

# Yahyá, Mírzá (c. 1831–1912)

*Younger half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh; follower of the Báb, who conferred on him a high station and leading role in the Bábí community; later, opponent of Bahá'u'lláh; known as Azal (Eternity or Pre-eternity) and Subh-i-Azal (Morning of Eternity), leading to his followers becoming known as Azalís; described by Shoghi Effendí as "the arch-breaker of the Covenant of the Báb."*<sup>1</sup>

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## MÍRZÁ YAHYÁ

### Early Life in Iran, c. 1831–53

Mírzá Yahyá was born in about 1831, the son of Mírzá Buzurg Núrí, a wealthy noble and minister of state from the district of Núr in Mazandaran Province, and his concubine Kúchik Khánum. In 1835, having incurred the enmity of [Haji Mirza Aqasi](#), the prime minister, Mírzá Buzurg lost his position and much of his wealth. He died four years later without having regained his fortune. During these difficult years, Mírzá Yahyá became the ward of [Bahá'u'lláh](#), who, although not the eldest son, emerged as the leader of the Núrí family and took His mother, His father's other wives, and several brothers and sisters to live with Him under His care and protection. After Bahá'u'lláh accepted the Cause of the [Báb](#) in

1844, Mírzá Yahyá was one of several of Bahá'u'lláh's full- and half-siblings who became Bábís.

In December 1848 Mírzá Yahyá was a member of a small party led by Bahá'u'lláh that was arrested in Mazandaran near the Bábí fortress at Shaykh Tabarsí, to which they were bringing provisions. The entire party was taken in shackles to Amul, where the prisoners were interrogated and threatened with being bastinadoed or executed. Bahá'u'lláh insisted on bearing punishment on behalf of His companions, and His feet were beaten until they bled. Subsequently, He and the rest of the party were freed but prohibited from reaching their destination.

By May 1849 virtually all the Bábís at Shaykh Tabarsí had been killed, and the role of leadership had fallen increasingly on Bahá'u'lláh. The Báb, imprisoned in the remote mountains of Azerbaijan, wrote letters that conferred on the teenaged Mírzá Yahyá a high station and leading role, giving him such titles as *Mir'átu'l-Azalíyyih* (Everlasting Mirror), *Ismu'l-Azal* (Name of Eternity), and *Thamara-i-Azalíyyih* (the Eternal Fruit). *Subh-i-Azal* appears to have been a title that Mírzá Yahyá took for himself.

The Báb committed Mírzá Yahyá to Bahá'u'lláh's tutelage, of which Bahá'u'lláh later wrote in a passage addressed to Mírzá Yahyá, "remember how We nurtured thee by day and by night for service to



Mírzá 'Abbás, known as Mírzá Buzurg, the father of Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yahyá.  
[Bahá'í Photographic Library](#)

the Cause."<sup>2</sup> Under Bahá'u'lláh's guidance, Mírzá Yahyá gained an extensive familiarity with the writings of the Báb but remained reclusive and demonstrated limited ability for leadership. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that Mírzá Yahyá's appointment as leader of the Bábís was a stratagem that Bahá'u'lláh, His brother Mírzá Músá, and Mullá 'Abdu'l-Karím Qazvíní, one of the Báb's secretaries, devised, with the Báb's approval, to divert attention onto a little-known figurehead and away from Bahá'u'lláh, "though He was known and seen."<sup>3</sup>

At the time of the Báb's execution in July 1850, Mírzá Yahyá, married while still in his teens, was living with his wife and young child in his father's native village of Tákur in Núr. Fearing arrest, he took refuge in the mountains of Mazandaran, where he wandered in disguise. His position became more vulnerable when Bahá'u'lláh, who continued to serve as his protector, was compelled by the prime minister, Mírzá Taqí Khán, to leave Iran in June 1851. Bahá'u'lláh went to Iraq, effectively in exile, only to be pardoned and summoned back nine months later by the new prime minister, Mírzá Áqá Khán.

On His return, Bahá'u'lláh learned of a conspiracy against Nasir al-Din Shah and the prime minister by a disgruntled group of Bábís. Bahá'u'lláh condemned the plan and warned the chief plotter of the disastrous consequences of such action. Just before the attempted assassination, which took place on 15 August 1852, Mírzá Yahyá, who was also aware of the plot, left the capital to rally the Bábís in Tákur if the assassination proved successful. Instead, the plan misfired, resulting in reprisals against the Bábís of [Tehran](#), including Bahá'u'lláh, who was cast into a dungeon known as the *Síyáh-Chál* (Black Pit). Attacks on the Bábís quickly spread to the remotest regions of the country.

Disguised as a dervish, Mírzá Yahyá fled Tákur. A cavalry regiment burned the village and terrorized the countryside, looting and burning the mansion of Mírzá Buzurg. The reprisals continued until mid-December 1852, when Bahá'u'lláh was released from prison, His properties were formally confiscated, and He was ordered to leave Iran within a month.

## In Iraq, 1853–63

Choosing Iraq as His place of exile, in January 1853 Bahá'u'lláh left for Baghdad, accompanied by His family and by officials representing the Iranian government and the Russian Legation. The party included His younger full-brother, Mírzá Músá, and sixteen-year-old half-brother, Muhammad Qulí. Mírzá Yahyá, after leaving Tákur, headed west for Rasht and Qazvín. Unknown to the Bábís, he worked as a seller of shrouds in Kirmanshah, on the edge of Kurdistan. There he met Bahá'u'lláh's party en route to Baghdad. Having been given a small sum of money that enabled him to travel, Mírzá Yahyá followed Bahá'u'lláh to Baghdad, posing as a cotton merchant. He arrived about June 1853, two months after Bahá'u'lláh. Mírzá Yahyá established his own residence in the Arab quarter of the city.

Since Mírzá Yahyá had not been banished, Bahá'u'lláh advised him to return to Iran and guide the Bábís. Instead, Mírzá Yahyá spent the next few years in hiding, under an assumed name, sometimes in Baghdad and sometimes in Basra or elsewhere. Even when Bábís loyal to him as the Báb's nominee traveled hundreds of miles to see him and were able to locate him, he usually refused to see them. His reticence created a void that as many as twenty-five claimants to leadership sought to fill.

Although Bahá'u'lláh put forward no claims, growing numbers of Bábís turned to Him for the support and leadership that was not forthcoming from Mírzá Yahyá. Bahá'u'lláh's favorable reputation spread beyond Bábí circles and garnered increasing respect for the exiles.

While Bahá'u'lláh's prestige grew, Mírzá Yahyá was joined in Baghdad by Siyyid Muhammad Isfahání, a Bábí who had met Bahá'u'lláh during His visit to Karbala in 1851. Siyyid Muhammad, described by



*Historical view of Baghdad and the Tigris River. Date: c. 1930. Photographer: Effie Baker. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank*

Bahá'u'lláh in a passage addressed to Mírzá Yahyá as "him who led thee astray,"<sup>4</sup> became Mírzá Yahyá's chief supporter. Incited by Siyyid Muhammad, Mírzá Yahyá became increasingly jealous of Bahá'u'lláh and started to intrigue against Him, circulating rumors and stirring controversies.

Unwilling to speak out against His brother, Bahá'u'lláh decided to remove Himself from the situation. In April 1854, with only one companion, He retired to Sargalu and Sulaymaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan, where He remained in seclusion for two years, living as a dervish. "The one object of Our retirement," Bahá'u'lláh later asserted, "was to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto Our companions, the means of injury to any soul, or the cause of sorrow to any heart."<sup>5</sup>

During Bahá'u'lláh's absence, Mírzá Yahyá continued both to hide—much of the time as a guest in Bahá'u'lláh's home, which he closed to visitors—and to attack those whom he perceived as his enemies. He denounced Mírzá Asadu'lláh Dayyán, a rival for the leadership of the Bábís, stating that Dayyán and his supporters should be killed. While Bahá'u'lláh was away, Mírzá Yahyá also married the Báb's second wife and, shortly thereafter, gave her in marriage to Siyyid Muhammad Isfahání. Bahá'u'lláh later described these actions as having dishonored the Báb.<sup>6</sup>

By early 1856, when Bahá'u'lláh's whereabouts finally became known and His family prevailed on Him to return, the Bábís in Baghdad, including Mírzá Yahyá, had become thoroughly demoralized and discredited. Bahá'u'lláh's return to Baghdad regenerated the Bábí community there, which numbered only some thirty or forty, and attracted the growing respect of officials and the general population. However, Mírzá Yahyá continued to seek ways to strengthen his own position. Dayyán, who had renounced his claims after traveling from Azerbaijan to meet Bahá'u'lláh, was assassinated while in Baghdad. Mírzá Yahyá also ordered the murder of Mírzá 'Alí-Akbar, the Báb's cousin and an admirer of Dayyán.

## **In Turkey, 1863–68**

In 1863 the Ottoman authorities summoned Bahá'u'lláh to Istanbul, yielding to concerted pressure from the Iranian government to distance Bahá'u'lláh from His homeland and thereby reduce His growing influence. Before His departure in April, Bahá'u'lláh entrusted Mírzá Yahyá with the task of disseminating in Iran writings of the Báb that Mírzá Yahyá had previously transcribed. Instead, Mírzá Yahyá proceeded to Mosul, where he joined Bahá'u'lláh's retinue en route to Istanbul, going most of the way in disguise even though the party included his own wives and Siyyid Muhammad Isfahání. When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled from Istanbul to Edirne (Adrianople) in December 1863, Mírzá Yahyá and Siyyid Muhammad Isfahání followed.

In Edirne, although Bahá'u'lláh and His companions were in difficult physical circumstances at first, the favorable attitude of the authorities lessened the exiles' fear of persecution. For the first time in many years, Mírzá Yahyá emerged from hiding. He continued to intrigue, however. This time he entertained plans to kill Bahá'u'lláh. About a year after their arrival in Edirne, Mírzá Yahyá himself poisoned Bahá'u'lláh, causing Him to be ill for a month and to develop a tremor in His hand that He retained to the end of His life. After this unsuccessful attempt, Mírzá Yahyá tried to induce Bahá'u'lláh's barber to cut His throat.

Bahá'u'lláh endeavored to protect His brother and the community by asking that the events not be discussed. Nevertheless, the attempts on His life ultimately could not be concealed. Mírzá Yahyá, and later his followers, denied these and other malevolent acts and laid the blame on Bahá'u'lláh. The attempts to murder Bahá'u'lláh and the allegations surrounding them created an uproar among the exiles, who had until then treated Mírzá Yahyá with deference.

In about March 1866, because of Mírzá Yahyá's continuing intrigues, Bahá'u'lláh openly announced to

His brother His claim to be "He Whom God shall make manifest" (*Man Yuzhiruhu'lláh*), the messianic Figure prophesied by the Báb. Mírzá Yahyá was aware of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His station to His followers nearly three years earlier, shortly before His departure from Baghdad, but had never before been challenged to respond. Since the Báb had indicated in the Bayán that, upon the appearance of "Him Whom God shall make manifest," the Bábí dispensation would end, Bahá'u'lláh's claim, if accepted, meant the end of the dispensation and of Mírzá Yahyá's authority. Spurred on by Siyyid Muhammad Isfahání, Mírzá Yahyá refused to accept Bahá'u'lláh's announcement and countered it with claims of his own.



*Photograph taken in Edirne during a visit in Oct. 1933 by noted Bahá'í teachers Martha Root and Marion Jack. Root described this scene as 'a portion of the old foundation wall and the great old fireplace where the cooking was done at the Amr'u'llah Big house in Adrianople.' The house, located across the street from the famous Sultan Salim mosque, was Bahá'u'lláh's residence at the time of the final break between Him and Mírzá Yahyá. On 10 Mar. 1866 Bahá'u'lláh withdrew to the House of Rida Big, which is still standing. National Bahá'í Archives, United States.*

Mírzá Yahyá's action caused Bahá'u'lláh once again to withdraw into isolation. After sending Mírzá Yahyá half of His possessions, including rings, seals, and manuscripts that He had received from the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh moved to another house and went into seclusion on 10 March 1866. For two months no one but His immediate family had access to Him. Forced to choose between Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yahyá, the community of exiles fell into disarray.

Mírzá Yahyá and Siyyid Muhammad Isfahání renewed their assault on Bahá'u'lláh by spreading stories to discredit Him. Although they eventually succeeded in turning the grand vizier and the sultan against Bahá'u'lláh, their activities tarnished Mírzá Yahyá's reputation as well. A key miscalculation occurred in September 1867. Siyyid Muhammad pushed for a public confrontation between Mírzá Yahyá and Bahá'u'lláh, certain that Bahá'u'lláh would decline. Instead, He agreed. A large crowd

gathered for the event, but Mírzá Yahyá, who had been touted as the one seeking to prove the truth of his position and the falsehood of Bahá'u'lláh's, failed to appear.

In the summer of 1868, after Mírzá Yahyá had written to the Ottoman authorities and involved them, the sultan decided to put a stop to the disruption. He ordered Bahá'u'lláh to be incarcerated for life in the prison city of Acre in Ottoman Palestine (See: Bahá'í World Center.Early Development) and condemned Mírzá Yahyá to exile on the island of Cyprus.

The upheaval that began in Edirne quickly spread to Iran. In the end, however, almost all of the Bábís chose to follow Bahá'u'lláh.

## **In Cyprus, 1868–1912**

Mírzá Yahyá was sent to Famagusta, a port city on the northeastern coast of Cyprus. He remained a recluse, regarded by the inhabitants as a Muslim holy man, a notion that Mírzá Yahyá did not dispel. When people called to greet him on important feast days during Ramadan and the annual period of pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj), it being customary to visit a holy man on such occasions, he accepted their demonstrations of deference. He and his followers made no attempt to teach the local people the Bábí or Azalí religious beliefs.

After a few years, three of Mírzá Yahyá's supporters, Persians from Zanjan, joined him on the island. Although freed from his exile in 1881, after the British occupation of Cyprus, Mírzá Yahyá chose to remain in Famagusta as a pensioner of the British government.



*Mírzá Yahyá, c. 1868. Bahá'í Photographic Library*

Over a two-week period in March 1890, Mírzá Yahyá met with the young Cambridge University

orientalist Edward G. Browne, who found him initially reticent but soon gained his confidence. Browne described Mírzá Yahyá as "a venerable and benevolent-looking old man of about sixty years of age, somewhat below the middle height, with ample forehead on which the traces of care and anxiety were apparent, clear searching blue eyes, and long grey beard" and with a "mild and dignified countenance."<sup>7</sup> From him Browne gained what he considered to be a wealth of new information on the Bábí Faith, about which Mírzá Yahyá spoke freely, but little about the breach between him and Bahá'u'lláh, which Mírzá Yahyá was evidently reluctant to discuss.

Mírzá Yahyá died on 29 April 1912 at the age of about eighty. According to an account by his son Ridván 'Alí, who had by this time become a Christian and taken the name Constantine the Persian, no "witnesses to the Bayán" (i.e., Bábís) could be found to carry out the funeral ceremony. Hence, it was performed by the *imám-jum'ih* (the chief *mullá*) of Famagusta and other Muslim clerics.<sup>8</sup> Mírzá Yahyá was buried in a small shrine that then lay outside the town but is now incorporated in the modern city of Famagusta.

## References to Mírzá Yahyá in Bahá'í Literature

In one of His works, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Bahá'u'lláh often mentions Mírzá Yahyá and recounts his actions. Bahá'u'lláh specifically addresses Mírzá Yahyá in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Most Holy Book): "I swear by God that I have wept for thee to see thee following thy selfish passions. . . . Granted that the people were confused about thy station, is it conceivable that thou thyself art similarly confused?" In the same passage, Bahá'u'lláh urges Mírzá Yahyá to repent of his wrongdoing and assures him of God's forgiveness if he repents.<sup>9</sup> In His *Suriy-i-Haykal*, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of having "singled out" Mírzá Yahyá and "protected him from the harm of the malevolent," only to find that "he became filled with arrogance and pride" and "emerged from behind the veil of concealment" to plot against Bahá'u'lláh. "Were God to turn all the oceans of the earth into ink and all created things into pens," Bahá'u'lláh continues, "they would not suffice Me to exhaust the record of his wrongdoings."<sup>10</sup>

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's brother Mírzá Músá sought to "rescue Mírzá Yahyá from the gulf" during the Adrianople period, reminding him of Bahá'u'lláh's kindness and His efforts to train them both, assisting with spelling and composition and even guiding Mírzá Yahyá's hand with His own. "Is this your thanks for all His tenderness," Mírzá Músá reportedly asked, "that you plot with Siyyid Muhammad and desert the shelter of Bahá'u'lláh?"<sup>11</sup>

[Shoghi Effendi](#) refers frequently to Mírzá Yahyá in his history of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths from 1844 to 1944, including devoting a chapter to "The Rebellion of Mírzá Yahyá and the Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission in Adrianople."<sup>12</sup>

In many of His writings, particularly in the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, Bahá'u'lláh addresses the Azalís, those who followed Mírzá Yahyá. Bahá'u'lláh usually refers to them as the "People of the Bayán" and exhorts them to examine His claims fairly and in the light of the writings of the Báb.

## EDWARD G. BROWNE AND THE QUESTION OF THE SUCCESSION TO THE BÁB

Edward G. Browne, whose study of the Bábís played a major role in bringing the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths to the attention of Western academics, has made the question of Mírzá Yahyá's accession to the leadership of the Bábí movement seem simple and logical by asserting that Mírzá Yahyá was one of the *Letters of the Living*, the fourth letter of the first *váhid* (or unit of nineteen) of the Bábí hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Browne concludes, Mírzá Yahyá became the leader after the three persons above him—the Báb, Quddús, and Mullá Husayn Bushrú'í—had been killed.

This explanation is fundamentally flawed, however. Mírzá Yahyá was not a Letter of the Living. He was only thirteen years old in 1844, when the Báb's first disciples sought and recognized Him. According to Mírzá Yahyá's own statements, he did not become a Bábí until some time later. Moreover, neither the

proto-Azalí history *Nuqtatu'l-Káf* nor the Azalí polemical work *Hasht Bihisht* makes such a claim for Mírzá Yahyá. The twentieth-century Azalí polemicist and descendant of Mírzá Yahyá, Jalal Azal, also asserts that Mírzá Yahyá "was not a Letter of the Living."<sup>14</sup>

Browne has claimed, moreover, that "during the period which elapsed from the Báb's death till the advancement of Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be 'He whom God shall manifest' (i.e. from 1850 to 1864 at any rate) he [Azal] was recognized by all the Bábís as their spiritual chief."<sup>15</sup> Such a position is untenable even on the basis of statements that the Azalís themselves advance. The *Hasht Bihisht*, written by two sons-in-law of Mírzá Yahyá—Shaykh Ahmad Ruhí and Mírzá Áqá Khán Kirmání—and quoted by Browne, lists five persons who in this same period laid claim to the station of "Him Whom God shall make manifest" and thereby implied the abrogation Mírzá Yahyá's authority.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, since one of the five, Husayn Mílání, was killed in the 1852 upheaval, these claims must have originated shortly after the martyrdom of the Báb. Furthermore, Mírzá Yahyá makes it clear in his book *Mustayqiz* (quoted by Browne) that at least one of these claimants, Mírzá Asadu'lláh Dayyán, had attracted a following from among the Bábís; Mírzá Yahyá calls them the *Asadiyyún*.<sup>17</sup> Browne also mentions Husayn Mílání and Siyyid Husayn of Hindíján (in the vicinity of Fárs) as having attracted a following.<sup>18</sup>



Professor Edward Granville Browne in oriental attire. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

Thus, even from information well known to Browne, Mírzá Yahyá's authority was clearly far from paramount or unchallenged as early as the period shortly after the Báb's martyrdom. It was certainly not the case, as Browne often suggests, that Bahá'u'lláh introduced His claim into the midst of a movement solidly united behind Mírzá Yahyá.

A third area in which Browne has been responsible for perpetuating a misleading impression is the question of the timing of the advent of "Him Whom God shall make manifest." Browne has advanced the late Azalí position that maintains from the numerology of the words *Ghiyáth* (Succorer) and *Mustagháth* (He who is invoked for succor) that "He Whom God shall make manifest" would not appear before fifteen hundred or two thousand years had passed. However, the Bábís in the 1850s expected an imminent advent. Quite apart from oral statements that the Báb reportedly made, indicating to several of His disciples that they would meet "Him Whom God shall make manifest," a number of prominent Bábís put forward a claim to be this figure. If the Bábís of the early period had been expecting the advent of "Him Whom God shall make manifest" in fifteen hundred years or more, it is unlikely that so many claimants would have emerged in the decade and a half immediately after the Báb's martyrdom.

Finally, the early pro-Azalí work *Nuqtatu'l-Káf* identifies Mírzá Yahyá as "He Whom God shall make manifest."<sup>19</sup> Thus the claim that *Man Yuzhiruhu'lláh* would not appear before fifteen hundred years is a late Azalí position taken in response to Bahá'u'lláh's claim; it probably originated with the authors of the *Hasht Bihisht*.

## THE AZALÍS

### In Iran

The vast majority of the Bábís of Iran became Bahá'ís. Among the small pockets of Bábís who did not, a very few stayed uncommitted to either Bahá'u'lláh or Mírzá Yahyá and are called Bayání Bábís. A larger number looked to Mírzá Yahyá as their leader and are called Azalí Bábís.

At first, appreciable numbers of Azalís existed in Iran, usually revolving around one or more prominent individuals: in Qazvin, around Muhammad Hasan Fatá and Mullá Hádí Qazvíní; in the Kashan and Naráq

area, around Mullá Ja'far Naráqí; in the Isfahan area, around Mullá Rajab 'Alí Qahír (whose sister had married the Báb while He was in Isfahan), his brother Mullá 'Alí-Muhammad Siráj, and Mírzá Hádí Dawlatábádí; in Kirman, around Mullá Muhammad Ja'far Kirmání; and in Núr, around Mírzá Yahyá's half-sister and other members of his family. Azalí groups could also be found in some of the towns and villages of Azerbaijan, in Hindíján, and in Zanjan.

Over the years, however, the Azalí groups in Iran diminished. In many towns, meetings were held to debate the claims of Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yahyá. Some individual Azalís made the journey to Cyprus and Acre to investigate the claims of Mírzá Yahyá and Bahá'u'lláh. They usually returned as Bahá'ís. One such was Áqá Mírzá Yahyá Sarráf, the son of the Qazvin Azalí leader Muhammad Hasan Fatá. His conversion to the Bahá'í cause, followed by the conversion of other Azalís, led to the eventual disappearance of the Qazvin Azalí group. The Hindíján Azalís also disappeared, most of them reverting to Islam.

Up to the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, estimates of the numbers of Azalís in Iran ranged from five hundred to five thousand. They could be divided into two categories. One group, many of whom should be regarded more as Bábís than Azalís, were villagers in such places as Tár, near Kashan, and several villages near Isfahan.

The other group of Azalís was deeply involved in politics. Although their numbers were small, they played an important role in the reform and constitutionalist movements in Iran. Mírzá Yahyá's two sons-in-law, Shaykh Ahmad Rúhí (the son of the Azalí leader Mullá Muhammad Ja'far Kirmání, mentioned above) and Mírzá Áqá Khán Kirmání, were both important writers who promoted the cause of reform in Iran in the late nineteenth century and advanced the pan-Islamist movement of Siyyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi ("Afghani"). They were both executed in Tabriz in 1896, after the assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah by one of Siyyid Jamal al-Dín's supporters. Mírzá Nasru'lláh Maliku'l-Mutakallimín and Siyyid Jamalu'd-Dín Isfahání were Azalís from Isfahan who played important roles as populist preachers in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906.

The group of Azalís interested in politics centered on the Dawlatábádí family. In later years members of this group helped one another into high places in the political and governmental establishment in Pahlavi Iran. They also included a number of literary figures, such as Mutarjim Humáyún. They had no organization and held no meetings, but, from about 1942 onward, one of their number named Qásimí published a few books, including some works by the Báb.

## **In Cyprus**

The Azalís remaining in Cyprus are mostly the descendants of Mírzá Yahyá, who had numerous wives (estimates of the number vary from eleven, given by his own son, to seventeen). The marriages resulted in a large number of children, many of whom resided in Cyprus.

Several of Mírzá Yahyá's children defected from the Azalí cause. His eldest son in Cyprus, Ahmad Bahháj, became a Bahá'í; another son became a Christian. Many of his children either did not marry or were childless. Therefore, the numbers of his acknowledged descendants shrank in the succeeding generations. Most of Mírzá Yahyá's descendants in Cyprus at present are outwardly Muslims, and no Azalí community as such exists.

## **Succession**

It appears that Mírzá Yahyá originally intended his son Ahmad Bahháj to succeed him. After a family dispute, Mírzá Yahyá changed the succession and appointed Mírzá Hádí Dawlatábádí. On Mírzá Hádí's death in 1908, Mírzá Yahyá appointed Mírzá Yahyá Dawlatábádí, Mírzá Hádí's son, who resided in Tehran and became a member of Parliament and a prominent figure in Iranian public life.

The E. G. Browne manuscripts include a poem that appears to indicate that the succession should have gone to Mírzá Yahyá's grandson Hájí Mírzá Ahmad Misbahu'l-Hukamá, the son of Núru'lláh.<sup>20</sup> However, Jalál Azal, a grandson of Mírzá Yahyá and a latter-day Azalí apologist, denies that Mírzá Yahyá appointed anyone to succeed him. At present, the Azalís appear to have no leader.

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## Notes:

1. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, new ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974, 2004 printing) 165.
2. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, 1st pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993, 2005 printing) ¶184: 85.
3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *A Traveler's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, trans. Edward G. Browne, new and corr. ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 37.
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## Other Sources and Related Reading:

- Mirzá Yahyá was a prolific writer. Large collections of his works are found in the British Museum Library Oriental Collection, London; at Cambridge University; at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; and at Princeton University. Of these, the following have been published: *Kitáb al-mustayqiz* (N.p. [Tehran?]: n.d.), *Mutammim-i-Bayán* (N.p. [Tehran?]: n.d.) and *Majmú'ih-az Áthár-i Nuqtay-i-Úlá va Subh-i Azal* (N.p. [Tehran?]: n.d.).
- See also Moojan Momen, "The Cyprus Exiles," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 5.3 (1991): 84–113; Mahdí Bamdád, *Tárikh-i-rijál-i-Írán*, 6 vols. (Tehran: Zowar, 1968–73) 4: 436–37; H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1991) 217–41; H.M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980) 18–88; Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, and Ulrich Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics*, trans. Geraldine Schuckelt (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) 618–73; Muhammad-Alí Malik-Khusraví Núrí, *Iqlím-i-Núr* (Tehran: Mu'assisiy-i-Milliy-i-Matbú'át-i-Amrí, 1962) 196–205. Several recorded accounts concerning Mirzá Yahyá and his followers are published in Lady [Sara Louisa] Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1940; Oxford: George Ronald, 2007) 48–52, 59–62, 237–38, 250–55. On the Azalís in the reform and Constitutional movement, see Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* (Syracuse, NY, USA: Syracuse UP, 1982) 140–42, 157–61, 167–68, 170–71, 179–81, and *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 22–23, 54–70, 110, 120, 145, 152, 205, 234, 263–64.
- Other sources are Edward G. Browne, "The Babis of Persia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London) 21 (1889): 486–526; (1889): 881–1009; and Edward G. Browne, trans., *The Tárikh-i-Jadíd: or, New History of Mirzá Alí Muhammed, the Báb, by Mirzá Husayn of Hamadán* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1893). Oral information was received from Iraj Ayman, Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, Mustafa Salman, and Erol Olkar.

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