day, the guards called out the name of a Bábí prisoner. They unchained him and took him outside to be tortured and killed. Each man embraced Bahá'u'lláh before he left. Bahá'u'lláh encouraged him and filled his heart with joy. The prisoner embraced the other Bábís and bravely went to his death.

Bahá'u'lláh was confined in the Black Pit for four months. The sháh's mother wanted Him to be executed. Instead, in this horrible place, far underground, the Bahá'í Faith was born. ☼

Set Afire

Bahá'u'lláh described how He felt the power of God in the prison:

"During the days I lay in the prison of Tihrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear." ☼

An Unforgettable Visit

One day, a servant brought 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who was eight years old, to visit His Father. The servant carried the Child on his shoulders. They went down some steps in the darkness, but could not see anything. Then they heard Bahá'u'lláh say, "Do not bring him in here."

They went back outside and waited. When the prisoners were let out for exercise, 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw His Father. Bahá'u'lláh was very ill. His hair and beard were tangled. His body was bent from the weight of the chains. 'Abdu'l-Bahá later described the scene. "He was chained to several others. What a chain! It was very heavy. The prisoners could only move it along with great difficulty. Sad and heart-rending it was." At the time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá fainted and was carried home unconscious. ☼