**Stories about Laughter during Hardships**

**In the early days of the Faith, conditions were difficult and painful. Baha’u’llah and the Holy Family spent decades in prison. Abdu’l-Baha mentioned on many occasions that it was the joy and humor of the friends in prison that preserved their well-being. The conditions were physically and emotionally so terrible, and it was acknowledged that a counter force of happiness and humor was needed to combat feelings of despair. The believers would gather together, particularly in the evenings, and tell stories to entertain each other and on some occasions Baha’u’llah would join them.** H. M. Balyuzi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 31.

Most of those present at this luncheon party knew a little of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's life history, and, presumably, were expecting a dissertation from Him on the Bahá’í Cause. The hostess had suggested to the Master that He speak to them on the subject of Immortality. However, as the meal progressed, and no more than the usual commonplaces of polite society were mentioned, the hostess made an opening, as she thought, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak on spiritual things. His response to this was to ask if He might tell them a story, and he related one of the Oriental tales, of which He had a great store and at its conclusion all laughed heartily. The ice was broken. Others added stories of which the Master's anecdote had reminded them. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, His face beaming with happiness, told another story, and another. His laughter rang through the room. He said that the Orientals, had many such stories illustrating different phases of life. Many of them are extremely humorous. It is good to laugh. Laughter is a spiritual relaxation. When they were in prison, He said, and under the utmost deprivation and difficulties, each of them at the close of the day would relate the most ludicrous event which had happened. Sometimes it was a little difficult to find one but always they would laugh until the tears would roll down their cheeks. Happiness, He said, is never dependent upon material surroundings, otherwise how sad those years would have been. As it was they were always in the utmost state of joy and happiness. That was the nearest approach He came to any reference to Himself or to the Divine Teachings. But over that group before the gathering dispersed, hovered a hush and reverence which no learned dissertation would have caused in them. After the guests had gone, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was leaving for His hotel, He came close to His hostess and asked her, with a little wistful smile, almost, she was used to say, like a child seeking approbation, if she were pleased with Him. She was never able to speak of this conclusion to the event without deep emotion.

Howard Colby Ives, Portals to Freedom, p. 119

I myself was in prison forty years—one year alone would have been impossible to bear—nobody survived that imprisonment more than a year! But, thank God, during all those forty years I was supremely happy! Every day, on waking, it was like hearing good tidings, and every night infinite joy was mine. Spirituality was my comfort, and turning to God was my greatest joy. If this had not been so, do you think it possible that I could have lived through those forty years in prison? ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Paris Talks, #35

Bahá’ís (then known as Bábís) would try to keep their spirits up, despite being chained to the floor of what was essentially a pitch black sewer. They would recite prayers and sing and it would be a great comfort, even after Bahá’u’lláh was taken away and banished to Baghdad.

According to Gordon, they would also tell jokes. Unfortunately they didn't know very many, so they kept telling the same jokes over and over. After a while this became somewhat tedious, so they decided to simply give each joke a number. When someone would call out a number, the others would remember the joke and laugh.

One day a new fellow was brought down into the pit. The others would sing and recite prayers, but then at one point someone said, "Fourteen!" and everyone laughed hysterically. This continued day after day: Every once in a while someone would call out, "Three!" or "eleven!" or some other number and they would laugh and laugh. The new guy didn't understand any of this, but he wanted to be sociable, so after a lengthy period of silence he called out, "One hundred and seven!"

At first there was silence, but then one prisoner laughed and then another, and before long everyone was laughing so hard they could barely breathe. It took several minutes before everyone recovered their composure.

After this display, the fellow finally gives up. "A’lright," he says, "What on earth is so funny?"

The prisoner next to him smiled and said, "We have never heard that one before."

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