

Nabíl-i-Zarandí and The Dawn-Breakers Chronicle

Nabíl [whose given name at birth was Muhammad] was born in the village of Zarand in Iran in 1831, which is why he was commonly known as Muhammad-i-Zarandí ﴿﴾ [meaning Muhammad from Zarand]. He describes his own background, how he learnt about the Báb and became a Bábí in *The Dawn-Breakers*.¹ Briefly, Nabíl was a shepherd and in his own words “was given in my early days a most rudimentary education”. In 1847, Nabíl was visiting a neighboring village when he overheard two men talking in the village about the Báb and his claims, which lit the seeker’s flame in his heart. Shortly after that, when he was back in his own village of Zarand, he chanced to meet a Bábí and through him, met Siyyid Ismá’íl-i-Zavári’í ﴿﴾, who was later known by the title of Dhabíh ﴿﴾.² Through Dhabíh, Nabíl was led to recognise the new Revelation. This was in 1848. Nabíl became an active Bábí and taught other members of his family including his brother, sister and mother. In time he met Bahá’u’lláh and eventually recognised Him as the One promised by the Báb.



Muhammad-i-Zarandí, surnamed Nabíl-i-A'zam. Archival photo.³

¹ Nabíl records in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 8, p168 and Chapter 21, p434-445 aspects of his own life and how he became a Bábí.

² Dhabíh [means sacrifice]. For brief overview of his life see [Portrait: Siyyid Ismá’íl-i-Zavári’í](#).

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Preface

Nabíl followed Bahá'u'lláh at various points in Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment and exile from city to city, from Baghdád all the way to 'Akká. From 'Akká, Nabíl was sent by Bahá'u'lláh on several missions to various parts of Iran to teach the people about the new Revelation. While on these trips, Nabíl gathered a lot of historical information from others about the events that transpired related to the birth of the Bábí and Bahá'í revelations. In 1888, Nabíl began to chronicle these events.⁴ He had the assistance of Mírzá Músá, the brother of Bahá'u'lláh, who had also been with Bahá'u'lláh throughout His exile and provided much historical information. As Nabíl was writing the manuscript, as noted by Shoghí Effendí in the introduction to the *Dawn-Breakers*: "parts of the manuscript were reviewed and approved, some by Bahá'u'lláh, and others by 'Abdu'l-Bahá".⁵ Nabíl himself notes this in the *Dawn-Breakers*: "At this stage of my narrative I was privileged to submit to Bahá'u'lláh such sections of my work as I had already revised and completed."⁶ Nabíl then describes how Bahá'u'lláh summoned Nabíl for an audience. The date given by Nabíl for that audience is 11 December 1888.⁷

Nabíl's original chronicle has not been published. It is at the Bahá'í World Center and available to researchers. The original chronicle is in Fársí [Persian] and covers the history of the life of the Báb and that of Bahá'u'lláh and goes all the way to 1892, that is the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghí Effendí, the Guardian, made an English translation and edited version of the first half of the chronicle, that is the parts up to January 1853, when Bahá'u'lláh is exiled from Írán. Shoghí Effendí named this English edited version "*The Dawn-Breakers - Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*". It was first published in 1932.⁸

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Introduction page xxxvii

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Introduction page xxxvii

⁶ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 21, p459

⁷ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 21, p459 and footnote 1

The website [Resources for the Study of Nabíl's Narrative](#), notes that: ' Unfortunately, Nabíl's final clean manuscript was among those "most precious documents" within the two satchels of Bahá'u'lláh which were tragically stolen by the Covenant Breakers. "[Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí] had, while Bahá'u'lláh's body was still awaiting interment, carried off, by a ruse, the two satchels containing his Father's most precious documents, entrusted by Him, prior to His ascension, to 'Abdu'l-Bahá." [God Passes By, #15.12] '

⁸ The website [Resources for the Study of Nabíl's Narrative](#), notes that: "Interestingly, it is often assumed that Shoghi Effendi worked on the Dawn-Breakers in Persian and translated the results to English, but this is not the case. In fact, he translated and edited directly into English. It was this English edition which was later abridged and translated to Arabic -- and the Arabic abridgment was translated by Ishráq Khávarí into the Persian book known as *Taríkh-i-Nabíl* (The History of Nabíl)."

As to his name, although his given name was Muhammad, Bahá'u'lláh called him by the name Nabíl in tablets addressed to him, and so he started being known as Nabíl-i-Zarandí ﴿﴾ [meaning Nabíl from Zarand]. The word Nabíl means noble or excellent and it has the same Abjad⁹ numerical value as the word Muhammad. Bahá'u'lláh also addressed him as Nabíl-i-A'zam ﴿﴾ [means 'the most great Nabíl']. Nabíl was also a great poet and composed many poems in praise of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghí Effendí listed him as one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh,¹⁰ and in *God Passes By* described him in these words:

Mullá Muḥammad-i-Zarandí ﴿﴾, surnamed Nabíl-i-A'zam, who may well rank as His Poet-Laureate, His chronicler and His indefatigable disciple.¹¹

The Dawn-Breakers is a story of lovers of the Light. It begins with Shoghí Effendí's dedication of the book to the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahíyyih Khánum ﴿﴾, with these words:

*To
The Greatest Holy Leaf
The Last Survivor of a Glorious and Heroic Age
I Dedicate This Work
in Token of a
Great Debt of Gratitude and Love*

Nabíl himself was one of those moth-like lovers of the Light. When Bahá'u'lláh passed away in 1892, Nabíl was overcome by grief. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tried to soothe him and even asked him to put together a few passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh that could be read at Bahá'u'lláh's Grave. Nabíl did that, and the result was the Tablet of Visitation that the Bahá'ís now read at the Shrines of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh, and when commemorating anniversaries associated with Them. However, Nabíl could not bear the loss of his True Beloved, so much so that one day he just walked into the sea by the city of 'Akká. His body was washed ashore near the city of 'Akká.¹²

⁹ The semitic languages have an alphanumeric system, that is each alphabet is also given a numerical value. Arabic uses the Abjad system. It was not unusual in the past, in literary circles, to sometimes interchange words that had the same numerical value or to represent a word by a number. The word Nabíl has the same Abjad numerical value as the word Muhammad. For more information on the Abjad system, see these sources: F. Lewis 1999 [Overview of the Abjad Numerological System](#) and Wikipedia [Abjad Numerals](#).

¹⁰ *Bahá'í World* vol 3, p80-81

¹¹ *God Passes By* Chapter 8, p130

¹² *Dawn-Breakers* Introduction page xxxvii

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Resources for Study of the Dawn-Breakers

- [The Dawn-Breakers: Resources for the Study of Nabíl's Narrative](#) is a resource site for additional information.
- [Ocean Library: The Dawn-Breakers](#) for online text and audio versions.
- [Bahá'í Works: The Dawn-Breakers](#) for an online text version.
- [Bahá'í Library Online: The Dawn-Breakers](#) for an online text version.
- [Dawn-Breakers: A Study Guide and Outline](#) for a study guide.

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Note on the importance of *The Dawn-Breakers*

[from Ruhi Book 7 *Walking Together on a Path of Service*, 2024, p142]:

The Guardian refers to this work as an “essential adjunct” to teaching programs and an “unchallengeable textbook” in summer schools. Further, he calls it a “source of inspiration in all literary and artistic pursuits,” an “invaluable companion in times of leisure,” an “indispensable preliminary to future pilgrimage to Bahá’u’lláh’s native land,” and an “unfailing instrument to allay distress and resist attacks of a critical, disillusioned humanity.” On the importance of that book, which was left for us by the great historian Nabíl, Shoghi Effendi writes:

Utilize, as extensively as you possibly can, the wealth of material which Nabíl’s stirring and precious narrative contains, and let it be your chief instrument wherewith you can feed the flame of enthusiasm that glows in every Bahá’í heart and upon which the success of your magnificent, your incessant efforts must ultimately depend.¹³

In a letter written on his behalf, we read:

Nabíl’s narrative is not merely a narrative; it is a book of meditation. It does not only teach. It actually inspires and incites to action. It quickens and stimulates our dormant energies and makes us soar on a higher plane. It is

¹³ Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi appended to an unpublished letter dated 17 November 1932 written on his behalf to an individual believer.

thus an invaluable help to the historian as well as to every teacher and expounder of the Cause.¹⁴

[For additional quotes on importance of the *Dawn-Breakers* see [Bahai9-Dawn-Breakers-Need to study](#)].

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¹⁴ From an unpublished letter dated 8 June 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.