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**Abstract:**

Two versions of a short article about the 12-day Baha'i festival.

**Notes:**

First is Walbridge's encyclopedia article, followed by his slightly revised version for Sacred Acts.

Written for possible inclusion in [The Baha'i Encyclopedia](#). Posted with permission of both the author and of the editor of the Encyclopedia project.

## Ridvan

by [John Walbridge](#)

published in *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time: Bahá'í Studies volume 1*  
Oxford: George Ronald, 1995

**Ridvan, Festival of.** The twelve day period commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's announcement of his claim to prophethood and his departure from Baghdad in 1863, observed from sunset 20 April to sunset, 2 May. The first, ninth and twelfth days of Ridvan are major Bahá'í holy days on which work should be suspended.\* Bahá'í elections are normally held during Ridvan. The name derives from the Najibiyyih Garden in Baghdad where Bahá'u'lláh stayed during this period and to which he gave the name Ridvan (Paradise).

1. Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdad. Following Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Iraq in the spring of 1853, he had gradually established warm relations with the ordinary people of Baghdad as well as with notables of all sorts: Ottoman officials, clerics, and Persian pilgrims and exiles. He had also become the generally recognized leader of the Babi community, although his brother Mirza Yahya was still accepted as the appointed successor of the Bab. Baghdad - close to the Iranian border, adjacent to several Shi'i shrine cities and home to many Iranian political exiles - was a hotbed of political intrigue; and the Iranian authorities feared that Bahá'u'lláh would use his growing prestige to threaten the government. The Persian ambassador in Istanbul, Mushiru'd-Dawlih, therefore demanded that Bahá'u'lláh be removed from Baghdad. Eventually, 'Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier, and Fu'ad Pasha, the Foreign Minister, yielded, and Bahá'u'lláh was summoned

to Istanbul. Bahá'u'lláh, however, was a person of consequence and had by this time become an Ottoman subject, so the summons was issued in the form of a polite invitation.

Namiq Pasha, the governor of Iraq and sympathetic to Bahá'u'lláh, was reluctant to deliver the summons. Finally he sent a courteous message asking Bahá'u'lláh to call on him at the governorate. The message reached Bahá'u'lláh on the fifth day after Naw-Ruz, 26 March 1863, at the Mazra`iy-i-Vashshash, an open area outside the city where Bahá'u'lláh and his followers had camped to observe the new year. The message arrived shortly after Bahá'u'lláh had completed the composition of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. Bahá'u'lláh arranged to meet the governor in the mosque across the street from the governorate. He ordered the tents struck and the party returned to the city.

Bahá'u'lláh met the next day with the deputy governor and agreed to go to Istanbul with his family and a number of attendants. Money for the journey was provided by the government, which Bahá'u'lláh accepted and immediately distributed to the poor. The next few weeks were very busy. Bahá'u'lláh received innumerable visitors, wrote tablets to each of the friends who would be left behind, and made the practical preparations necessary for the journey. Eventually, Bahá'u'lláh decided to move to the Najibiyyih Garden across the river and receive visitors there, thus clearing the house of visitors and allowing the family to pack.

Bahá'u'lláh left his house in Baghdad for the last time on the afternoon of 22 April 1863. He walked through crowds of friends, acquaintances and the merely curious down to the river where he took a small boat across to the garden. He was accompanied by his sons, his secretary Mirza Aqa Jan and perhaps others. He reached the garden just at the time for afternoon prayers. There for the next eleven days he received farewell visits from his friends, including the governor. The river rose soon after his arrival, so it was not until the ninth day, 30 April, that his family was able to join him.

The twelfth day was appointed for departure. The garden was filled with people coming for final farewells. It was late afternoon before the party got underway. Bahá'u'lláh mounted a fine roan stallion named Sa`udi (he also had two others, named Sa`id and Farangi), and the party left the garden amidst displays of affection and grief. The party travelled as far as Firayjat, three miles up the Tigris. There they stayed in a borrowed garden for a week while Bahá'u'lláh's brother Mirza Musa completed dealing with their affairs in Baghdad and packing the remaining goods. Visitors still came daily. The party finally set out on 9 May for the three-month journey to Istanbul.

**2. The significance of Ridvan.** Ridvan is the anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of his prophetic mission to his followers. It is clear, however, that the symbolic significance of Ridvan is richer than the simple fact of Bahá'u'lláh's open announcement of his prophetic claim.

a. The announcement. The exact nature and details of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration are unknown. `Abdu'l-Bahá states that on the afternoon he arrived in Ridvan Bahá'u'lláh disclosed his claim to be Him Whom God shall make manifest, the Prophet promised by the Bab. Bahiyyih Khanum, however, is reported to have said that on that day Bahá'u'lláh privately stated his claim to prophethood to `Abdu'l-Baha and four other followers. According to this account "he enjoined upon them secrecy as to this communication, as the time had not come for a public declaration; but that there were reasons which caused him to deem it necessary to make it at that time to a few whom he could trust." (Master in `Akka 39) It would appear then that Bahá'u'lláh, having prior to this time concealed his mission, decided on this day to disclose it. He chose however to inform only a handful of people and most Babis - even those in exile with him - seem to have been unaware of this claim until a year or two later in Edirne, although, of course, Bahá'u'lláh's

Baghdad writings are full of hints about it.

b. The departure from the Most Great House. In some places Bahá'u'lláh stresses his departure from the Most Great House: "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." (GWB 14:35) Another tablet recounts his journey from the House to the Ridvan Garden, giving supernatural significance to each stage of the journey. Another refers to his "exile (hijrah) from Iraq," thus linking Bahá'u'lláh's departure from the Most Great House to Muhammad's emigration from Mecca, the site of the most holy House of Islam, to Medina, the city where Muhammad fully exercised the prerogatives of prophethood.

c. The three announcements. In a tablet written some years later Bahá'u'lláh states that three announcements were made on the first day of Ridvan. First, Bahá'u'lláh's followers were forbidden to fight to advance or defend their faith. Religious war (jihad) had been permitted in Islam and under certain conditions by the law of the Bab. Second, there would not be another prophet for a full thousand years. Third, at that moment all the names of God were fully manifest in all things. These are perhaps to be regarded as an oblique announcement of his own prophethood. The first two anticipate basic features of Bahá'í law recorded in the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

The third announcement is echoed in many passages from tablets related to Ridvan - for example: "He Who is the Desire of all nations hath shed upon the kingdoms of the unseen and of the seen the splendor of the light of His most excellent names, and enveloped them with the radiance of the luminaries of His most gracious favors - favors which none can reckon except Him." Thus, Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Ridvan marks a mystic transformation of the world, in which the entire creation is infused with the glory of God's names. His announcement can, therefore, be viewed less as the revealing of a secret to a few individuals than as a fundamental transformation in the relationship between God and the world.

d. Completion of the first Vahid of the Bahá'í calendar. Naw-Ruz 1863 marked the beginning of the nineteenth year of the calendar established by the Bab, the last year of the first Vahid - "unity" - of nineteen years. Bahá'u'lláh's first prophetic experience had been in 1852-53 during his imprisonment in Tehran - the "year nine" of the Babi calendar. One, nine, and nineteen all have important symbolic and prophetic significance in the writings of the Bab.

**3. The Festival of Ridvan.** On the afternoon on which Bahá'u'lláh entered the garden, he proclaimed the festival of Ridvan. The Kitab-i-Aqdas, revealed ten years later, ordains it as one of the two "Most Great Festivals," along with the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab. Bahá'u'lláh specified that the first, ninth, and twelfth days were to be major holy days - days on which work is prohibited. These mark the days of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, the arrival of his family and his departure. Several tablets state that the festival properly begins at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the garden, that is, two hours before sunset. However, work is prohibited for the entire Bahá'í day, beginning the previous evening.

Ridvan is observed everywhere according to the Bahá'í calendar. It begins on the 13th of Jalal - 21 April if Naw-Ruz is on 21 March - the thirty-second day of the Bahá'í year. The ninth day falls on 29 April and the twelfth on 2 May. Like other Bahá'í holy days, there are few specific rules concerning the observance of Ridvan. It is usually observed with community gatherings for prayer and celebration on the three holy days. Most Bahá'í elections are held during Ridvan, a practice that began in the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Local spiritual assemblies are elected on the first day of Ridvan each year. The national conventions at which national spiritual assemblies are elected each year are usually held later in Ridvan, as is the international convention presently

held every five years to elect the Universal House of Justice.

**4. Tablets and writings associated with Ridvan.** A number of important tablets of Bahá'u'lláh are associated with Ridvan. These include:

a. Lawh-i-Ayyub. The Tablet of Job, also known as Suriy-i-Sabr ("the Surih of Patience"), Madinat-u's-Sabr ("the City of Patience"), and Surat Ayyub. A long tablet in Arabic revealed on the afternoon Bahá'u'lláh arrived at the garden of Ridvan. It was written for Haji Muhammad-Ta'iq-i-Nayrizi, whom Bahá'u'lláh surnamed Ayyub, "Job," a veteran of the battle of Nayriz. The tablet praises Vahid (q.v.), the Babi leader at Nayriz, and the believers of Nayriz. (Ayyam-i-Tis'ih 262-304)

b. Tablet of Ridvan, beginning "Huva 'l-Mustavi `ala hadha 'l- `arshi'l-munir" "He is seated upon this luminous throne." An Arabic tablet speaking joyfully of the lifting of the veils that had concealed God's beauty and the manifestation of all his names in created things and appealing to the people to answer the call of their Lord. After each verse is a refrain of the form, "Glad tidings! This is the Festival of God, manifest from the horizon of transcendent bounty." (Ayyam-i-Tis'ih 246-50)

c. Hur-i-`Ujab: "The Wondrous Maiden." An allegorical tablet in Arabic rhymed prose celebrated the unveiling of Bahá'u'lláh's glory. In this allegory the Maid of Heaven comes forth and unveils herself. Her unveiled beauty inflames creation. In joy she passes around the wine of life, plays music, and serves the food of beauty. But the arrogant reject her and she returns saddened to her heavenly palace, grieving that the people of the Book have rejected her and vowing not to return to them until the Day of Resurrection (Ayyam-i-Tis'ih 251- 54. RB 1:218).

d. "The Divine Springtime is come. . . ": (Qad ata Rabi`u'l-Bayan) The superscription of this tablet says that it "was revealed in the Ridvan for all to read during the Festival of Ridvan. . ." The tablet takes the form of a dialogue between God and "the Most Exalted Pen" - i.e., Bahá'u'lláh. God chides Bahá'u'lláh for not openly proclaiming the greatness of this day. Bahá'u'lláh replies that he is silent only because the people are veiled. God answers that today only His face can be seen in creation. God excuses Bahá'u'lláh's silence and proclaims that he has made Bahá'u'lláh the trumpet of the Day of Resurrection. The tablet explains in mystical terms the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's entry into the garden of Ridvan and commands Bahá'u'lláh to attract the hearts of men through the Word of God. The tablet appeals to the believers to heed the call of God. Bahá'u'lláh concludes the tablet with the statement that the Word of God had so inebriated him that he can write no longer. This well-known and frequently-quoted tablet is frequently referred to by western Bahá'is as the Ridvan Tablet. (Ayyam-i-Tis'ih 254-61; GWB xiv; Days to Remember 27-31)

e. "When the gladness of God seized all else. . .": (Fa-lamma akhadha farahu'llah kulla ma sivahu. . .) An Arabic tablet in which Bahá'u'lláh describes, with much mystical symbolism, his departure from the Most Great House, the grief of the people in the streets, his crossing of the Tigris and entry into the garden, and his final departure. This tablet is a rich source for understanding the symbolic significance of Ridvan and provides some historical information as well. (Ayyam-i-Tis'ih 305-12)

f. Other tablets and talks: There are other prayers, tablets and talks of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá relating to Ridvan, usually composed at or for a particular Ridvan observance. (Ayyam-i-Tis'ih 313-21, 324-31; Days to Remember 31-34; AVK 3:29-39).

g. Ridvan messages: As early as 1923 Shoghi Effendi sent a letter of encouragement and greeting to the American national Bahá'í convention at Ridvan. Later it was his regular practice to write a Ridvan letter to the Bahá'ís of the world summarizing the progress of the Faith in the previous year and setting out general directions for the coming year. The Universal House of Justice has continued this practice. Other Bahá'í institutions, especially national spiritual assemblies, also sometimes issue Ridvan letters.

SEE ALSO: "Ridvan, Garden of, Baghdad," "Bahá'u'lláh," "Calendar, Badi`"

**Bibliography:** Collections of material on Ridvan are found in AT 246-339; Days to Remember 25-43; AVK 3:6-10, 29-39; AAK 4:21-24. Accounts of the events of Ridvan are found in GPB 146-58; BKG 154-58, 168-76; RB 1:257-82; Phelps, Master in `Akka 35-41; CH 56-58, 122-24.

### Version published in *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time*

**The Festival of Ridvan** Ridvan is an Arabic word meaning 'good pleasure'. Because it is used in the Qur'an for God's satisfaction with the believers in heaven, it has come to mean 'paradise'. Its meanings in Bahá'í usage are:

- \* 'Paradise', as in such expressions as 'the Ridvan of unfading splendour (Ridvan-i-Quds-i-Munir). In this sense it is translated as 'paradise', 'heaven', 'tabernacle' and 'garden'.
- \* Garden of Ridvan: the name given by Bahá'u'lláh to two gardens -- the Najibiyyih Garden in Baghdad and a garden belonging to Bahá'u'lláh outside `Akka.
- \* Holy day of Ridvan: the most important Bahá'í festival, commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's public announcement of His prophetic mission and His departure from Baghdad.
- \* A Bahá'í name for the city of Nishapur in Iran.
- \* A village near Birjand, site of a Bahá'í community.
- \* An element of names, Bahá'í and Shi`i, such as Ridvan-`Ali ('Paradise of `Ali'), Ridvaniyyih (a girl's name), and
- \* Ridvani (a surname).

The most usual modern Bahá'í usage of Ridvan is for the twelve-day festival commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's open announcement of his claim to prophethood and His departure from Baghdad in 1863. This holiday is observed from sunset 20 April through sunset 2 May. The first, ninth and twelfth days of Ridvan are major Bahá'í holy days on which work is suspended.\* Bahá'í elections are usually held during Ridvan. The name derives from the Najibiyyih Garden in Baghdad where Bahá'u'lláh stayed during this period and to which He gave the name Ridvan.

### Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdad

Following Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Iraq in the spring of 1853, He had gradually established warm relations with the ordinary people of Baghdad as well as with notables of all sorts: Ottoman officials, clergy and Persian pilgrims and exiles. He had also become the generally recognized leader of the Babi community, although His reclusive brother Mirza Yahya was still accepted as the appointed successor of the Bab. Baghdad -- close to the Iranian border, adjacent to several Shi`i shrine cities and home to many Iranian political exiles -- was a hotbed of political intrigue; and the Iranian authorities feared that Bahá'u'lláh would use His growing prestige to threaten the government. The Persian ambassador in Istanbul, Mirza Husayn Khan Mushiru'd-Dawlih, therefore demanded that Bahá'u'lláh be removed from Baghdad. Eventually, `Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier, and Fu'ad Pasha, the Foreign Minister, yielded, and Bahá'u'lláh was summoned to Istanbul. Bahá'u'lláh was, however, a person of consequence and had by this time become an

Ottoman subject, so the summons was issued in the form of a polite invitation.

Namiq Pasha, the governor of Iraq and sympathetic to Bahá'u'lláh, was reluctant to deliver the summons. Finally he sent a courteous message asking Bahá'u'lláh to call on him at the governorate. The message reached Bahá'u'lláh on the fifth day after Naw-Ruz, 26 March 1863, at the Mazra`iy-i-Vashshash, an open area outside the city where Bahá'u'lláh and His followers had camped to observe the new year. The message arrived shortly after Bahá'u'lláh had completed the revelation of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, `whose gloomy prognostications had aroused the grave apprehensions of His Companions'.<sup>[1]</sup> Bahá'u'lláh arranged to meet the governor in the mosque across the street from the governorate. He ordered the tents struck and the party returned to the city amidst furious rumours. Bahá'u'lláh met the next day with the deputy governor and agreed to go to Istanbul with His family and a number of attendants. At the urging of the authorities He accepted the money provided by the government for the journey and immediately distributed it to the poor.

The next few weeks were very busy. Bahá'u'lláh received innumerable visitors, wrote Tablets to each of the friends who would be left behind and made the practical preparations necessary for the journey. Eventually, Bahá'u'lláh decided to move to the Najibiyyih Garden across the river and receive visitors there, thus clearing the house of visitors and allowing the family to pack. Bahá'u'lláh left His house in Baghdad for the last time on the afternoon of 22 April 1863 and walked, `admist weeping and lamentation',<sup>2</sup> through crowds of friends, acquaintances and the merely curious down to the river where He took a small boat across to the garden. He was accompanied by His sons, His secretary Mirza Aqa Jan and perhaps others. He reached the garden just at the time for afternoon prayers. There for the next eleven days He received farewell visits from His friends, including the governor, who crossed the river by a floating bridge. The river rose soon after His arrival, so it was not until the ninth day, 30 April, that His family was able to join Him. Mirza Asadu'llah Kashani raised a tent for Bahá'u'lláh in the open space of the garden by the side of the river upstream from the Najibiyyih Palace. A small village of tents was created with Bahá'u'lláh's alone in the centre.

The twelfth day was appointed for departure. The garden was filled with people coming for final farewells. It was late afternoon before the party got underway. Bahá'u'lláh mounted a fine roan stallion named Sa`udi (He also had two others, named Sa`id and Farangi), and the party left the garden amidst displays of affection and grief. The party travelled as far as Firayjat, three miles up the Tigris. There they stayed in a borrowed garden for a week while Bahá'u'lláh's brother Mirza Musa completed their affairs in Baghdad and packed the remaining goods. Visitors still came daily. The party finally set out on 9 May for the three-month journey to Istanbul.

### The significance of Ridvan

Ridvan is the anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His prophetic mission to His followers. This details of this declaration remain mysterious. Shoghi Effendi comments that `The words Bahá'u'lláh actually uttered on that occasion, the manner of His Declaration, the reaction it produced, its impact on Mirza Yahya, the identity of those who were privileged to hear Him, are shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate.'<sup>[3]</sup> It is clear, however, that the symbolic significance of Ridvan is richer than the simple fact of Bahá'u'lláh's open announcement of His prophetic claim.

### The announcement

While the exact nature and details `of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration are unknown, Abdu'l-Bahá states

that on the afternoon He arrived at the garden Bahá'u'lláh disclosed His claim to be Him Whom God shall make manifest. Bahá'u'lláh's daughter Bahiyyih Khanum is also reported to have said that on that day Bahá'u'lláh privately stated His claim to prophethood to `Abdu'l-Bahá and four other followers. According to this account `he enjoined upon them secrecy as to this communication, as the time had not come for a public declaration; but that there were reasons which caused him to deem it necessary to make it at that time to a few whom he could trust'.[4] Bahá'u'lláh clearly did not make a general public announcement of His prophetic claim at the Najibiyyih Garden: that did not happen until after His arrival in Edirne.[5] Most Babis --even those in exile with Him -- seem to have been unaware of Bahá'u'lláh's claim until a year or two later -- although, of course, His Baghdad writings are full of hints about it.[6]

### The departure from the most great house

In some places Bahá'u'lláh stresses His departure from the Most Great House: `as He departed from His house, proceeding to the Spot from which He shed upon the whole of creation, the splendours of His name, the All-Merciful'.[7] Another Tablet recounts His journey from the House to the Ridvan Garden, giving supernatural significance to each stage of the journey. Another refers to His `exile (hijrah) from Iraq', thus linking Bahá'u'lláh's departure from the Most Great House to Muhammad's emigration from Mecca, the site of the most holy House of Islam, to Medina, the city where Muhammad fully exercised the prerogatives of prophethood.

### The three announcements

In a Tablet written some years later Bahá'u'lláh states that three announcements were made on the first day of Ridvan. First, Bahá'u'lláh's followers were forbidden to fight to advance or defend their faith. (Religious war, jihad, had been permitted in Islam and under certain conditions by the law of the Bab.) Second, there would not be another prophet for a full thousand years. Third, at that moment all the names of God were fully manifest in all things. These are perhaps to be regarded as an oblique announcement of His own prophethood. The first two anticipate basic features of Bahá'í law recorded in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The third announcement is echoed in many passages from Tablets related to Ridvan, for example:

For We perceive the fragrance of the Day whereon He Who is the Desire of all nations hath shed upon the kingdoms of the unseen and of the seen the splendour of the light of His most excellent names, and enveloped them with the radiance of the luminaries of His most gracious favours -- favours which none can reckon except Him, Who is the omnipotent Protector of the entire creation.[8] Thus, Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Ridvan marks a mystic transformation of the world, in which the entire creation is infused with the glory of God's names. His announcement should, therefore, be viewed less as the revealing of a secret to a few individuals than as a fundamental transformation in the relationship between God and the world.

### Completion of the first vahid of the Bahá'í calendar

Naw-Ruz 1863 marked the beginning of the nineteenth year of the calendar established by the Bab, the last year of the first vahid -- `unity' -- of nineteen years. Bahá'u'lláh's first prophetic experience had been in 1852-3 during His imprisonment in Tehran -- the `year nine' of the Babi calendar. One, nine and nineteen all have important symbolic and prophetic significance in the writings of the Bab.

### The Festival of Ridvan

On the afternoon on which Bahá'u'lláh entered the garden, He proclaimed the festival of Ridvan. All twelve days of His sojourn in the garden are regarded as part of this festival. The Kitab-i-Aqdas, revealed about ten years later, ordains Ridvan as one of the two 'Most Great Festivals', along with the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab. Bahá'u'lláh specified that the first, ninth and twelfth days were to be major holy days -- days on which work is prohibited. These mark the days of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, the arrival of His family and His departure. Several Tablets state that the festival properly begins at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the garden, that is, two hours before sunset. However, work is prohibited for the entire Bahá'í day, beginning the previous evening. Ridvan is observed everywhere according to the Bahá'í calendar. It begins on the 13th of Jalal -- 21 April if Naw-Ruz is on 21 March -- the thirty-second day of the Bahá'í year. The ninth day falls on 29 April and the twelfth on 2 May. Most Bahá'í elections are held during Ridvan, a practice that began in the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Local spiritual assemblies are elected on the first day of Ridvan each year. The national conventions at which national spiritual assemblies are elected each year are usually held sometime during the Ridvan period, as is the international convention presently held every five years to elect the Universal House of Justice. Like other Bahá'í holy days, there are few specific rules concerning the observance of Ridvan. It is usually observed with community gatherings for prayer and celebration on the three holy days.

### Tablets and writings associated with Ridvan

A number of important Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh are associated with Ridvan. These include: \* Lawh-i-Ayyub: The Tablet of Job, also known as Suriy-i-Sabr ('the Surat of Patience'), Madinat-u's-Sabr ('the City of Patience'), and Surat Ayyub. A long Tablet in Arabic written on the afternoon Bahá'u'lláh arrived at the Garden of Ridvan. It was written for Haji Muhammad-Taqiyy-i-Nayrizi, whom Bahá'u'lláh surnamed Ayyub, 'Job', a veteran of the battle of Nayriz. The Tablet praises Vahid, the Babi leader at Nayriz, and the believers of Nayriz. \* Tablet of Ridvan, beginning 'Huva 'l-Mustavi 'ala hadha 'l-'arshi'l-munir' 'He is seated upon this luminous throne'. An Arabic Tablet speaking joyfully of the lifting of the veils that had concealed God's beauty and the manifestation of all His names in created things and appealing to the people to answer the call of their Lord. After each verse is a refrain of the form, 'Glad tidings! This is the Festival of God, manifest from the horizon of transcendent bounty'. \* Hur-i-'Ujab: 'The Wondrous Maiden'. An allegorical Tablet in Arabic rhymed prose celebrating the unveiling of Bahá'u'lláh's glory. In this allegory the Maid of Heaven comes forth and unveils herself. Her unveiled beauty inflames creation. In joy she passes around the wine of life, plays music and serves the food of beauty. But the arrogant spurn her, and she returns saddened to her heavenly palace, grieving that the people of the Book have rejected her and vowing not to return to them until the Day of Resurrection. \* 'The Divine Springtime is come . . .' (Qad ata Rabi'u'l-Bayan): The superscription of this Tablet says that it 'was revealed in the Ridvan for all to read during the Festival of Ridvan . . .' The Tablet takes the form of a dialogue between God and 'the Most Exalted Pen' -- i.e. Bahá'u'lláh. God chides Bahá'u'lláh for not openly proclaiming the greatness of this day. Bahá'u'lláh replies that He is silent only because the people are veiled and because He Himself is not privy to the essence of God. God answers that today only His face can be seen in creation. God excuses Bahá'u'lláh's silence and proclaims that He has made Bahá'u'lláh the trumpet of the Day of Resurrection. The Tablet explains in mystical terms the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's entry into the garden of Ridvan and commands Bahá'u'lláh to attract the hearts of men through the Word of God. The Tablet appeals to the believers to heed the call of God. Bahá'u'lláh concludes the Tablet with the statement that the Word of God had so inebriated Him that He can write no longer. \* 'When the gladness of God seized all else . . .' (Fa-lamma akhadha farahu'llah kulla ma sivahu . . .): An Arabic Tablet in which Bahá'u'lláh describes, with much mystical symbolism, His departure from the Most Great House, the grief of the people in the streets, His crossing of the Tigris and entry into the garden, and His final departure. This Tablet is a rich source for

understanding the symbolic significance of Ridvan and provides some historical information as well. Other Tablets and talks: There are other prayers, Tablets and talks of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá relating to Ridvan, usually composed at or for a particular Ridvan observance.

## Ridvan messages

As early as 1923 Shoghi Effendi sent a letter of encouragement and greeting to the American national Bahá'í convention at Ridvan. Later it was his regular practice to write a Ridvan letter to the Bahá'ís of the world summarizing the progress of the Faith in the previous year and setting out general directions for the coming year. The Universal House of Justice has continued this practice. Other Bahá'í institutions, especially national spiritual assemblies, also sometimes issue Ridvan letters. Such letters are found in the collections of the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice and in national Bahá'í journals.

Garden of Ridvan, Baghdad The Najibiyyih Garden in Baghdad, known to Bahá'ís as the Ridvan Garden, was probably named for Muhammad-Najib Pasha who had been governor of Iraq between 1842 and 1847. It was a large agricultural area situated immediately north of the walls of the city on the east bank of the Tigris about 450 metres from the Mu`azzam gate and directly across the river from the district in which Bahá'u'lláh lived. It was also on the road Bahá'u'lláh would take to Istanbul and thus was well-placed to assemble the caravan for the journey, as well as being a convenient spot to receive visitors. Early maps and photographs show the Najibiyyih as a wooded garden. Najib Pasha built a palace there and a wall around the garden. Najib Pasha dies in May 1851 and the garden was presumably in the possession of his heirs when Bahá'u'lláh used it. It was purchased by the government in 1870 and used as a guest house for Nasiru'd-Din Shah when he visited Iraq in 1870. In the twentieth century the Royal Hospital was established there and it is now the site of Medical City, a large modern teaching hospital.

## Notes

1. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 147.
2. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 149.
3. *ibid.* p. 153.
4. Reported words of Bahiyyih Khanum, recorded in Phelps, Master in `Akka, p. 39.
5. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 151, 404.
6. *ibid.* p. 152.
7. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 35.
8. *ibid.* pp. 32-3.

\* While all twelve days of Ridvan are "holy days," the 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> days of Ridvan are not declared work-free "holidays" in the *Aqdas* itself, but in the supplemental "Questions and Answers". From [reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/KA/ka-15.html](http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/KA/ka-15.html):

The Most Great Festival commenceth late in the afternoon of the thirteenth day of the second month of the year according to the Bayán. On the first, ninth and twelfth days of this Festival, work is forbidden.

In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, dated June 8, 1952, to an individual believer, in *Lights of Guidance* p. 230, it says:

"As regards various matters you raised in your letters, the reason we commemorate the 1st, 9th and 12th days of Ridvan as Holidays (Holy Days) is because one is the first day, one is the last day, and the third one is the ninth day, which of course is associated with the number 9. All 12 days could not be holidays, therefore these three were

chosen." [This footnote added by J.W., 2013, with input from Greg Billington]

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