

THE TEST OF GOLD¹

by Sherveen Lotfi

Hájí Muhammad-Báqir-i-Qazvíní already had the spiritual wealth that comes with being a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. But he also wished to have money and fame – things he did not have.

So, he traveled to Baghdád to ask Bahá'u'lláh to grant his wish.

Bahá'u'lláh instructed Hájí Muhammad to become a cotton merchant. But he also warned him not to allow riches to become a barrier between him and God.

To protect us, Bahá'u'lláh has given us the same warning: *"... Rejoice not in the things ye possess; tonight they are yours, tomorrow others will possess them. ... Happy the days that have been consecrated to the remembrance of God ... Neither the pomp of the mighty, nor the wealth of the rich ... will endure. All will perish, at a word from Him. He, verily, is the ... All-Compelling ..."* ²

Though Hájí Muhammad quickly obeyed Bahá'u'lláh's first counsel, he soon forgot the second. The cotton trade made him rich, but he became proud. He forgot that it was Bahá'u'lláh Who guided him to wealth. He thought his success came through his own doing only.

One day, as Hájí Muhammad went about his carefree life, he received some sudden and shocking news. His younger brother, who lived in Írán, was arrested and cast into prison because he followed Bahá'u'lláh. Hájí Muhammad loved his younger brother more than anything else. He would do anything to save him from the harm that would surely come to him in prison. So, in great haste, he left Constantinople for Írán. In his quest to free his brother, Hájí Muhammad would face two tests ...

When he arrived, the prison guards demanded a large sum of money before they released his brother. Hájí Muhammad gave them the money and the guards released his brother. The life of one he loved so much was certainly worth more than the money. His brotherly love had won over his desire for wealth. He had passed the easier of the two tests.

To his surprise, the guards then threatened to put Hájí Muhammad in jail for being a follower of Bahá'u'lláh also! He tried to give them money to spare him of their sentence but they refused. They would spare him only if he denied being a Bahá'í. This time he could not pay his way out with money. This time he would have to pay his way out with his belief in Bahá'u'lláh.

Hájí Muhammad stood facing the second, and more difficult test on his quest. He felt he had no choice but to deny his faith to win his own freedom. How else could he have the freedom to return to his cotton trade in Constantinople? How else could he have the freedom to return to his riches?

So, Hájí Muhammad gave up his faith and hastened back to Constantinople. He did not realize that he had failed the greater of the two tests - surely Bahá'u'lláh would never know what he had done. But Bahá'u'lláh had known all along. And Bahá'u'lláh had told the believers that this was only the beginning of Hájí Muhammad's tests.

Soon many other difficulties fell upon Hájí Muhammad, and he lost his fortune. He had become wealthy by buying cotton at low prices in one place and selling it at higher prices in another. When the price of cotton suddenly fell, he could no longer make any money. The people that had lent him money for his business wanted their money back. He did not know how he could ever repay them. He did the only thing he thought was left for him to do. He wrote a letter to Bahá'u'lláh and asked for His advice ...

Hájí Muhammad realized that he had been forgetful of Bahá'u'lláh's warnings and asked for His forgiveness. Bahá'u'lláh, again revealed a beautiful Tablet for Hájí Muhammad and assured him that he would soon become wealthy again.

¹ adapted from Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 2, pp. 276-279*

² Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pg. 33

Within a short time, the price of cotton rose up higher than ever. This time Hájí Muhammad's had ten times more wealth than ever. This time Hájí Muhammad became one of the most famous of the merchants of Constantinople. And, this time, just like last time, he let his fortune cloud his belief in Bahá'u'lláh.

He soon cut off his relationship with Bahá'u'lláh. When Bahá'u'lláh asked one of the Bahá'ís to go and visit him, he found Hájí Muhammad heedless of Bahá'u'lláh's warnings. Again, Hájí Muhammad's fame had made him extremely selfish and proud. To show that he had no need for Bahá'u'lláh, he showed his visitor a box of money and told him, "My god is in this box!" Hájí Muhammad had forgotten Bahá'u'lláh's guidance: *"O Son of My Handmaid! Be not troubled in poverty nor confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty."*³

When Bahá'u'lláh heard of Hájí Muhammad's condition, He became very sad. He began to pace up and down his room restlessly. When He finally stopped, He held out His open palm, and said 'With this hand We conferred upon him riches.' He then clenched his palm, and quickly pulled his arm back and said, 'Now with the same hand We take it back from him.'

Again, Hájí Muhammad-Báqir lost all his money and possessions.

Again, Hájí Muhammad-Báqir wrote to Bahá'u'lláh and asked for forgiveness.

And, again, with love and forgiveness, Bahá'u'lláh took Hájí Muhammad back under His powerful and warm wings. But, this time Bahá'u'lláh revealed a Tablet for Hájí Muhammad that shared the wisdom behind His tests. Bahá'u'lláh answered Hájí Muhammad by teaching him the reason God had repeatedly taken away his wealth. Through these tests Hájí Muhammad would learn to obey Bahá'u'lláh. And through obedience to Bahá'u'lláh, Hájí Muhammad would become steadfast in His love.

This time Bahá'u'lláh counseled Hájí Muhammad-Báqir to leave Constantinople. He told him to spend his days performing the most humble task - copying the holy Writings for others to read. After this, Hájí Muhammad-Báqir lived the remainder of his life in the utmost poverty. His faith grew stronger everyday. And as his faith grew stronger, he spent more and more of his time serving others

³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, #51 (Persian)

Bahá'u'lláh always knew that Háji Muhammad's desire for wealth would bring him pain. But He gave Háji Muhammad vast riches anyway. Why would Bahá'u'lláh allow us to suffer pain? Because, like He says in the Hidden Words, "*Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.*"⁴

Bahá'u'lláh was testing Háji Muhammad. He knew that Háji Muhammad would endure. He knew that Háji Muhammad would someday become a loyal Bahá'í. Bahá'u'lláh constantly watched over and protected him. He always showed Háji Muhammad the utmost love and compassion. Bahá'u'lláh's love and compassion are what pulled Háji Muhammad out of the fire of his tests. They helped him become stronger and more obedient.

Bahá'u'lláh constantly tests us in the same way. He tests us constantly to help us become stronger and more obedient. It is through His tests that we see the light of His love and feel the warmth of His compassion.

⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, #55 (Arabic)