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OBSERVANCE OF BAHÁ'Í HOLY DAYS

A Communication from The Universal House of Justice

TO: National Spiritual Assemblies.
Dear Bahá'í Friends:

From time to time questions have arisen about the application of the law of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas on the observance of Bahá'í Holy Days. As you know, the recognition of Bahá'í Holy Days in at least ninety-five countries of the world is an important and highly significant objective of the Nine Year Plan, and is directly linked with the recognition of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh by the civil authorities as an independent religion enjoying its own rights and privileges.

The attainment of this objective will be facilitated and enhanced if the friends, motivated by their own realization of the importance of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, are obedient to them. For the guidance of believers we repeat the instructions of the beloved Guardian:

"He wishes also to stress the fact that, according to our Bahá'í laws, work is forbidden on our Nine Holy Days. Believers who have independent businesses or shops should refrain from working on these days. Those who are in government employ should, on religious grounds, make an effort to be excused from work; all believers, whoever their employers, should do likewise. If the government, or other employers, refuse to grant them these days off, they are not required to forfeit their employment, but they should make every effort to have the independent status of their Faith recognized and their right to hold their own religious Holy Days acknowledged." (*From letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the American National Spiritual Assembly, dated July 7, 1947 — BAHÁ'Í NEWS No. 198, page 3*)

"This distinction between institutions that are under full or partial Bahá'í control is of a fundamental importance. Institutions that are entirely managed by Bahá'ís are, for reasons that are only too obvious, under the obligation of enforcing all the laws and ordinances of the Faith, especially those whose observance constitutes a matter of conscience. There is no reason, no justification whatever, that they should act otherwise . . . The point which should be always remembered is that the issue in question is essentially a matter of conscience, and as such is of a

binding effect upon all believers." (*From letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the American National Spiritual Assembly, dated October 2, 1935 — BAHÁ'Í NEWS No. 97, page 9*)

In addition, steps should be taken to have Bahá'í children excused, on religious grounds, from attending school on Bahá'í Holy Days wherever possible. The Guardian has said:

"Regarding children: at fifteen a Bahá'í is of age as far as keeping the laws of the Aqdas is concerned — prayer, fasting, etc. But children under fifteen should certainly observe the Bahá'í Holy Days, and not go to school, if this can be arranged on these nine days." (*From letter written on behalf of the Guardian, dated October 25, 1947, to the American National Spiritual Assembly*)

National Assemblies should give this subject their careful consideration, and should provide ways and means for bringing this matter to the attention of the believers under their jurisdiction so that, as a matter of conscience, the mass of believers will uphold these laws and observe them.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
— THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Bahá'í World Center
Haifa, Israel
28 January, 1966

COMMENTARY:

A letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to an individual believer, published in BAHÁ'Í NEWS, April 1948, states: "He wishes the Bahá'ís to press for the recognition of their right to observe their own Holy Days, and to observe them wherever possible in strict accordance with our teachings."

In this connection Shoghi Effendi in 1938 designated the exact hour for the observance of four of the nine Holy Days. These hours are printed on the Bahá'í Calendar published annually by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of the United States.

— NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'IS
OF THE UNITED STATES

The House of Quddus in Mashhad

by Guy Murchie

EDITORIAL NOTE: This is another in a series of articles written by Guy Murchie from his diary kept on his journey to Iran in 1964 and printed with the permission of The Universal House of Justice. The photos were taken by Mr. Murchie.

Mashhad is the biggest city in northeastern Persia and lies close to where that country joins Afghanistan on the east and Turkistan (part of the Soviet Union) on the north. Turkistan, east of the Caspian Sea, is where the horse is presumed to have been first domesticated (around 4000 B.C.) and its principal city is 'Ishqábád where the first Bahá'í temple was erected shortly after the turn of the century.

Though close to the Great Salt Desert, Mashhad is not a desert city like Yazd but in fact is quite lush and fertile, particularly in winter and spring when it enjoys frequent rains. When I landed here today by plane with my interpreter, a retired major general, a shower had just washed the dusty streets and the cotton and sugar beet fields were green and fruit orchards coming into blossom on the surrounding broad plain. As a Bahá'í friend drove us to town along poplar-lined roads, we could see also numerous mulberry trees which provide the principal raw material (worm food) for the silk industry. As we reached the first squared-off blocks of

faces of a spinning brass top will end uppermost, a file of seven porters with huge trays of cakes and sweets on their heads hurrying to a wedding feast, three old men haggling in a radish market in front of six-foot piles of radishes, a large crowd of pilgrims with bulky bundles awaiting a bus to start them on a month-long journey to Mecca and back, and two mullas at the door of a mosque greeting each other with respectful salaams



House of Bábíyyih showing steps to the meeting room at right where Mullá Husayn and Quddús met with their followers.

(bowing with hand over heart) and conversing quietly with palms-up gestures and bland, benign expressions.

House of Bábíyyih

The most important thing for a visiting Bahá'í to see in Mashhad is the famous house of Bábíyyih built by Mullá Husayn at the behest of Quddús before they went to Fort Tabarsí and which may be said to be the first building on Earth constructed as a Ḥaẓiratu'l-Quds (which means in Persian "The Sacred Fold"). So we went there by way of a street with poplars so light in color they seemed to be birch trees. When we got to a muddy alley in the immediate neighborhood (apparently near the southeastern edge of town), we separated as a normal precaution against attracting attention, and walked quietly ahead past several women in black chadurs and a couple of squatting beggars, filing inconspicuously through a narrow gate to find ourselves suddenly in the garden of Bábíyyih. It was also a sort of courtyard perhaps fifty feet square surrounded by low, unpretentious buildings that would have seemed very ordinary to one unacquainted with their history. But to us of course these structures had a magical quality for we recalled that this area was open grass land in the spring of 1848 when Mullá Husayn, who had just arrived on foot from visiting the Báb in Máh-Kú some 1200 miles away, chose the lot of land, bought it early in



A discussion with a mulla in front of a small mosque Mashhad.

houses and approached the heart of the city its oriental character became apparent in the loose turbans of white cloth commonly worn like coiled dish towels with one end dangling in back. Lots of faces are Mongoloid and some almost Chinese though often very dark of skin. Exotic street scenes include camels being led under the plane trees beside the small canal separating the two sides of one of the main double streets, a cluster of youths betting coins on which of the six numbered

May and, with his own hands and probably those of a few helpers, built the houses by the end of June in time to move in, along with Quddús, and held many important meetings there during the first three weeks of July — for on July 21 both these heroes left, at the Báb's command, for their glorious destiny at Fort Tabarsí from which they would never return.



The garden and courtyard of the House of Bábíyyih.

Múllá Husayn, we were told, lived in the larger quarters on the north side of the courtyard and slept in a bedroom about nine by twelve feet with an eleven-foot wooden ceiling, the walls indented with double rows of niches in traditional style except that the upper ones have unusually fancy pointed arches at the top. The main meeting room is approximately fourteen by twelve feet but here the niches are rounded at the top, a small fireplace is in an alcove to the rear (north wall), while three outside doors and two small windows open on the courtyard. Quddús occupied the humbler south side of the courtyard with lower (ten-foot) ceiling and only a single row of oblong niches. His room was originally rectangular, I am told, but due to later construction of a street on the south side of the property, has now been reduced to a wedge shape with a single outside door and two little windows facing the courtyard. The storeroom of the north building, which could also serve as a hiding place in time of danger, is a windowless, dark closet about nine by six feet behind Múllá Husayn's bedroom.

The relatively ample courtyard has at least one old tree possibly planted by Múllá Husayn himself, in which a turtle dove was sitting most of the time we were there. The Persians call it an "anob" tree and its edible fruit consists of orange-colored, one-inch "beans" that look something like rose hips. There are also several young pine trees in the garden, some pears in blossom, a grape arbor, lots of roses and a central pool, while poplars are visible rising here and there above the low flat roofs from outside.

The custodian of this holy house is a very dark and wizened old man with a gentle face named Gholam Husayn Bidari, which seems appropriate as Bidari means "ever awake" which he must be to maintain such a well-kept garden and buildings despite the hostile Muslim neighbors all around. He is a mason by trade and has the distinction of having actually worked

on construction of the Bahá'í temple in 'Ishqábád more than sixty years ago. The street outside this sacred house and garden is traditionally known as Bábíyyih Street and many still call it that although the Muslims, trying to erase its memory, have troubled themselves to give it some other name.

The Story of a Bahá'í in Mashhad

Repairing to another part of the city, my guides took me to call on a seventy-four year old sick Bahá'í who honored me with tearful kisses and told such a touching story that I cannot bear not to repeat it, nor is it possible to forget how he looked as he sat on the edge of his bed in his black bathrobe and woolen sailor's cap atop his greasy, unshaven but enraptured face. It seems that his father, a Muslim, had wanted him to become a droshky driver when he was in his teens and, discovering that he preferred to take up reading and writing, violently opposed this outlandish idea on the ground that it might lead to his becoming a Bábí, as these "scheming heretics" were still called in many parts of Persia. The boy had never heard the name Bábí before but somehow it fascinated him despite the evil implication his father gave it, so he secretly bided his time to learn more about these dangerous literary monsters. A few years later when he was a servant in the great household of the Grand Vazír in Tíhrán he chanced to be scolded for not being able to read, and again he thought how wonderful it would be if only he could comprehend a book and he hoped he could find someone, even a Bábí, who might teach him this unimaginable magic.

Shortly thereafter he found himself jobless and semi-starving in Rasht on the Caspian Sea where one night he dreamed he met a holy man with blue eyes and a



A droshky with a typical load passes down a street in Mashhad.

white beard who smiled on him and asked if he needed any help. "O yes," replied the hungry youth, clutching the old man's robe. "Then you must be patient," said the old man and he repeated this for what seemed a long time eventually introducing him to a man who, he said, would presently offer him an important job. The young man did not know how much he could trust this curious dream but a few weeks afterward he was

overjoyed to encounter in a narrow alley of the bazaar the very man he had been introduced to and, better still, the man recognized him in return and, comparing accounts, they discovered they had both had the same dream at the same time. And by this means the youth got a job which led to his being taught to read and write, through which he discovered the Bahá'í Faith and heard that the holy man of his dream was 'Abdu'l-Bahá. By this time he was a successful merchant and his life took on a whole new purpose, much of which was evident from the attractive pictures still on his walls and the large library of books behind glass-fronted bookcases and his oft-expressed praise of God for all his blessings, one of them being that his daughter in dying had dreamed she was about to be a guest of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Perhaps he was gladdest of all, however, in knowing that his Muslim neighbors had come to appreciate his character and deeds and one of them had even allowed he was absolutely sure he was a "good man" despite his being a Bahá'í.

The next afternoon we were in our hotel when a messenger arrived to inform us that a local Bahá'í

farmer with a Muslim wife had just been molested by her fanatical brothers abducting her and threatening to kill her if she tried to return to him or their three children. They also destroyed his crops and commandeered his farm, hoping thus to make him destitute, and when he appealed to the police they refused to listen to him, even kicking him out the door as a "filthy Bahá'í" . . .

My interpreter, a member of the Persian National Assembly and a respected military figure who outranked the brigadier general responsible for the Mashhad police, immediately took action to right the wrong — with the result that the farmer is likely at least to get his farm back, though extracting the wife unharmed from her bitter family is another thing again. Such occurrences unfortunately are still only too common in Persia.

NOTE: For an account of the "Babiyyih" in Mashhad see *The Dawn-Breakers* pp. 265-7 and 126-7.

Journey to the Holy Land

In a far off land there is a small industrious city called Haifa. For not only Bahá'í adults but especially Bahá'í youth this bay area is a dreamland; and to be accepted for a pilgrimage to this Most Holy Place is in truth a dream come true.

As your Israeli cheroot, the equivalent of a New York taxi cab, winds up Carmel Avenue you view the gold-domed Shrine of the Báb for the first time, towering over all of Haifa. Turning on Uno Avenue, you approach a great iron gate. Down the driveway are the open doors of the warm and loving pilgrim house which will take you in for the next nine days.

And so your most memorable and moving pilgrimage begins. An experience packed with other experiences. Sometime within these nine days you will spend two days and two nights at the Mansion of Bahjí, where Bahá'u'lláh spent the remainder of His life after being imprisoned. Here is His Shrine. While at Bahjí you will take one day and go to the Most Great Prison — 'Akká. After a prayerful visit to Bahá'u'lláh's cell, you visit the House of 'Abbud, within the city walls of 'Akká. Bahá'u'lláh spent seven years upstairs in this house without once coming down. From His window all He could see were the untamed waves of the Haifa Bay. As a result of this, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had the Riḍvān Gardens made for the Blessed Perfection. The sprouting greenery and blooming trees surround you when you visit here. Before returning to Haifa you stop at Mazr'ih where Bahá'u'lláh spent the two years between his stay at the House of 'Abbud and Bahjí. Mazr'ih is hidden behind a great many trees and gives you an overwhelming feeling of love when you enter.

On your return to Haifa there is one more outstanding experience during your pilgrimage; a visit to the Archives Building. This, the first of the administrative buildings, patterned after the Parthenon, contains almost all the relics of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and some of Shoghi Effendi's personal articles,

and volumes and volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's writings are also included.

Like all marvelous things, your pilgrimage, in brief, must come to an end, a tearful and painful end. Leaving the Holy Land is as if leaving your heart there. Your pilgrimage has paved a new pathway for the rest of your life.

It's an unforgettable experience, so precious and meaningful at this age. Don't worry how you'll get there; just pray and serve this most wonderful Cause of ours the best you can and this bounty and blessing shall come your way. God bless you.

—PAULETTE PAPPAS
A Bahá'í Youth

Ever since the inception of the Ten Year Crusade, the macrocosm of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh has been increasingly reflected in local assemblies springing up around the planet. Many of them represent, in their individual members, people of a variety of racial, national and cultural backgrounds. Future ages will recall this historic period, these early spiritual assemblies and those who brought them into existence, for they are the first-fruits of His World Order. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Kampala, Uganda, Africa is drawn from people of British, Canadian, Persian, Irish and American origins as well as three African tribes — Luo, Mukigga, and Muluya.

