

# The Tax Collector

*A true story retold by Pat Osgood.*

*Illustrated by Graeme Taylor.*



In through the gates pranced a beautiful stallion

This particular morning the air was crisp and fresh. To the East a glory of clouds began to form: those clouds that climb and climb as though trying to reach the very face of God. With them, a breeze began, dashing here and there, pausing to ruffle the hair of a Boy who stood quietly in a recessed door of His home. He was startlingly handsome even at that young age, His dark eyes so beautiful, seeing all and yet holding a hidden mystery. He watched the household begin the day. This was the house of a great man and this was the coolest time of day, when the world seems newly made and work could be done with ease.

As He watched all the activities going on around Him, He heard the sound of horses approaching. In through the gates pranced a beautiful Arabian stallion. White he was, tall, strong and very alert, and his eyes were drawn to the young Boy who stood so still. It was easy to see that this stallion could race the wind and win. He had a bright purple blanket that made the heart glad, and the deep golden tones of the leather saddle and bridle made one think of the colour of summer honey.

The young Boy watched the horse with delight until He noticed the rider. He wore clothes of satin and fine silk, and his dark leather boots caught the sunlight with a sullen dullness. Greed was in his black eyes and on his face – vicious greed. And the black eyes were turned to look at the young Boy. They rested on Him for a moment like the eyes of a cobra ready to strike, then passed on, to take in the magnificence of the mansion and its wonderful gardens. This was one of Fath-'Ali-Shah's tax collectors.



The black eyes were turned to look at the young Boy

At that moment a lovely carved door opened slowly and the master of the house came out to greet his guest. Before his formal words of greeting could be uttered, the tax collector began speaking. It was a dry voice, cruel and grating, demanding gold and precious jewels.

The Boy stood very still, watching and listening, taking into Himself what the tax collector was saying to His father. This man had made two previous trips to the house to collect taxes and each time the amount grew larger. This new demand was completely unjust.

The Child watched as His father dealt with the tax collector; saw how His father, in tones of velvet tinged with steel, urged this cruel and greedy man to leave. There were no more gold coins, there was no more silver to be had. Twice already he had wrongly taken money from them.

The tax collector seemed to withdraw into himself, weighing the truth and feeling the words that had been said so quietly, yet so firmly. Still he sat, in contemplation, as the sun rose higher and the heat beat around his head.

The master of the house motioned his young Son to him and together they entered the cool, safe house, closing the lovely carved door silently behind them.

The tax collector turned the steed's head savagely, causing one drop of ruby red blood to stain the snow white coat. Joining the guards who had been waiting in the white hot heat, he rode hard for the next town, his rage trailing behind him.

Teheran, the capital city of Persia, lies in a saucer-shaped hollow at the foot of the southern slopes of the Alburz mountains. The great hills form an encircling backdrop to the city; to the north-east the snow-capped, cone-shaped peak of Mount Damvand stands sentinel; to the south the vast empty desert of central Persia laps its tawny waves at the very feet of the city.

Nightfall and daybreak come with swiftness here. On clear winter mornings the sun leaps from behind the northern slopes of Damvand and suddenly, brilliantly, it is day.

Out of that tawny landscape, out of that lonely desert, came a chestnut-hued horse. On his back, a young Boy, with hair the colour of midnight black. The dust of two days travel showed plainly on His fine clothes. His eyes, piercing as an eagle's, watched as the city closed in behind him. Gone was the silence of the desert; here: the din of humanity.

W i t h o u t hesitation the boy made for the palace of the King. He had business with Fath-'Ali. Stopping only to make Himself more presentable, the young One strode into the palace. He had been here many times with His noble father who was part of the Shah's court. He knew how to ask to see the Shah, and who to see for a room to rest.



Fath-'Ali, the King

Did they marvel, the palace servants and nobles, to see a seven year old Child in the palace unaccompanied, let alone seeking a private conversation with the King?

Amidst the grandeur of the palace, and the magnificence of the audience chamber, the young Boy explained this unjust demand for taxes. Because of His eloquent speech and the truth of the message He brought, the King learned of the greed and cruelty of one of his tax collectors.

With a speed that amazed the ministers at the palace, documents were made ready with their words of black ink on fine, creamy parchment, and seals and ribbons attached. By the time the Boy was ready to leave the palace, word had gone out that the cruel tax collector was to be dismissed and never to be seen again.



The Tax Collector was dismissed

The young One returned home to His father and loving mother. They thanked God that He was safe and once again with them, and were surprised when they heard how the King had listened to such a young child and obeyed Him. The Child was Bahá'u'lláh, and even at the age of seven He could see that injustice had been done and He set out immediately to put it right.