

# HANDMAIDENS OF THE LORD

On each side of the river stood the tree of life...  
...And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.  
*The Revelation to St. John, 22:2*

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## JUDAISM - Hagar

1. Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Look the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her." And Abram heeded Sarai's request....

An angel of the Lord found (Hagar) by a spring of water in the wilderness, ...and said, "I will greatly increase your offspring, and they shall be too many to count."

The angel of the Lord said to her further, "Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son. You shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has paid heed to your suffering."

*Torah, Genesis 16.1-12*

## JUDAISM - Sarah

2. And God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her." Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!"

God said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come. As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation. But My covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."

*Torah, Genesis 17.15-21*

## JUDAISM - Miriam

3. A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it

with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew child." Then his sister said to the Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes."

So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."

*Torah, Exodus 2.1-10*

## CHRISTIANITY – Mary Magdalene

4. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.... but Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing Him to be the

gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew – Rabbi! (which means teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to Me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that He had said these things to her.

*John 20.1-18*

### ISLAM – Fátimih

5. O heedless one! Rely not on thy glory, and thy power. Thou art even as the last trace of sunlight upon the mountain-top. Soon will it fade away as decreed by God, the All-Possessing, the Most High. Thy glory and the glory of such as are like thee have been taken away, and this verily is what hath been ordained by the One with Whom is the Mother Tablet. Where is he to be found who contended with God, and whither is gone he that gainsaid His signs, and turned aside from His sovereignty? Where are they who have slain His chosen ones and spilt the blood of His holy ones? Reflect, that haply thou mayest perceive the breaths of thine acts, O foolish doubter! Because of you the Apostle (Muḥammad) lamented, and the Chaste One (Fátimih) cried out, and the countries were laid waste, and darkness fell upon all regions.

*Bahá'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*

6. The Shí'ihis believed in fourteen immaculate Souls and four Gates. The fourteen immaculate Souls are Muḥammad, Fátimih, and the twelve Imáms. The four Gates are the four individuals who succeeded one another as the leaders of the Shí'ihis after the twelfth Imám.

*Twelve Table Talks Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká*

### BAHÁ'Í FAITH – Tahirih

7. In Badasht, there was a great open field. Through its center a stream flowed, and to its right, left, and rear there were three gardens, the envy of Paradise. One of those gardens was assigned to Quddús, but this was kept a secret. Another was set apart for Táhirih, and in a third was raised the pavilion of Bahá'u'lláh. On the field amidst the three gardens, the believers

pitched their tents. Evenings, Bahá'u'lláh, Quddús and Táhirih would come together. In those days the fact that the Báb was the Qá'im had not yet been proclaimed; it was the Blessed Beauty, with Quddús, Who arranged for the proclamation of a universal Advent and the abrogation and repudiation of the ancient laws.

Then one day, and there was a wisdom in it, Bahá'u'lláh fell ill; that is, the indisposition was to serve a vital purpose. On a sudden, in the sight of all, Quddús came out of his garden, and entered the pavilion of Bahá'u'lláh. But Táhirih sent him a message, to say that their Host being ill, Quddús should visit her garden instead. His answer was: “This garden is preferable. Come, then, to this one.”

Táhirih, with her face unveiled, stepped from her garden, advancing to the pavilion of Bahá'u'lláh; and as she came, she shouted aloud these words: “The Trumpet is sounding! The great Trump is blown! The universal Advent is now proclaimed!” The believers gathered in that tent were panic struck, and each one asked himself, “How can the Law be abrogated? How is it that this woman stands here without her veil?”

“Read the Súrih of the Inevitable,” said Bahá'u'lláh; and the reader began: “When the Day that must come shall have come suddenly... Day that shall abase! Day that shall exalt!...” and thus was the new Dispensation announced and the great Resurrection made manifest.

*'Abdul-Bahá, Memorials of the Faithful, p. 200-201*

### BAHÁ'Í FAITH - The Greatest Holy Leaf

8. The outbreak of the Great War gave her yet another opportunity to reveal the true worth of her character and to release the latent energies of her heart. The residence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa was besieged, all throughout that dreary conflict, by a concourse of famished men, women and children whom the maladministration, the cruelty and neglect of the officials of the Ottoman Government had driven to seek an alleviation to their woes. From the hand of the Greatest Holy Leaf, and out of the abundance of her heart, these hapless victims of a contemptible tyranny, received day after day unforgettable evidences of a love they had learned to envy and admire. Her words of cheer and comfort, the food, the money, the clothing she freely dispensed, the remedies which, by a process of her own, she herself

prepared and diligently applied—all these had their share in comforting the disconsolate, in restoring sight to the blind, in sheltering the orphan, in healing the sick, and in succoring the homeless and the wanderer. She had reached, amidst the darkness of the war days, the high water-mark of her spiritual attainments. Few, if any, among the unnumbered benefactors of society whose privilege has been to allay, in various measures, the hardships and sufferings entailed by that Fierce Conflict, gave as freely and as disinterestedly as she did; few exercised that undefinable influence upon the beneficiaries of their gifts.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 192

**9.** Grant, O Thou my God, the Compassionate, that that pure and blessed Leaf may be comforted by Thy sweet savours of holiness and sustained by the reviving Breeze of Thy loving care and mercy. Reinforce her spirit with the signs of Thy Kingdom, and gladden her soul with the testimonies of Thy everlasting dominion. Comfort, O my God, her sorrowful heart with the remembrance of Thy face, initiate her into Thy hidden mysteries, and inspire her with the revealed splendours of Thy heavenly light. Manifold are her sorrows, and infinitely grievous her distress. Bestow continually upon her the favour of Thy sustaining grace and, with every fleeting breath, grant her the blessing of Thy bounty. Her hopes and expectations are centered in Thee; open Thou to her face the portals of Thy tender mercies and lead her into the ways of Thy wondrous benevolence. Thou are the Generous, the All-Loving, the Sustainer, the All-Bountiful...

Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahíyyih Khánum*, pp. 8-9

**10.** O MY handmaiden and My leaf! Rejoice with great joy inasmuch as thy call hath ascended unto the Divine Lote-Tree and is answered from the all-glorious Horizon. Verily, no God is there but Me, the Wronged One, the Exile.

Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 251

**11.** O MY handmaiden, O My leaf! Render thou thanks unto the Best-Beloved of the world for having attained this boundless grace at a time when the world's learned and most distinguished men have remained deprived thereof. We have designated thee 'a leaf' that thou mayest, like unto leaves, be stirred by the

gentle wind of the Will of God -- exalted be His glory -- even as the leaves of the trees are stirred by onrushing winds. Yield thou thanks unto thy Lord by virtue of this brilliant utterance. Wert thou to perceive the sweetness of the title 'O My handmaiden' thou wouldst find thyself detached from all mankind, devoutly engaged day and night in communion with Him Who is the sole Desire of the world.

Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 254

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## Personal Prayers

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## Reflections on the Texts

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## Discussion

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What do you remember about being the child of your mother:

- Something funny?
- Something wise?
- Something tasty?