**Four Stories of Ayáz**

from *Sweet and Enchanting Stories*, ed. by Aziz Rohani, p33

Story 34

Once ‘Abdu'l-Bahá related the following story which is good for every Bahá’í to know:

 Ayáz was a young shepherd who, from childhood, had a burning desire to see the king, Sultán Mahmúd. He was like a lover desirous to see his beloved. One day he heard that the king would be passing by. He hastened to the route where the king would be passing and waited for a glimpse.

 As luck would have it, when the king reached the spot where Ayáz was waiting, he noticed the look of adulation, stopped and asked the young shepherd after his health. With sincerity, Ayáz said that the fire of wanting to see his king was burning in his breast. The king was pleased seeing Ayáz’s ardour, so he took Ayáz to his palace and entrusted him with a position close the king.

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 The courtiers and ministers began feeling jealous and were determined to belittle him. One day, the king had a precious jewel in his hand and bade his ministers and generals to shatter it to pieces. None of them stepped forward to carry out what the king wished, as they regarded the jewel as far too precious. The king then asked Ayáz who immediately shattered the jewel as bidden and commented to the king that the others had broke his bidding, but he, Ayáz, had broken the jewel as he regarded the king’s command more precious.

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 The king was of the habit that sometimes he would leave the city for an outing, accompanied by his ministers and generals. On the way back, he would throw a sack of gold and silver coins in the air and watch everyone rushing to pick them up. The king enjoyed this child ish reaction of his courtiers and watching their clamour. On one occasion, Ayáz was also present, but he did not move. The courtiers used this as a pretext to neutralize Ayáz’s popularity with the king. They presented Ayáz’s lack of engagement as a token of pride and vainglory.

 The king asked Ayáz about his lack of interest in gold. Ayáz responded, “I would rather have my gaze upon the king which is worth more to me than all the gold.”

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 Most Friday evenings Ayáz would leave the palace and go to the city ruins, where he would unlock the door to a dilapidated hut, spend some time there, and then return. The courtiers tried to make a case of this habit, again in an attempt to discredit Ayáz. They presented the story that Ayáz had gathered together a fortune and hidden it in the hut and visited the hut every week to ensure its safety. They repeated this accusation so many times that the king decided to personally investigate the situation.

 So, one time when Ayáz headed for the hut, the king and his companions, stealthily followed Ayáz. After Ayáz entered the hut, the courtiers stood by the door as the king followed Ayáz into the hut. The king saw only a stick of wood in a corner on which an old cloak was hanging and found Ayáz facing it.

 Bewildered, the king asked Ayáz for an explanation. Humbly, Ayáz said, “Once a week I pay a visit to my former abode and gaze at my ragged shepherd’s cloak—which I wore before being admitted to the palace—so as not to forget that I was a poor simple shepherd and now by the grace of the king I have attained such exaltation. I wish to remain steadfast and a devotee of yours and avoid pride barring me from rendering humble services.”

 The king was mightily pleased and turning to his courtiers said, “Now you know why I have made Ayáz a confidant of mine."