



## NABIL-E A'ZAM ZARANDI, MOLLĀ MOḤAMMAD

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**NABIL-E A'ZAM ZARANDI, MOLLĀ MOḤAMMAD** (نابیل‌عزّام زاراندی، مولّامحمد)، Persian *Bahai* poet, teacher, and chronicler of *Babi* history (b. Zarand, 18 Šafar 1247/29 July 1831; d. 'Akkā, Palestine, 10 Šafar 1310/3 September 1892).

Nabil converted to Babism around 1847 and in 1858 accepted the faith of *Bahā'-Allāh*. Born into a humble family in Zarand, he received traditional education in his childhood and worked as a shepherd in his youth, when he converted to Babism (Zarandi, p. 434). Later in his life, he studied the writings of the *Bāb* and became well versed in both Islamic and Bahai literature.

During his years as a Babi, Nabil traveled to Lorestan, *Kermanshah*, *Tehran*, and Khorasan; he met with the Babis and Babi leaders in those provinces to foster the Babi ideology and inspire the believers to arise, consolidate, and expand the new Babi communities. He also transcribed and distributed Babi literature among the rank and file of the society to promote the Babi faith. He was jailed in Sāva for four months because of his pro-Babi activities. In September 1854, he set out for Baghdad and *Karbala*, where he stayed until October 1856. During late 1856 to July 1858, he traveled to *Hamadan*, his hometown Zarand, and many major Babi communities in the capital province and returned to Baghdad on 19 July 1858 (Rafati, pp. 30-31).



Nabil was one of the Babi leaders who claimed to be the promised messianic figure according to the Bāb's prophecies, but he withdrew his claim when he recognized Bahā'-Allāh's status as the fulfillment of the Bāb's predictions and the leader of the Babis (Taherzadeh, p. 202). Nabil became one of Bahā'-Allāh's earliest followers, in 1858 in Baghdad.

Nabil's life as a Bahai is summed up in his extensive travels throughout Iran, Iraq, Turkey, the Caucasus, Egypt, and Palestine. In his early travels as a Bahai, he met with the Babi communities to invite them to the Bahai faith; he attracted the Babi leaders to the recognition of Bahā'-Allāh as the fulfillment of the Bāb's prophecies concerning the promised messianic figure and helped reinforce the belief of the new Bahais in the teachings and principles that were being advanced by Bahā'-Allāh. Through these activities, Nabil turned into an outstanding teacher, defender, and promulgator of the Bahai faith.

While Nabil was in Khorasan in spring 1866, at his suggestion, the greeting *Allāho abhā* (God is the most glorious) was adopted by the followers of Bahā'-Allāh, replacing the old salutation of *Allāho akbar* (God is the greatest), which was common among the Babis (Shoghi Effendi, p. 176). This was a significant action that gave group identity to the Bahais and was a sign of their independence from the Babis and the *Azalis*, a Bābi faction that considered Mirzā Yaḥyā Şobḥ-e Azal (d. 1912) as the legitimate successor to the Bāb.

Nabil was the first Bahai to perform pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to the house of the Bāb in *Shiraz* in fall 1866, in accordance with the rites prescribed in the *Surat al-ḥajj* revealed by Bahā'-Allāh. He also went to Baghdad and performed the pilgrimage to the House of Bahā'-Allāh in spring 1867, according to another *sura* written by Bahā'-Allāh for that purpose (Rafati, p. 36). Nabil's pilgrimage to those two houses marked the inception of pilgrimage laws ordained by Bahā'-Allāh later in his *Ketāb-e aqdas* (Shoghi Effendi, pp. 176-77).

Another historic mission undertaken by Nabil under Bahā'-Allāh's instruction was his travel to Egypt to appeal to the officials for the release of several Bahais who had been imprisoned in Cairo at the instigation of their enemies (Shoghi Effendi, p. 178). Nabil's mission resulted in his own imprisonment for two months in Cairo in spring 1868 and then in the Alexandria jail for a few more months. After being released, Nabil traveled to Cyprus and Beirut, and then he joined Bahā'-Allāh's exiled community in Acre (Akkā) in late October 1869. He spent much of the last two decades of his life in Acre and its surrounding areas.



After the passing of Bahā'-Allāh in 1892, Nabil was chosen by 'Abd-al-Bahā' to prepare a text for recitation in his tomb (Shoghi Effendi, p. 222). Nabil selected four passages from Bahā'-Allāh's own works and composed the text, which is known as the *Ziārat-nāma* ('*Andalib* 18/71, summer 1999, pp. 19-20). The impact of the passing of Bahā'-Allāh on Nabil was so great and inconsolable that he drowned himself in the sea at Acre circa 10 Şafar 1310/3 September 1892. He is buried in the Acre cemetery.

Nabil was the recipient of a number of Bahā'-Allāh's best-known works, including *Surat al-damm* (1866), *Surat al-ḥajj*, for the house of the Bāb in Shiraz (1866), and *Surat al-ḥajj*, for the house of Bahā'-Allāh in Baghdad (1867).

When Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957) designated nineteen prominent early Bahais as the "Apostles [Ḥawāriyun] of Bahā'-Allāh," Nabil was one of them (*The Bahá'í World* III, pp. 80-81). The title signifies the recognition of distinguished services that those nineteen loyal and devoted Persian Bahais have rendered to their faith.

Nabil's works are in poetry and prose. He was a gifted, prolific poet, who devoted most of his poetry to the historical events in the Babi and Bahai faiths. His most famous poem in couplet form (*matnawi*) about the history of the Bahai faith was published as *Matnawi-e Nabil Zarandi* in Cairo in 1924 in 65 pages and reprinted in Langenhain in 1995. In this *matnawi* he describes major historical events from the early days of the Babi movement to the year 1869. His second *matnawi*, in 666 verses, deals with Bahā'-Allāh's banishment from Edirne to Acre. Other historical poetry of Nabil consists of his *matnawi* titled "Matnawi-e weşāl wa hejr" in 175 verses (pub. in Rafati, 2014, Chap. 6; *Ḍokā'i*, p. 416) and his *matnawi* on the life of Āqā Moḥammad Nabil Akbar Qā'eni in 303 verses (*Kuṣṣahā-i az karman-e adab wa honar* 13, pp. 108-16). In addition to those *matnawis*, Nabil left behind a great collection of poetry in different forms, only a fraction of which has been published.

Nabil's works in prose include a treatise on the Babi-Bahai [calendar](#), a treatise on Bahai inheritance laws (Fāẓel Māzandarāni, IV pp. 1, 214), and his account on the event of the passing of Bahā'-Allāh (Nabil Zarandi, *Matnawi-e Nabil Zarandi*, Langenhain, 1995, pp. 67-108). But Nabil's most celebrated work is *Maṭāle' al-anwār*, an extensive historical narrative of the Babi faith, written in Acre in 1888-90, which was edited and translated into English by Shoghi Effendi as *The Dawn-Breakers*. The work was first published in the United States in 1932.



*Maṭāle' al-anwār*, the most authentic and the main primary source on the early history of the Babi movement in Iran, is regarded by the Bahais as the definitive account of the Bāb's dispensation. The work has been translated into many languages, and it has played a major role in familiarizing the Bahais around the world with the historical background of their faith and helping them understand its link to the socio-religious climate of the Persian society in the early days of its development. The original Persian manuscript of *Maṭāle' al-anwār*, preserved at the International Bahai Archives in Haifa, comprises 1,014 pages of 22-24 lines.

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