

NOTES FROM A FIRESIDE

ENCINO, CALIFORNIA 2005

Transcribed from a talk at a Baha'i Fireside gathering

Hello Everyone. Thanks for coming to visit with us tonight. I'm very honored. What I'm going to be doing tonight is to share with you a kind of confessional reading from these papers I hold before me, these papers which I will explain momentarily. And then I would be happy to answer any questions.

But, first, for those of you who haven't seen me around, my name is Holiday Reinhorn and I became a Baha'i on December 31, 2004. That's the date when I actually signed the card, but I have been associated with the Los Angeles Baha'i Community for about seven years now. I have attended many holy days and feasts and devotional gatherings and Ruhi classes—all with my husband, Rainn Wilson who is a second generation Baha'i. He's sitting over there.

In fact, the first time I attended a Baha'i holy day celebration, it was here in the San Fernando Valley, in the lobby of this very building and we were celebrating the birth of the Bab, a very sacred figure in Baha'i history.

So that is who I am, I guess, and another thing I should say here is that I am a fiction writer. I write short stories for a living. I studied literature and creative writing and earned a master's degree in Fiction from the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the center of our country, in the center of many large cornfields where it gets very, very cold in the winter and I have been writing for about eleven years now, professionally. My first collection of short stories, *Big Cats*, was published in 2005 by the Free Press.

After a decade or more, it's still pretty mind boggling to me that I get to stay home during the day and make things up. I'm still a little shocked each time I sit down to do it. Seems kind of ludicrous really, but it's what I do. It chose me more than I chose it and

it's not very romantic. Most days I am at home writing in the clothes I slept in which are usually the clothes I wore the day before that.

I am also a teacher of writing. I have taught writing classes at the UCLA Extension Writers' Program and I have also led workshops at theatre spaces, Universities out of the backs of station wagons and campers and out of nearly every home, where I have lived Hollywood, Silver Lake, Van Nuys. You get the picture. I have an ongoing Thursday evening writing class that's been in session almost constantly for six years. We've been on hiatus since I gave birth to my son, Walter.



So I am also newly a mother as well as a new Baha'i. Walter will come up in tonight's talk too, as well as my husband Rainn over there, who introduced me to the Baha'i Faith and my maternal Grandparents John and Alice Schaefer, who were and continue to be the most inspiring spiritual people I've ever known. They aren't in this world anymore and I miss them, especially now that I'm older and can appreciate their example, they will come up too in this reading, but that's later.

So I'm honored to be here and of course, terrified, and whenever I am terrified I tend to write lots of things down, which is what I did. I wrote some things down.

You'll notice I'm reading from my notes. And before I begin I should say that I have never done anything like this before—I have never spoken publicly about my spiritual beliefs. But what I'll be doing tonight is reading to you, more than I'll be speaking.

When I began to approach what I might share with you tonight I did what I always do when I have a blank page. I tried to write some sort of story. As I said, I'm a fiction writer so this kind of behavior made sense to me. And I gave what I was writing a title, which for tonight will be:

HOW I, HOLIDAY REINHORN, CAME TO FAITH OUT OF A SERIES OF EVENTS, OUT OF A SERIES OF SURPRISES, NOT NECESSARILY IN ANY ORDER.

That's the title. I always tell my students to title everything they write whether it's one sentence you write down or one word. Because when you give something a title, it exists. When you give something a title, it immediately becomes a work in progress. So, as I said, I sat down at my desk this morning much like the characters in my stories do, they sort of appear out of nowhere and I have to start asking them questions—like why are you here? What happened to lead you here? Where are you going?

And when I start writing a story, when I begin with a blank page, I have to pretend, in a way, that I'm God—I am the creator of the characters in my story regardless of their circumstances. I am their channel and I have to be very compassionate and try to forgive them. I have to not judge them because lots of times my creations, even with the best of intentions, are behaving very, very badly. I have to listen to my characters as they introduce themselves to me, and I have to let them discover whatever they need to discover on their own time. I have to let them react and respond to the light and the weather around them. I have to let them live their lives from moment to moment, and whether they are doing something very small or something very momentous in a given story, I have to let them make their choices of their own free will, which is always, always, very different than the allotment of time, or space or choices, I—the author, might want to allow them. I have to relinquish control. I have to become very aware of my dreams, especially the parts that don't make sense—as one of my most cherished teachers, the award-winning author, Marilynne Robinson, (who I will mention again later) once said:

“If we understood our dreams they would not be revelations.”

(That woman has such a large, well-functioning brain, it's crazy!)

But to continue on---I have to be open to being wrong and imperfect. I have to accept constant failure and disappointment. I have to live with the dissatisfaction I feel at the end of each story, because the beautiful empire I built in my mind, all the bright futures I imagined for my characters is never the same on the page. It never does turn out the way I planned. So my ego has to move aside, I have to surrender expectation.

Now, if I was the real God, this exercise would never have to happen. I would be perfect and infallible and all forgiving. But like I said, I'm a pretend God, a demigod and I have to be willing to understand that every story, if it's authentic to my heart in the least, is a story that does not "want" to be written, but that each story is a story that "needs" to be written.

I tell my students always: *write what needs to be written*. I have comedians come into my classes who start writing terribly sad stories and they say-- Hey, wait a minute, I'm supposed to be funny. I'm supposed to be making people laugh. I don't want to write something sad, it scares me, where is it coming from?

Or-- Hey, I'm supposed to be writing a screenplay and all I'm doing is jotting down these lines by some weird character.

But, I digress.

I was talking about today's question, which was:

Holiday—How did you go from being a person who was very uncomfortable about discussions of spiritual faith, a person who wasn't quite sure what to think when it came to God—to a person who just joined the Baha'i Faith?

And this led to more and more questions—thankfully, I tend to be afraid whenever I think I have the answer to anything. And the things I'm saying right now, are just my

experiences, by the way. I'm not making any declarative statements. I feel much more comfortable asking questions.

A friend of mine who was raised a Jew and now believes there is no God, and loves to talk about God or the lack of one and questions the subject of spiritual faith all the time—recently I saw her in New York and she asked me what was my feeling on God these days and I said I became a Baha'i and she was floored.

“So now you believe in God?” she asked. Is that what that means? When did that happen?” Because in the past I had just shrugged my shoulders and in having that discussion I sort of realized, maybe I had realized all along, that I always did believe in God, I just didn't know what to channel it towards. Unlike the experience I have in my writing, which is to accept fallibility, I never had that when it came to believing in God. I always felt like there was a one-way relationship with God that worked as follows:

YOU DO THESE THINGS OR ELSE.

For me, God was an angry, disappointed parent and this made me very rebellious. So I was a real teenager when it came to God. God and people who believed in God were always trying to ground me and keep me home on a Saturday night and make me guilty and tell me what to eat and who to like. I only felt holy when it came to Art.

For me, Art, the appreciating of it, the making of it, the cleaving to it, the paradoxes of it. This was God. This was the only allowance I would make. If Art exists, if we are allowed through our expression to become larger than ourselves, if we, as human poets can, if for only a moment, invoke a muse, if our Art can surpass and transcend the limitations of our opinions and judgments. If Art can unite and reach people, then there is a God. So it was a tremendous thing for me that in the Baha'i Faith, art and science are prized. In other words, argument and discovery and contradiction are welcomed.

Where art lives, God lives. Just an opinion.

And that is initially what opened me up to the Faith. The writings. The words themselves, the prayers, the poetry of struggle and beseeching and terror and healing and gratitude and praise.

The ability of the Holy writings to question, refresh and surprise.

This isn't to say that I didn't read other holy writings, because I did. I always found the Bible very beautiful and the writings of the Koran and the Bhagavad Gita and the Tibetan Book of the Dead.—but there was always so much writing about those writings that seemed to weigh it down, so much baggage about how to read it and live it and what it meant and which sect to chose or what charismatic leader to follow, that I almost couldn't access the writing itself.

We read the Book of Revelations several years ago when I was in graduate school. We read the words as literature instead of scripture and I couldn't believe how strange it was. Reading and studying the actual writing. My experience up to that point had almost all been through secondary sources.

For me, one of the key strengths of the Baha'i Faith is that the writing is the writing is the writing. There is no re-interpretation of the writings that functions in lieu of, or stands above the actual writing itself. There is no clergy in the Baha'i Faith. The writings of the Faith stand alone for each individual to understand or interpret on their own terms. In the faith, it's called "the independent seeking of truth."

There is an epigraph in *The Hidden Words* that sums it up for me. When God, the author of the universe, says to the character in his human tragedy, the character, Baha'u'llah, using Baha'u'llah as his channel, as his manifestation, he says:

"O Son of Being: Love Me that I may love thee. If though lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee."

And that was so simple and so heartbreaking for me. *Love me so that I can love you.* Let me love you. Allow me to love you. How many times have I not allowed myself to be loved in my life? How many times have I refused comfort when it is genuinely offered? And it was not the offerer of Love who was unavailable, it was me—choosing to turn my back.

So it's the first time I've ever done anything like this, to stand before others and discuss my relationship to faith and my love for Baha'u'llah. But for me, the past year has been a remarkable series of firsts. And if you really look at it—that's what life is. A series of firsts—with the strange twist that whatever happens from moment to moment is one first, after another first, after another first. The kind of nerve wracking thing though, is that every one of those firsts is also simultaneously, a last.

A first that will live and pass away never to return. A first that will hopefully be filled with as much life, as much kindness, as much faith and service as one can give it.

So a year of firsts.

After ten years of writing fiction or so, I finished a book (many writers call the first ten years an apprenticeship to the craft.) A writer I admire once said this to me when I was just starting out, and I laughed. Ten years later, I'm still laughing, but in a different way.

My most valued writing teacher, Marilynne Robinson, the one with the giant brain (who just won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *Gilead*, her first novel in twenty five years, and it's really a great book---I would recommend it,) she says that:

“Most fiction is about a character who comes, over the course of the story, to understand his false relation to the truth.”

I feel that in my life, my relationship to faith was very much like that. For most of my life I believed that the truth of faith was defined and should be defined, if it was working properly, by the actions of people. And I saw people who declared themselves faithful do lots of horrible and questionable things in the name of faith. Children led off into crusades, skyscrapers exploding, people being martyred and murdered.

In other words, I looked to people to set the examples and the parameters of what faith was. I would think—you know—if there's a faith out there that works, the people within it will exemplify it. Fully. Totally. Without question.

And of course, I met wonderful, lovely spiritual people along the way, but people always disappointed me. Mostly having to do with how much in the end, I disappointed myself.

My father's side of the family was Jewish so I explored that for a while, but then the Rabbi at the synagogue embezzled all the community's money and two factions of the congregation started warring over who the next rabbi would be or the guru at my Zen Center would sleep with his students and the two he was sleeping with would have a fist fight after 5:30 am Zazen or the television evangelist I used to watch on Sundays out of a sort of horrible fascination would ride a white donkey through his Christian theme park one day and then get arrested for tax evasion the next, and I would say---you see---people are just not capable of faith. People are not capable of acting responsibly and well in the name of faith. People are not capable of faith. How can it possibly be helping us?

I did always love those Quaker meetings though, because lots of times they were quiet and blessedly so. And if all else failed there was always yoga three or four times a year. The union of opposing opposites --plus good for your circulation. You couldn't go wrong there.

Then many, many years went by. Lots of water under the bridge. And I began attending a Ruhi course.

If you don't know what this is—we can discuss it afterwards, but in a nutshell, it is a group that meets weekly to study the Baha'i writings in further depth---so after thirteen years of marriage, my husband, that guy over there I mentioned, who is a very persuasive person when he wants to be, talked me into attending this Ruhi Course and I went there kicking and screaming. I was prepared to stay for one session I told him. ONE TIME.

Then I planned to beg off, and I sat there with my arms crossed and our group facilitator did this amazing thing. He read this quote by Baha'u'llah.

“If any differences arise among you, Behold me standing before your face and overlook the faults of another for my name's sake and as a token of your love for my manifest and resplendent Cause.”

And the Baha'i Faith as I mentioned in the title—surprised me—refreshing me, once again.

Here was one of those great events. And I realized at that moment, Faith is not defined by the actions of people. God and his manifestations exemplify faith. The actions and spiritual qualities of God define faith. Forgiveness. Compassion. Kindness. This was one of the many gifts that the writings of Baha'u'llah have given me. A change of my perspective. A re-focusing of expectations. But more on that later.

So I finished my first collection of short stories, *Big Cats*, which will be published this July.



I also gave birth to my first child, a son, whose name is Walter. Who, hopefully, for the sake of all of us, but especially his babysitter, is at home asleep right now. But, thank God, he's arrived. The journey into life was a little bit difficult as I'll touch on later, but Walter is very much here.

I also became a member of the Baha'i Faith—and made a pledge to serve the faith in whatever capacity I can. I'm still learning what that is.

For those of you that know me, I take a while to make decisions. I'm also a stubborn person and a person, who, throughout her life has defined herself in opposition to things. I'm not a joiner. I don't like to be given advice. I buck up against authority and institutions. Whenever there's a rule or an unspoken agenda, I cringe. I like to do things my own way first, especially if it's wrong and time consuming, just because I always start out with the assumption that the general rules of life don't really apply to me. Somehow, I'm different. I'm not going to get old. I'm not going to die. I'm not going to have a baby and move to the suburbs!!

So. How and why am I standing here?

How does someone who said they would never become a member of any religion become someone who declares themselves a Baha'i?

It's strange. I started looking back at faith in the history of my family and interestingly, like my own experience with spirituality, it is a series of rifts and disappointments.

Looking way back into history—the Scottish clan I'm from—Clan Morrison—were historically a clan of incredible ragtag misfits who got in a shipwreck off the coast of Scotland. They think maybe they were Norse to start with. Originally clergy and poets, they were called, “The Driftwood People,” because they floated to the Scottish shore hanging on to the broken pieces of the sunken ship and eventually this strident bunch of driftwood wordsmithing clerics, they ended up pissing off the MacCleods, their neighbors to the north and south and coincidentally, the most powerful clan in the country, and most all of them got beheaded one day. All 750 of them. And their heads were mounted on stakes planted at the edge of all the roads.

So it didn't end well. In fact, my maternal Scottish relatives that came to New York and eventually to Oregon on the Oregon Trail were all ministers and they had been driven out of the country at gunpoint apparently for some secret indiscretion that has gone with them to the grave, so that is how we ended up in the states.

And then there was the other side of the family.

My paternal grandfather, who was a Romanian Jew married my father's mother who was Welsh Presbyterian and they both got kicked out of their families for doing that. There's sort of a romantic story about the two of them meeting actually, at the World's Fair in New York.

My grandfather was the elevator operator in the Empire State Building and my grandmother sold Souvlaki sandwiches at the international foods booth, and every day my grandfather would go buy a Souvlaki for his lunch and the courting went on from there.

But anyway, they were sneaking around dating each other on the sly because of their religious differences, having a secret romance and my grandfather was so desperately in love with her, that one day, he just couldn't stand it—this also happened to be the day that Eleanor Roosevelt was riding up to the top of the Empire State Building, and he turned to the First Lady and all of her entourage and he said—I'm in love with the wrong woman--and Eleanor Roosevelt said to my grandfather—Excellent. You should marry her.

And so they borrowed a drive-away car—a pink Cadillac and they ran away and eloped and drove to Hollywood. It is much more romantic you see, not to be religious.

But really, except for my maternal grandparents, John and Alice, who happened to be Methodists AND the most spiritual people I have ever known as I mentioned earlier—both at the same time! What a coincidence! Except for them, I did not come from a home that ascribed to any faith.

My mother sent me to Sunday School while she and my father stayed home and played Bridge, they were in a really high level Bridge league. They read about Bridge and studied the Bridge column in the daily newspaper. And so since they were playing Bridge every weekend morning, my mother asked the lady from across the street to drive me to Sunday School at the First Methodist Church and all the while we'd be driving there the lady from across the street would be asking:

Why don't your parents believe in God?

Your parents should believe in God.

You need to tell your parents that they will suffer great pain and torture if they don't come to church too.

Do you know what will happen to them if they don't?

The devil is always walking under our feet.

So my relationship to faith as a child was related to worry and shame and duty and paranoia and the sense of being judged, not only by God, which is exhausting enough, but by everybody else. I mean, Jesus seemed like a simply wonderful person in all the stories, but I didn't want to ride in the car with that lady.

So from the beginning, I found more pleasure in Art—I used to love to draw. I used to sit at the bus stop after school and draw until the bus came, and lots of times I would miss the bus. And once I was drawing, and this girl came up to me, maybe she was about fifteen or so, and I was eight or nine and she said—That's a nice thing you're drawing there and I said—Thanks. And she said—Do you want to draw even better? And I said—Okay. And she said—You'll draw better if you accept Jesus as your Lord and personal savior.

And again, I started to watch myself having one of those dizzy, out of body experiences that had become so familiar when I was in the religion-based company of perfect strangers.

In fact, I had such a bad taste in my mouth about church and what it meant, that I broke up with my high school boyfriend because he confessed to me that he had belonged to a Christian Youth Group in the past and was considering joining back up.

“Forget it,” I said. “We’re finished here.” And once he dropped out of it completely, once he had ripped up his phone list and severed all his ties, I told him we could get back together.

In fact, over the years, I’ve been very promiscuous about faith. I always knew there was something missing in my life, but I didn’t know what to look for. So I acted with faith like someone at a cocktail party. I would sample different faiths like hors d’oeuvres. I would take small bites. Just small bites, so my relationship to faith wouldn’t get too intense, because I didn’t want to spoil the bouquet.

I was Jewish Monday, Wednesday and Friday and a Buddhist on weekends. I had Hindu friends. I liked to have long conversations with Sikh cabdrivers in New York. I went to séance parties where people were channeling everything from reptilian aliens to the nephew of Nicodemus.

I tried to give myself to political causes as if they were religions. Feminism was my religion. And for the last fifteen years or so, it was my career. Ambition was my religion and the pain it caused almost drove me into the ground. And the strange thing was, I wasn’t really even in touch with that.

Until I noticed, about six years ago, my husband, after growing up in the Baha’i Faith and leaving it for ten years or so, he started to explore a relationship with the faith once again and he started to pray. And fortunately this time, I didn’t break up with him because of it.

Instead, I snuck a look at the prayer books once in a while when he wasn’t home, at first out of alarm for my welfare. Because what if my husband was behaving well for instance

and God gets suddenly pleased with him or whatever and things start to go well for him and then God will look down on me and say---Hey, wait a minute. You need to be punished for just living there and ignoring the fact that prayer and good behavior is going on in such close vicinity, so I started to pray secretly, out of fear. And not a small bit of guilt, but then strangely enough—

The Hidden Words, which I quoted before, they started to speak to me. Like I'd be completely baffled by something in my short story writing which was my religion—I would be just up in arms over a character, about to rip up the page, and I would read:

O Son of Man, veiled in my immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence I knew my love for thee and therefore I created thee---Have engraved on thee mine image and revealed to thee my beauty.

O Son of Man, I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore do thou love me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.

And then I was surprised, then I was refreshed, then I realized that my work did not belong to me, it belonged to God. I realized that someone loved me regardless. I just had to accept it. And I realized too, how much pain God must feel, loving us. He wasn't cold and angry. I imagined he was filled with an ineffable sadness.

And that there was a plan for the work I do that was outside of my own ego was also a huge realization. And I started to not be led to the holy writings out of fear, but out of hunger, out of curiosity, out of awe and this sudden humility too. Another surprise.

And my husband, who I respected, started to attend Baha'i events again, and he came and asked me one day if we could host them in our home. And I was reluctant again. I thought people are going to come here and pressure me. They are going to tell me they know the best way again. Uh oh. And I kept waiting for that to happen. And it didn't and it didn't. Until one day, it actually did.

And it was perfect because an unnamed Baha'i person came up to me after a few weeks and said—Holiday, what are you doing? Why aren't you a Baha'i? What are you waiting for?

And I was furious for awhile and testy and mad. And then, pretty soon, which is natural, Baha'is started to get on my nerves. The more I knew them, the more they became human. But then, unlike before when I was attending to the issues of the spirit like dropping by cocktail parties, I decided to stay and then I realized that Baha'is are fallible too. People are fallible. Especially me. And faith gives us guidance. Faith is there, God is there, to forgive us. Faith is a process, like writing every day, even for just ten minutes.

Like our beloved spiritual assembly member, Lois Willows, who is no longer in this world, and who is missed terribly, once said to a room of new Baha'is, including myself. She said: If Baha'is get on your nerves now, forgive them. Just imagine what they were like before they became Baha'is.

And then my Grandmother Alice died, a major family transition, and when we went through her things we found a secret Bible.

There was the Bible she shared with my Grandfather and then there was her secret one, her private one. And it had all kinds of things written in the margins, all kinds of things underlined and crossed out. She had blacked out entire verses in the Holy Bible. She had written next to one line in Isaiah, maybe once when she was having a crisis of faith.

This simply isn't true.

That line was written in her neat schoolteacher's handwriting. The pages were dog-eared. Some of them were ripped. She had struggled over this Bible. She had obviously questioned it. She had turned to it again and again. There were 3 X 5 cards in there with

pages and pages of quotes. It was a whole secret self she was exploring—an exploration that was private and hers alone.

And I realized she was seeking her truth. And suddenly, instead of seeing my grandmother as someone who exemplified quiet perfection, I saw her anger and her revolutionary response to the verses. I saw her grief and her rage and her powerlessness. And she became more spiritual in my eyes instead of less. It was an example that we are allowed to question God. Faith is our invitation. This may be one of the major reasons we are here.

Baha'u'llah does so in the Fire Tablet.

When he questions God, He says:

Indeed, the hearts of the sincere are consumed in the fire of separation: Where is the gleaming of the light of Thy Countenance, O Beloved of the Worlds?

He asks:

Longing hands are uplifted to the heaven of Thy grace and generosity: Where are the rains of Thy Bestowal, O Answerer of the Worlds?

He asks:

Where are the breezes of Thy compassion, O Mercy of the worlds?

Those who are near unto thee have been abandoned in the darkness of desolation: Where is the shining of the morn of Thy reunion, O Desire of the worlds?

The barking of dogs is loud on every side...

Coldness hath gripped all mankind...

Darkness hath enveloped most of the people...

Where is the brightness of Thy Splendor, O Radiance of the worlds?

And God answers him,

O Supreme Pen, We have heard Thy most sweet call in the eternal realm: Give Thou ear unto what the Tongue of Grandeur uttereth, O Wronged One of the worlds.

Were it not for the cold, how would the heat of Thy words, prevail, O Expounder of the worlds?

Were it not for calamity, how would the sun of Thy patience shine, O Light of the worlds? Lament not, because of the wicked. Thou wert created to bear and endure, O Patience of the worlds.

God answers him:

Dost Thou wail or shall I wail? Rather shall I weep at the fewness of Thy champions, O Thou Who hast caused the wailing of the worlds.

Baha'u'llah questions God. Like my Grandmother did by encircling this passage from Isaiah 40. Bold. In red.

A voice says, Cry out!

And I said—What shall I cry?

All people are grass,

Their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades

When the breath of the Lord blows upon it;

Surely, the people are grass.

And then a number of years ago now, I attended the Baha'i World Congress, held in New York City at Madison Square Garden with my husband's family.

And I heard Ruhiiyyih Khanum speak. And when she came up to the stage my mother-in-law, who is a Baha'i, elbowed me.

"This is Ruhiiyyih Khanum," she said. "She is very precious to the faith."

And here was this sort of lovely woman, who races up to the mike and plops her pocketbook in the center of the podium and takes off her white gloves and proceeds to tell this story about her husband, Shoghi Effendi, the guardian of the Faith, the grandson of Baha'u'llah. How one of the first things Ruhiiyyih remembered after they were married, was moving in with her husband and having diplomats from around the world stopping by at the drop of a hat and how once that happened and they didn't have anything in the house except six eggs and how horrified she was, that maybe she and her husband should just have these people come back on a better day when they could adequately receive them, until Shoghi Effendi told her they would just cook what they had and so they all sat with the Archbishop of Something or other and Prince What's-His-Name and they each took one tiny bite of omelet and then passed the plate around again and again and again.

A simple story. Not earth shattering per se. But a story of love and generosity on such a human level that it left me refreshed. It left me surprised. It wasn't a sermon. It wasn't a meeting stratified by the status of it's participants. It was a simple gesture. I liked these Baha'is.

And so there were the writings.

And there were the tenets of the Faith.

And there was also a miracle.

There was the birth of my son, who came into the world in a dangerous and traumatic way. In the middle of the night. In blood. In an emergency room. In a crowded hospital

with no bed. In the presence of nurses who didn't know how to turn on the fetal monitors and oxygen machines.

And when, at last, the doctor on call arrived and I was lying there. After the doctor ordered anyone who did not know how to assemble an OR board to please leave the room. After the anesthesiologist bent over me and said:

Ma'am, we are about to perform an emergency cesarean section, which will be performed regardless of whether your baby is alive or dead.

I had a vision before the needle turned everything black. Of Baha'u'llah and his son, Abdu'l Baha's, hands on my stomach keeping guard over the child.

And I remembered this prayer that I recited each day while I was pregnant. This prayer for my son.

My Lord! My Lord! I praise Thee and I thank Thee for that whereby Thou hast favored Thine humble maidservant, Thy slave beseeching and supplicating Thee, because Thou hast verily guided her unto Thine obvious Kingdom and caused her to hear Thine exalted call in the contingent world and to behold Thy Signs which prove the appearance of Thy victorious reign over all things.

O my Lord, I dedicate that which is in my womb unto Thee. Then cause it to be a praiseworthy child in Thy Kingdom and a fortunate one by Thy favor and Thy generosity, to develop and to grow up under the charge of Thine education. Verily, Thou art the Gracious! Verily, Thou art the Lord of Great Favor!

And when I awoke and my son was still alive, when I saw him in his little knitted cap, wrapped in his little blanket, I knew I wanted to give him some sense of spirituality in his

life. Something that he can experience and question and leave and ultimately, if he so chooses, return and be welcomed.

I will do the only thing I can. I will offer him exposure to faith. I will show him that it's difficult sometimes and confusing. That I struggle with it. I will show him that it is harder to accept something, to have faith in something even part way, than to reject something completely.

I will try to tell him, as I am trying to do now, how I came to faith, out of a series of events, out of a series of surprises, not necessarily in any order.

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