

## Memories of My Life

### Translation of Mírzá Habíbu'lláh Afnán's Khátirát-i-Hayát<sup>1</sup>

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In the name of God, the Most Glorious, the Most Luminous.

Recently, I received a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran – may God always sustain its pillars. It urged me to write an autobiography detailing what I have witnessed in life and to present it to that sanctified Assembly.

What I have written below is a brief sketch of the 74 years of the Bahá'í life of this ephemeral servant, Habíbu'lláh Afnán-i-A'lá'í. My purpose is to offer, from memory or notes I have kept, a summary of my recollections and of what I have heard or seen. This particularly relates to the period during which I was reared through the loving-kindness of the illustrious wife of the Báb and her sister [Zahrá Bagum], and the hallowed time that I spent in the presence of the Blessed Perfection and the Center of His Covenant.

God willing, I will endeavor to offer a short history of the Blessed House of the Báb – the site of pilgrimage for all the denizens of the Supreme Ark.

### Childhood and Early Life in Shiraz

My name is Habíbu'lláh<sup>2</sup> and I am the fourth child of Áqá Mírzá Áqá, who was honored by Bahá'u'lláh with the title Núri'd-Dín [the Light of Religion]. I was born on 1 Muharram 1292 A.H. [7 February 1875], in the

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<sup>1</sup> Additional sources used in translation of this work include Abadi'i, Mírzá Qābil; *Tarikh-i-Abadih va Tavabi'*; MS, n.d. Manuscript in private hands. Hamadání, Mírzá Husain. *The Tárikh-i-Jadíd, or New History of Mírzá 'Alí Muhammad the Báb*. Translated by Edward Granville Browne. Cambridge: The University Press, 1893. *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection* [INBMC]. 103 vols. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [1970s]. Note: This is a limited set of Xeroxed manuscripts produced from copies in the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran. Ishráq Khávarí, 'Abd al-Hamíd, ed. *Má'idih-'i Ásmání*. 9 vols. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 128-129 B.E. [1971-1973]. Nicolas, A.L.M.; *Seyyed Ali Mohammad dit le Báb*. Paris, 1905. Táhirzádeh, Habíb. "Dr. Youness Afrukhtih." *Bahá'í World* (Wilmette) vol. 12, 1950-1954 (1956), pp. 679-681

<sup>2</sup> His given name was Muhammad-'Alí. Bahá'u'lláh addressed him in Shiraz by this name in one of His Tablets; Bahá'u'lláh. *Majmu'ih Athar-i Qalim-A'la*. Vol. 51. *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [c 1977] 353-4, no. 362. INBMC 51: While on pilgrimage, as a sign of respect, Núri'd-Dín asked Bahá'u'lláh to give his young son a different name, so that he would not be a namesake of Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí (1853-1937). Granting his wish, Bahá'u'lláh named the young pilgrim, Habíbu'llah [Beloved of God]. From then on, he was known by this name and it was used in all subsequent Tablets by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

city of Shíráz, and raised by the loving and compassionate hands of the wife of the Báb<sup>3</sup>.

I was no more than four years old when Shiraz was plunged into turmoil as a result of the martyrdom of the illustrious [Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn], the Mahbúbu'sh-Shuhadá [the Beloved of Martyrs], and [Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Hasan], the Sultánu'sh-Shuhadá [the King of Martyrs], in Isfahán.<sup>4</sup>

At that time, the Qajar prince Farhád Mírzá, the Mu'tami'd-Dawlih, was the governor-general<sup>5</sup> of Fárs, and he was especially antagonistic towards the Cause. There was great commotion in Shiraz. The merchants in the bazaar and custom offices, as well as the shopkeepers and traders, spoke constantly of the events in Isfahán. The elders of the Bahá'í community were particularly concerned since, only a short time earlier, three believers in Shiraz had been martyred by the enemies. A number of friends gathered and consulted about the difficult situation. They concluded that, among the believers, my father, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, was the most renowned as a Bahá'í. Therefore, if the foes plotted to commit injustices against the community, they would certainly be directed against him. They said, "From the very beginning, because of his devotion to the Faith, Áqá Mírzá Áqá has allowed everyone to learn of his attachment to this Cause. Should trouble now be directed against him, others would suffer as well." Each one of them spoke in a similar manner, until they unanimously resolved that it was best for my father not to remain in Shiraz, but to leave immediately for Búshihr and head to Bombay [India].

Afterwards, the entire consultative body<sup>6</sup> came to our house and informed my father of its decision. They noted that, in light of the turmoil in Shiraz and all the talk among the people, it would be wise for him to depart immediately for Búshihr.

Within 24 hours, my father left for Bombay. He entrusted our mother and sister, and us five brothers, to the joint care of Hájí Mírzá Abdu'l-Qasim-i-

<sup>3</sup> See Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Khadíjih Bagum, Wife of the Báb*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1981. for a biography.

<sup>4</sup> The martyrdom of these two brothers took place on 17 March 1879. For details see: Ishráq Khávarí, 'Abd al-Hamíd. *Núrayn-i-Nayyirayn*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 123 B.E. [1966].; Nur, 'Izzatu'llah. *Khatirat-i Muhajiri az Isfahan dar Zaman-i shahadat-i Sultan ash-Shuhada'va Mahbub ash Shuhada'*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 128 B.E. [1972].; Mázandarání, Fadil Mírza Asadullah. *Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq (History of the Manifestation of Truth)*. Vols.1-9. Digital facsimile. East Lansing, Mich.: H-Bahai, 1998-1999., vol. 5, pp. 242-8 ; and in English, Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Eminent Bahá'is in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh: With Some Historical Background*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985, pp. 33-51.

<sup>5</sup> The term governor-general will be used throughout to refer to civil ruler at the provincial level.

<sup>6</sup> On the election of the first Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz in 1908, see *In the Land of Refuge*, (forthcoming), chapter 16. Before this Assembly was formed, as bidden by Bahá'u'lláh, the community benefited from an unstructured consultative body, where the elders and prominent believers discussed local affairs and advised the friends. For example, see Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Núri'd-Dín dated 4 Rabí'u'l-Avval 1301 A.H. [2 January 1884] in *Núri'd-Dín Collection of Tablets*, p. 70, in which each locality was asked to form a consultative body to assist the believers.

Afnán, the older brother of Khadíjih Bagum, and our paternal grandmother [Zahrá Bagum], a sister of the aforementioned Hájí.

### Khadíjih Bagum

The wife of the Báb was a maternal aunt to my father and a paternal aunt to my mother [Maryam-Sultan Bagum]. As such, she was intimately concerned with our upbringing. She tried her utmost to ensure that, from the earliest age, we would flourish under the canopy of God's Cause. This was the greatest blessing of our lives. Whatever spiritual perspicacity I may possess, the faith that I consider to be the source of my salvation, the blessing of beholding the Countenance of God [Bahá'u'lláh], and all the other blessings of this life that have unfailingly been the lot of this lowly servant are all due entirely to the favors and care of the esteemed wife of the Báb. That link to the Most Great Infallibility [the Báb] remained faithful to the Covenant of God until her final breath. I beseech her to intercede on behalf of this servant for the confirmations of the Concourse on High.

At the age of seven [circa 1882], I was sent to the traditional elementary school in Masjid-i-Naw<sup>7</sup>, Shiraz, along with my older brother, the late Hájí Mírzá Buzurg-i-Afnán. There, we were taught by the respected Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Sádiq, who was a great admirer of the Báb and ranked among the most esteemed of the city's recognized citizens.

During this time, the wife of the Báb became severely depressed due to her disappointment over not being able to visit Bahá'u'lláh. Shortly after, as a result of contracting dysentery, she passed on to the Abha Kingdom, thus depriving us of her infinite loving-kindness and unsurpassed spiritual qualities. After the ritual washing [of her body] at the Hammam-i-Khayri (otherwise known as Guldastih), her earthly remains were interred in a sacred shrine.

Addressing my late father, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a special Tablet of Visitation in the ever-brilliant memory of Khadíjih Bagum, which extols her exalted station and bestows the grace of God upon her. ...<sup>8</sup> From these exalted Words [of Bahá'u'lláh], her brilliant station is most evident.

<sup>7</sup> A prominent mosque constructed during the rule of Ibn-i-Zangi of the Atabakan dynasty. This classroom is located on the eastern corner of the mosque.

<sup>8</sup> At this point, Mírzá Habib quotes portions of this Tablet of Visitation. However, the Bahá'í World Centre has indicated that they will publish a translation of this Tablet in due course. Bahá'u'lláh. "Lawh-i-Ziyarat-i Khadíjih Bagum." (Tablet of visitation for Khadíjih Bagum) In *Khándán-i-Afnán sadra-yi Rahmán*, by Muhammad-'Alí Fayzí. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 127 B.E. [1971], pp. 184-6. Bahá'u'lláh. "[Tablet of Visitation for the Wife of the Báb, Khadíjih Begum.](#)" *Translations of Shaykhi, Bábí and Bahá'í Texts*, Ahang Rabbani, (East Lansing, Mich.) no.9 (Oct. 1997.)

### The Báb at the Masjid-i-Vakíl

Several years after Khadíjih Bagum's passing, when I was 13 years old and still studying under the tutelage of the late Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Sadiq-i-Mu'allim, the honored `Andalíb<sup>9</sup> arrived in Shiraz from Yazd. I remember well how that `Andalíb would set out for his afternoon walk around [my school at] Masjid-i-Naw. Because he was a poet, calligrapher and accomplished gilder, and had become renowned throughout Shiraz, our teacher invited him to our class one day. As was customary at the time, upon arrival, he sat next to the Hájí on the floor. Because of our close kinship to the Báb, our teacher treated my brother and I with the utmost consideration throughout our school years, and he used to seat us near him in the front row of the class. As a result, we could hear clearly everything that was said. On that day, I was particularly attentive to what passed between the honored `Andalíb and my late teacher.

Our teacher lit the waterpipe and offered it to `Andalíb, and the conversation between the two of them began. For a while, they spoke of various topics. At first, their discussion revolved around the art of poetry and the late Mu'allim, [as a sign of respect], insisted that `Andalíb should teach the science of prosody and rhyme to his son Mírzá Muhammad, who was talented in calligraphy and occasionally composed verses as well. `Andalíb showed humility, however, and eventually directed the conversation to teaching the Faith. On that day, I realized that our teacher had a particular fondness for the Báb and referred to Him reverently as the Jináb-i-Mírzá [the honored Mírzá].

Our teacher then related the story of the day when the Báb arrived at the Masjid-i-Vakíl. He stated:<sup>10</sup>

I was about 25 years of age or perhaps a bit older, already engaged in my occupation as a teacher in this same school, and had heard something about the call of the Jináb-i-Mírzá. I was uncertain as to the truth of the matter though. The learned `ulamá, especially Shaykh Abú'l-Qásim, the brother of the Imam-Jum`ih<sup>11</sup>, and Shaykh Husayn-i-Zalim [the tyrant], were terrorizing and tormenting [the seekers]. In the streets, bazaar and mosques, they would sully people's minds about Him at every opportunity by saying, "As this

<sup>9</sup> `Andalíb [Nightingale] (d. 1920) was the sobriquet of Mírzá `Alí-Ashraf of Lahijan in the Caspian province of Gilan. `Andalíb was a poet of superb accomplishment and an eloquent teacher. A collection of his poems, filling over 760 pages, was published in 1969 `Andalíb, `Alí Ashraf Láhijání, Mírzá. *Díván-i-`Andalíb*. [Tehran]: Mu'assasih-i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [1969]. For a biography, see Sulaymání, `Azizu'lláh. *Masábih-i-Hidáyat*. 9 vols. Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli-yi Matbu'át Amri, 124-32 B.E. [1967-1975]., vol 7.

<sup>10</sup> See Nabil-i-A`zam (Mullá Muhammad-i-Zarandí). *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. Translated and edited by Shoghi Effendi Rabbani. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, 1974., pp. 153-4, for a brief reference to this incident.

<sup>11</sup> Shaykh Abu-Turab, a son of Shaykh Mufid, was a great admirer of the Báb and belonged to the same learned, extended family as Siyyid Yahya Vahid-i-Darabi; see Rabbani, Ahang. "The Family of Vahid Darabi." *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (April 2004).

claim is fundamentally a source of the destruction of Islam, it must be eradicated.” They even conspired to slay the Jináb-i-Mírzá in Shiraz. However, as Shaykh Abu-Turab, the Imam-Jum`ih, did not agree with their plans, they schemed to invite the Jináb-i-Mírzá to the Masjid-i-Vakíl<sup>12</sup> so that, upon seeing a large multitude and the circle of the `ulamá, He might become frightened and renounce His claim. Eventually, they conspired with Husayn Khán, the Nizamu`d-Dawlih, the governor-general of Fárs, to realize their plan. It was a Thursday when the public crier announced [throughout the city] a call for all the citizens to gather the following day, three hours before sunset, at the Masjid-i-Vakíl to witness the Siyyid-i-Báb renounce His false claims.

From the morning of that day, the entire courtyard, the cloisters, the roofs and even the minarets of the mosque were thronged with onlookers. There was no one who had not come to see and hear the Jináb-i-Mírzá. I, too, went to the mosque at about an hour past noon and, with great difficulty, reached a spot near the pulpit, designated for the government officials and the `ulamá. I was keen to meet Him and hear His words. There was a great deal of noise because people were busy talking about the Person and claim of the Siyyid-i-Báb. The `ulamá entered the mosque and the officials and dignitaries were present also [sitting in the cloisters, near the stone pulpit<sup>13</sup>].

Three hours before sunset, a great commotion occurred near the entrance of the mosque and we heard, “He is coming!” At once, all tumult in the mosque subsided and there was absolute silence. Not a whisper could be heard from anyone. I witnessed `Abdu`l-Hamíd Khán, the Darúghih [the sheriff], enter the mosque, followed by five farrashes [attendants], then the Jináb-i-Mírzá, followed by yet another group of five farrashes.

The Jináb-i-Mírzá wore a black turban, a green sash [signifying His holy lineage], and an `abá on His shoulders. His hands extended beyond the sleeve of the `abá. When He approached the spot where the officials and `ulamá were seated, without paying the slightest attention to anyone, He inquired of the governor-general [Husayn Khán], “What is your purpose in summoning Me to this place?” Shaykh Husayn, the Nazimu`sh-Shari`ih, known as Zalim [the tyrant], responded with much vehemence, “The intention is that you should ascend this pulpit and repudiate your false claim!”

I looked very closely at the countenance and appearance of the Jináb-i-Mírzá and noted that the presence of the vast multitude, the

<sup>12</sup> The name derives from the fact that Karim Khán-i-Zand (d. 1779), whose capital was in Shiraz, had built this structure.

<sup>13</sup> This pulpit is carved out of a single piece of marble and has 14 steps.

authority of the officials and the might of the `ulamá did not have the least influence on His dignified bearing. Oblivious to all, He proceeded to the pulpit, ascended the third step and stood there. Shaykh Husayn said to the governor, "Instruct Him to go to the top of the pulpit so everyone will hear Him." Husayn Khán said, "Siyyid, go up so all will see you." His Holiness ascended to the top of the pulpit and began to recite a homily on the divine unity with such eloquent Arabic as I had not heard until that day. It was truly magnificent and wondrous. The concourse of people, high and low, learned and illiterate alike, were in total rapture as they listened attentively and fascinated.

When Shaykh Husayn noticed that His power of utterance had absorbed all there, he said to Husayn Khán, "The Siyyid is casting a spell on the assemblage with His enchanting speech. Instruct Him to say what He intended to say." With great vehemence, Husayn Khán shouted, "Siyyid! Say what you are supposed to say. What is this idle chatter?" The Jináb-i-Mírzá remained silent for some two minutes and then said, "O People! Know this well and be informed. I say unto you what My Forefather, the Messenger of God, spoke twelve hundred and sixty years ago and I do not speak what He did not." He then quoted the following hadíth, "What Muhammad made lawful remains lawful unto the Day of Resurrection and what He forbade remains forbidden unto the Day of Resurrection. Thus said the Immaculate One: 'When the Qá'im appears is, verily, the Day of Resurrection'<sup>14</sup>."

Having recited this Tradition, He then descended the pulpit. Shaykh Husayn, who appreciated the significance and meaning of this proclamation, raised his walking-stick, out of sheer hostility, to strike Him on the head. Mírzá Abú'l-Hasan Khán, the Mushiru'l-Mulk<sup>15</sup>, quickly brought forward his shoulder to ward off the attack, and his shoulder sustained the blow.<sup>16</sup>

After relating this story, our late teacher commented, "I still have not understood the implications of His saying, nor comprehended the reality of His meaning, 'I say the same that My Forefather, the Prophet, has said.'" "That is rather surprising," `Andalíb responded, "as you yourself testify that the Primal Point stated, 'Whatever the Messenger of God spoke, I speak

<sup>14</sup> In numerous places, the Báb identifies the Day of Resurrection with His own Advent; see, for example, *The Persian Bayan* 2:3 The Báb. *Inna al-bayán*. [Tehran?, s.n., 1947]. [*Kitáb-i Bayán-i Fársí*].

<sup>15</sup> He and his father, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, the first Mushiru'l-Mulk, were the viziers of Fars, in succession, over a period of 40 years; see Afnán, Mírzá Habíbu'llah. *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz: History of the Cause in Shiraz*. East Lansing, Mich. H-Bahai, 2000. .Translated and Annotated Ahang Rabbani, *In the Land of Refuge: Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in Shiraz*, Series: Witnesses to Bábí and Bahá'í History Vol 1., 2007. . One of the daughters of the renowned Bábí martyr, Hujjat (Mulla Muhammad-'Alí Zanjani, 1812-1850), had married Mírzá Abú'l-Hasan Khán; see *In the Land of Refuge*.

<sup>16</sup> With some minor differences, the author reports this event in two manuscripts *Khátirát-i-Hayát* and *Tarikh Amri Fárs va Shiraz*; see *In the Land of Refuge*.

also.' Consider that the same sufferings that Muhammad endured were indeed sustained by the Báb, and that the same Call that the Messenger of God raised was also proclaimed by the Báb."

### Leaving Shiraz

In 1307 A.H. [1890], my maternal grandmother, Zahrá Bagum, the sister of the Báb's wife, passed away. Only a few months later, Bahá'u'lláh instructed our family to proceed to the Holy Land. My father wrote to us [saying] that our oldest brother, Mírzá Jalál, was to remain in Shiraz to protect, and serve at, the august House of the Báb. The rest of the family was to join him in Port Said, where he was engaged in commerce [and from there, to proceed to `Akká]. As a result, Mírzá Jalál married and established himself in a residence next to the sacred House of the Báb.

At the beginning of the month of Safar 1308 A.H.<sup>17</sup>, we left Shiraz with a caravan, traveling on horses and mules. Our group consisted of the following: my mother, Maryam-Sultan Bagum; the mother of Áqá Mírzá Hadiy-i-Afnán [Zivar Sultan Khánum]; my brothers, Áqá Mírzá Buzurg and Áqá Mírzá Diya'u'llah; my sister, Tuba Khánum; myself; and an attendant named Áqá Muhammad `Alí, who was a Bahá'í from Káshán. At that time, I was 16 years old.

Experiencing great hardship, we traveled the near-impassible and difficult roads and arrived in Búshihir. The weather was oppressively hot and we all fell ill. My sister was seriously ill and her condition was worse than the rest. We languished like this for over 30 days, until a ship arrived from London destined for Port Said. During our time in Búshihir, we stayed at the house of one of our relatives, the late Hájí Mírzá `Abdu'llah-Khán, the uncle of the Múvaqqaru'd-Dawlih. He was the Governor of Búshihir and the southern ports, and the representative of the British government for commerce and political affairs. He had been instrumental in freeing Muhammad Khán-i-Balúch from trouble in Shiraz.<sup>18</sup>

After we left Búshihir and were on the high seas, difficulties intensified and we were assailed from every direction by tremendous hardship, distress and suffering. At one time, near the port of Masqat, we faced severe storms that lasted about ten hours and our ship had to weather the huge waves of an angry sea. That incident was not quite over and we had not had any rest, when a hole developed in the side of our ship, which nearly caused her to sink. And then, for the third time, the ship's engine caught fire. But eventually, through the infinite grace and bounty of the Ancient Beauty, we reached Port Said unscathed and our ship anchored.

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<sup>17</sup> Circa 16 September 1890

<sup>18</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*.

When we disembarked, we did not know where to go or what to do, so we stood perplexed in a corner and occupied ourselves in conversation. Then my older brother, the late Áqá Siyyid Áqáy-i-Afnán, who was fluent in English and Arabic, arrived and greeted us warmly. After several years of separation, we were seeing each other again. He took us to his home and, on the way, we saw our father, who was on his way to welcome us. Tenderly, he embraced each one of us and showered us with his love and affection. At long last, the grace of God had surrounded us and the hardship of the journey was over.

### **First Pilgrimage: In the Presence of Bahá'u'lláh**

We stayed in Port Said for seven months, until my late father wrote to Bahá'u'lláh seeking permission for us to attain His presence. Permission was granted.

### **Arrival at Haifa**

We left Port Said on 7 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1308 A.H. [14 July 1891], spent the next day aboard the ship and, that evening, arrived at the port of Haifa. At dawn on 9 Dhi'l-Hajjih, the ship anchored at the port of Haifa, and, with intense eagerness and anticipation, we got ready to disembark. [The prospect of fulfilling] our life-long desire to place our brow at His Most Holy Threshold and gaze on the Countenance of the Beloved of the world overjoyed us. The thought of being able to kiss the ground He walked on - an act that was the highest aspiration of the bygone Prophets and saints - caused our beings to tremble with extreme delight. With great humility, we called to mind that we were about to set foot on a land that the spirit of the Holy Ones, Prophets of old, and Manifestations of past ages circumambulated in adoration. Tears of joy flowed uncontrollably from our eyes. My brother [Áqá Siyyid Áqá], who, along with our father, had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh<sup>19</sup> before, was constantly counseling us about how we should behave in the presence of the Blessed Perfection. He emphasized that, at His Threshold, we must be the essence of submissiveness and reverence.<sup>20</sup>

Eventually, the first believer to welcome us came on the boat. It was the late honored Manshádí<sup>21</sup>. In accordance with the Blessed Beauty's instructions, he arranged for our landing, guided us through customs and, from there, led us to the tent of Bahá'u'lláh, which was pitched at the foot of Mount

<sup>19</sup> In the eleventh leaf of *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*, Bahá'u'lláh announces the arrival of the Núri'd-Dín and his son, "Recently the Afnáns and Amin – upon them be My glory and loving kindness – attained Our presence and beheld Our countenance." Bahá'u'lláh. "Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise)." In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and translated by Habíb Taherzadeh, with the assistance of a committee at the Bahá'í World Centre. 1st pocket-sized ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, p. 73

<sup>20</sup> Portions of Mirzá Habíb's recollections of Bahá'u'lláh have previously appeared in Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1980. chapter 41.

<sup>21</sup> During the time of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, Siyyid Taqiy-i-Manshádí lived in Haifa where he served in many capacities.



Carmel. For this unique visit and as a sign of respect, a special Arabic custom was prepared for us. But there was no time to change and we went along in our European-style clothing. I well remember that the sun had not quite come up over the crest of the mountains, and the air was particularly fresh and vivifying. [As we waited by His tent], the honored Manshádí was asking about Shiraz and the friends. Suddenly, Mírzá Mustafa, [later] known as Abu Hurayrih<sup>22</sup>, an attendant of Bahá'u'lláh who in later years broke the Covenant<sup>23</sup>, appeared and guided us to His house<sup>24</sup> and to the blessed Presence. Our one ardent wish was realized! He held aside the curtain and we saw the Blessed Beauty standing in the middle of the room. When we saw His sacred Figure and luminous Visage, we became utterly oblivious of all else, as tears poured from our eyes. Overwhelmed, we circumambulated His blessed Person.

Bahá'u'lláh invited us to sit. He sat on the mandar. With the utmost respect, we four brothers sat on the floor on our heels. On our right, Mírzá Áqá Jan was in attendance and the samovar was brewing tea in front of him. Bahá'u'lláh said, "Pour tea for the young Afnáns. They have just come ashore." Then the Tongue of Grandeur spoke these sweet words, "O flowers of the rose-garden of the honored Afnán! You are welcome; you are welcome. Your departure from Shiraz was very difficult and tiring. The divine will and the resoluteness of the honored Afnán brought you to this threshold of holiness. During your sea journey, dangers beset you and God protected you. Consider, this very day several thousand people are treading the ground between Safa and Marwih [on one foot].<sup>25</sup> The Beloved of the world of being is present in this land, but they are oblivious. All are heedless; all are unaware; all are uninformed. You are the true pilgrims." Three times He repeated, "You are the true pilgrims!" At that moment, as I sat enraptured and listening attentively to the utterances of the Desire of the world, these lines of Rúmi<sup>26</sup> came to my mind:

O pilgrims on pilgrimage, where are ye, where are ye?  
the Beloved is here, come hither ye, come hither ye.

The Beloved is your neighbor, wall by wall;  
why in the wilderness lost are ye all?

<sup>22</sup> Named after a fickle follower of Prophet Muhammad. He was the son of Mírzá Mustafay-i-Naraqí (d. 1867), who became a martyr in Tabriz; see Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, pp. 204-5 and 237-8.

<sup>23</sup> After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, he became a follower of Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí. He lived towards the end of his life near Tiberias, on a property belonging to Mírzá Majdi'd-Din (d. 1955), a nephew of Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>24</sup> During Bahá'u'lláh's sojourns in Haifa, houses in the German Templar colony would be rented for Him.

<sup>25</sup> The Festival of Sacrifice ('Id-i-Qurban) occurs on the tenth day of Dhi'l-Hajjih. Part of the rites of pilgrimage includes traversing seven times the distance between two mounds where, according to traditions, Hagar ran back and forth seven times, seeking a spring to quench her son's thirst.

<sup>26</sup> Maulana Jalali'd-Din Rumi (1207-1273) was the most renowned of all mystic poets of Iran. Jalál al-Dín Rúmi. *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rūmī*. Edited and translated with commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson. 8 vols. London: Luzac, 1925-1940.

At that very moment, the blessed Countenance turned to this servant and said, “The mystics have also had something to say on this matter.” Once again, He ordered more tea for us. After that, we left His presence.

### **With Bahá’u’lláh in Haifa**

The house next to His blessed residence was rented for us. We lived in close proximity to the house of the Abhá Beauty. Attaining His blessed threshold, meeting the believers living in the Holy Land and consorting with the veterans of the Faith had blotted everything else from our minds. The sweetness of living and the spiritual ecstasies that we experienced in those days lie beyond description. The pen is unable, and the words inadequate, to convey those feelings.

Haifa was hot during these days. We were not familiar with, or accustomed to, its climate and had a very difficult time, often falling ill. But the bounties of our beloved Lord were measureless and the sea of His grace and munificence was ever billowing. I remember well one day when we were called to His presence at three o’clock in the afternoon. I had a very bad fever. My brothers dressed and prepared to attain His presence. I also got up [from my bed] to accompany them, when my oldest brother tried to stop me from going. He said, “Perhaps you are not allowed to attain Bahá’u’lláh’s presence in such a feverish condition.” I replied, “He is aware of my condition.” I went into His presence. The Blessed Perfection turned to me and said, “You have a fever,” at which I bowed my head. He continued, “Fever is a product of this land. Whoever comes here must suffer from it.” Then He ordered tea to be given to us. Immediately I began to perspire so much that my clothes were soaked. Then the Blessed Perfection said, “Go and change your clothes. Fever will not trouble you again.” Throughout the remaining nine months we spent in the Holy Land, I did not suffer from fever again.

After 15 days, my brother [Áqá Siyyid Áqá] returned to Port Said and my father came [to Haifa]. My father was the recipient of infinite bounties and kindness from the Blessed Perfection.

During these days in 1308 A.H. [1891], the episode of the seven martyrs of Yazd took place. When the news was brought to Bahá’u’lláh, it caused Him tremendous sorrow and anguish.<sup>27</sup> For nine whole days, verses were not revealed from the heaven of divine knowledge and no one was allowed into His presence.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of this tragic event, which was brought about by Mas’ud ibn Nasiri’-d-Din Zillu’s-Sultan (1949-1918) and his son, Husain Mirzá, Jalalu’-d-Dawlih (1870-1913), in the spring/summer of 1891, see: Bayda, Abú’l-Qásim. *Tarikh-i-Bayda*. Manuscript in private hands. ; Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhuru’l-Haqq* vol 5, pp 404-26; Málmírí, Háji Muhammad Táhir. *Tárikh-i shuhadá-i-Yazd*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Karachi: Mu’assasah-i Matbú’át-i Pákistán,[1979].; and Momen, Moojan. *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, pp. 301-5.

On the ninth day, the friends were all summoned, and we had that honor too. The deep grief that surrounded His Blessed Person was indescribable. He spoke extensively about the Qájárs and their misdeeds. Afterwards, He mentioned the events of Yazd. Sternly, the Tongue of Grandeur spoke of the Jalálu'd-Dawlih<sup>28</sup> and Zillu's-Sultan: "Zillu's-Sultan<sup>29</sup> wrote Us a letter in his own handwriting and gave it to Hájí Sayyah<sup>30</sup> to bring. He asked Us to help him, with [the support of] the Bábís, to destroy his Sháh-Bábá<sup>31</sup>. 'If You do this', he wrote, 'I will give You liberty; I will give You official recognition; I will help and support You; I will make amends for the past. Whatever Sháh-Bába did, I will do just the opposite.' The entire letter was full of such statements. The answer We gave him was this: 'Praying for the Sháh is obligatory for both you and Us. Never again write to Us in this vein. Never again put such requests to this Wronged One. We have arisen to improve the morals of a number of people wronged in this world. If We were after leadership, what authority would have been better than holding the position of a minister in Iran?' When he received this answer from Us, he despaired of Us, and is now behaving in this manner. Were We to send his letter to Nasiri'd-Din Sháh, he would skin him alive. But God is the Concealer. He draws veils over the deeds of His servants." Then He said, "Do not be sad; do not be downcast; do not let your hearts bleed. The sacred tree of the Cause of God is watered by the blood of the martyrs. Unless watered, a tree does not grow and bear fruit. Before long, you will see the name of the Qájárs obliterated, and the land of Iran cleansed of the filth of their existence and the odor of their names."

Regarding the Jalálu'd-Dawlih, the Blessed Perfection said, "This ungrateful one has done what has caused the eyes of the denizens of the Supreme Concourse to shed tears of blood." Just 32 years from that day, the rule of the Qájárs came to an end and they were overthrown. After nine days, the first Tablet revealed from the heaven of divine will was the Lawh-i-Dunyá [Tablet of the World]<sup>32</sup>, with which our father was honored. That reference to the oppression of the Jalálu'd-Dawlih can be read in this Tablet: "*The tyrant of the land of Yá (Yazd) committed that which has caused the Concourse on High to shed tears of blood.*"<sup>33</sup> That night, Bahá'u'lláh gave a copy of the Tablet of the World, in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin,

<sup>28</sup> Sultan-Husayn Mírzá, the eldest son of Zillu's-Sultan, was made the deputy governor of Fars at the age of 13. In 1888, he was appointed the governor-general of Yazd and, to amass a personal fortune, killed a large number of people, including seven believers. He was dismissed from the office in 1892, but re-appointed to it in 1903 when, once again, he launched a Bahá'í pogrom in which nearly 100 believers perished. During the Constitutional Revolt of 1905-11, he sided with the revolution and the despotic Muhammad-'Alí Sháh (1872-1925) imprisoned him for a while, ordered him stripped of his estate, and eventually exiled him to Europe. For a biography, see *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran* 2:77-80.

<sup>29</sup> For a biography, see *In the Land of Refuge*.

<sup>30</sup> Hájí Muhammad-'Alí-i-Sayyah-i-Mahallati (1836-1924) was an attendant of Zillu's-Sultan and his autobiography is published under the title, *Khatirat Haji Sayyah*, edited by Hamid Sayyad.

<sup>31</sup> His father, Nasiri'd-Din Sháh (r. 1848-1896), had not selected Zillu's-Sultan as the heir to the throne.

<sup>32</sup> Bahá'u'lláh. "Lawh-i-Dunyá (Tablet of the World)." In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Pp. 81-97.

<sup>33</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 85.

to my late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg. He commented, “At the beginning of this Tablet, mention has been made of your father, the Afnán. We therefore bestow it upon you.”

### With Bahá'u'lláh in `Akká

Fifteen days after my father arrived and the days of our attainment were drawing to a close, an epidemic of cholera broke out in Syria and Lebanon. The government set up quarantine around the borders. My father asked for permission to leave, but Bahá'u'lláh did not grant it, remarking: “While the epidemic rages, you are not to leave.” For us, this was the supreme felicity. Autumn came and the air of Haifa and `Akká improved. The Blessed Perfection moved from Haifa to the Mansion of Bahjí. We were provided with a small house next to the blessed Mansion<sup>34</sup>. Our house was situated so that we had a good view of His blessed chambers. When we got up at dawn to say our prayers, most of the time we saw that His chamber was lit and Tablets were being revealed. The Blessed Perfection was pacing the room and the amanuensis was busy writing. I do not remember anyone other than Mírzá Áqá Jan taking down the revealed Words in those days.

During that time, the late Mírzá Yúsuf Khán-i-Vujdání<sup>35</sup> and the late Áqá Siyyid Asadu'llah-i-Qumí<sup>36</sup> were tutoring the Aghsán in the Mansion. The Blessed Perfection instructed my brothers, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, Hájí Mírzá Diyá' and myself to attend their lessons too. The late Mishkin-Qalam taught us calligraphy. Every day, we went to the room on the ground floor of the Mansion set aside as a classroom. There we received our tuition, and we passed our precious days oblivious of all our blessings. Our father constantly admonished us, so that we would never act improperly in the presence of the Blessed Beauty or in the Mansion.

On the first day of Muharram 1309 A.H. [7 August 1891], the Blessed Perfection celebrated the festival [of the anniversary of the birth of the Báb by the lunar calendar]. He called together all the friends, and we attained His presence as well. My father was corpulent and suffered from rheumatism. He could not sit on the floor. The Blessed Perfection said, “Bring a chair for the Afnán,” and one of the attendants provided a chair for him. Bahá'u'lláh then said, “Bring chairs for his sons as well,” and so we were all seated on chairs. The entire company of resident believers and pilgrims were in His presence.

<sup>34</sup> The date of Bahá'u'lláh's first arrival at the Mansion of Bahji is given as September 1879 in *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 362. However, in a Tablet dated 11 Rabi'u'l-Avval 1298 A.H. [11 February 1881], Bahá'u'lláh tells Núri'd-Dín that it had been only a month since He arrived at the Mansion; see *Núri'd-Dín's Collection*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> Previously, a mystic of the `Alí-Allahy order (also known as Ahl-i-Haqq). He was a renowned teacher of the Faith from Kirmanshah.

<sup>36</sup> A trusted believer who served in the Holy Land with distinction during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá.

On that day, His blessed utterances mainly concerned division and disunity in religion. He stated, “Islam was a good religion, but they destroyed it. Differences arose from the beginning of the Dispensation and, after the ascension of the Prophet, the foundation of Islam was shattered. Division first appeared in the house of the Prophet. When the Messenger of God [Muhammad] was ill and His companions<sup>37</sup> gathered about His deathbed, He asked for a pen and paper to write His Will. `Umar said, ‘He is delirious.’ His Holiness `Alí responded, ‘Sickness and fever have no effect on the condition of the Prophets; they are always inspired. Present Him with writing materials and see what guidance He gives.’ `Umar responded, ‘The Book of God is sufficient unto us.’ Those same words became the cause of division, and the world and Islam have suffered since. The same words ‘the Book of God is sufficient unto us’ broke the back of the Prophet’s daughter. The same words ‘the Book of God is sufficient unto us’ resulted in the slaying of `Uthmán. The same words ‘the Book of God is sufficient unto us’ brought about the Battle of Camels<sup>38</sup>. The same words ‘the Book of God is sufficient unto us’ split `Alí’s forehead. The same words ‘the Book of God is sufficient unto us’ precipitated the episode of the land of Taf and the martyrdom of Husayn ibn `Alí. The same words ‘the Book of God is sufficient unto us’ sent the House of Immaculacy<sup>39</sup> into slavery and scattered it in all directions. The same words ‘the Book of God is sufficient unto us’ ultimately assailed the holy breast of the Exalted One [the Báb]. He then raised His hand and stated, ‘Our enemies are also in Our sleeve.’”

Afterwards, the Blessed Perfection, Himself, distributed baqlavá [baklava]<sup>40</sup> to the friends present. He said, “This is the day on which Hadrat-i-Mubashshir<sup>41</sup> set foot in this nether world and illumined it with His dazzling brilliance. There is every reason to rejoice.” He then dismissed us all. After that, the friends gathered in smaller groups in the surrounding grounds of the Mansion beneath the Spruce and fir trees and, with tremendous excitement, repeated Bahá’u’lláh’s words to ensure that they remembered them accurately.

The next day, the second day of Muharram, was the anniversary of the birth of the Lord of Days and the World of Being<sup>42</sup>. In the morning, all the pilgrims, visitors and resident believers were summoned to the presence of the All-Knowing One. Bahá’u’lláh spoke about the sublimity of His advent, the power of the Most Exalted Pen, the circumstances of His exile, and the arrival at the Most Great Prison. Then He spoke extensively about the

<sup>37</sup> The Islamic traditions maintain that four believers were present: Abu Bakr, `Umar ibn Khattab, `Uthman ibn Affan and `Alí ibn Talib; see Tahezadeh, Adib. *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992., p. 156.

<sup>38</sup> A watershed battle led by `Ayyishih, a wife of Muhammad and a daughter of Abu-Bakr, against Imam `Alí and His companions, marking a division within Islam.

<sup>39</sup> The descendants of Muhammad and `Alí; implies the Imams and Their families.

<sup>40</sup> A traditional sweetmeat

<sup>41</sup> lit. His Holiness, the Herald (the Báb)

<sup>42</sup> Bahá’u’lláh’s birth took place on 2 Muharram 1233 A.H./12 November 1817.

aggression and transgressions of the tyrants and divines. He said, “Nasiri’-d-Din Shah and `Abdu’l-`Aziz both transgressed against Us and harmed the body of the Cause of God, but the tyranny of `Abdu’l-`Aziz was by far the more severe, because he banished, without any reason, the Wronged One of the worlds to the Most Great Prison. Nasiri’-d-Din Sháh, however, because of the ignorant action of the believers in the early days of the Cause, whenever he strokes his limbs and feels the pellets under his skin<sup>43</sup>, is roused in anger to commit these harsh deeds and adopt tyrannical measures against the friends, spilling the blood of innocent people. Notwithstanding all these injuries inflicted upon them by the Sháh and the government, the friends do not stop practicing their Faith openly and do not observe wisdom. You cannot blame them, because two great festivals have been joined into one<sup>44</sup>, foreshadowing a brilliant future for the Cause of God in all corners of the world.” Then the Blessed Perfection spoke these two verses<sup>45</sup>:

“These times more bitter than venom shall pass,  
And once again, times as sweet as sugar shall come our way.”

When He finished His blessed words, He graced us with sweetmeats and we left His presence.

The glad tidings uttered on that day by the Author of the Cause were realized not long after, when the hand of His believers raised the banner of God’s religion in various corners of the world: the Western countries, the provinces of India, `Ishqábád, and many other territories of the globe. In the early years of the ministry of the Center of the Covenant, the first group of American pilgrims, with utmost humility and indescribable gratitude, arrived in the Holy Land and attained the presence of the Appointed Beauty.

I have already mentioned that our house was adjacent to the blessed Mansion. Our practice was to wake at dawn to carry out our devotions, recite Tablets of Visitation and perform our daily obligatory prayers. One morning, before sunrise, an attendant came with the news that the Blessed Perfection was coming to our house. In this way, He placed the crown of everlasting honor upon the heads of these humble servants. The tidings made us weep uncontrollably with joy and we hurried out [to welcome Him]. We saw His blessed Person coming towards our house with great majesty and glory. We all prostrated, kissed His feet and made the earth trodden by His blessed feet the kohl of our eyes. Each one of us in turn was favored with His tender blessings and was given a share of His infinite generosity. He went inside our house and, in doing so, conferred upon us an everlasting honor. I offered Him a cup of tea. The Tongue of Grandeur stated, “Well

<sup>43</sup> See *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 599-600.

<sup>44</sup> Regarding the celebration of the Báb’s Birth and His own, in *Questions and Answers*, question 2, Bahá’u’lláh has revealed, “*These two days are accounted as one in the sight of God.*” Bahá’u’lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. Haifa: Bahá’i World Centre, 1992.p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> These lines are by Hafiz.

done!” He drank half of it and gave the rest to me. He also gave me a black rosary made of dark olive-wood that He was carrying. I kissed His hands. That rosary, which has been as dear to me as life itself, is now placed in the Archives of the House of the Báb in Shiraz.

Again, I have mentioned that His blessed chamber was visible from our house. We saw Him several times at dawn and early morning while He spoke the revealed Word. Mírzá Áqá Jan wrote it down as He uttered it. Mírzá Áqá Jan used to have several reed pens well cut and pointed, with ink and paper ready. The flow of divine verses from the heaven of Revelation was swift. It was like a surging ocean. Mírzá Áqá Jan wrote as quickly as he could - so quickly that, at times, the pen slipped out of his hand. He would promptly take up another pen. There were times when he could not keep up and would say: “I can’t write.” Then the Blessed Perfection would repeat what He had spoken.

The Blessed Perfection instructed my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, to make a copy of *Qasídiy-i-`Izz-i-Varqá’íyyih*<sup>46</sup>. When he had finished the task and presented it, he received much commendation and praise from Bahá’u’lláh, and was favored with a pen-case made in Isfahán, which held a silver inkstand. That pen-case is now held in the Archives of the Blessed House [of the Báb].

On another occasion, Bahá’u’lláh called me by myself and, after showering His indescribable blessings on me, stated, “We have asked Mírzá Yúsf Khán and Siyyid Assadu’llah to pay particular attention to your lessons and instructions.” I bowed down. With His blessed hands, He gave me a bottle of rose-water saying, “This rose-water comes from Qamsar of Káshán. It has taken 40 days to reach this land. God has created this rose-water for such a day as this, which is the Prince of days.” He then dismissed me. I had the bottle of rose-water until not long ago, and some of the friends would use it to perfume their faces and hairs. Now I deeply regret not having saved what was given to me by the Hands of the divine sovereignty of the Blessed Perfection.

One evening, Abu-Hurayrih announced that the Beloved of the world had decided to visit the Garden of Junaynih<sup>47</sup> on the following morning and had asked all pilgrims and resident believers to accompany Him. I speak the truth when I say, the joy of knowing that we would be in the presence the Blessed Beauty for several hours the next day kept me awake that night until morning. At times, I was rapt in supplication and prayer, and at other moments filled with euphoria and excitement. The night passed in this way and, at early dawn, I faced His blessed chamber offering prayers of

<sup>46</sup> A poem of 127 verses composed by Bahá’u’lláh in Sulaymaniyyih; see Bahá’u’lláh. *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A’lá*. 7 vols. Tehran: Mu’assasih-i Milli-yi Matbu’at-i Amri, 1963-1968, vol. 3, pp. 196-215. Bahá’u’lláh. *Ode of the Dove (Qasídiy-i-Varqá’íyyih)*. Translated by Juan R. I. Cole. [s.l.]: Bahá’í Library Online, [n.d.].

<sup>47</sup> Known also as Bagh-i-Jamal, it is situated close to the Mansion of Mazra’ih.

thanksgiving and praise. Before sunrise, we all gathered by the gate of the Mansion. An hour later, Bahá'u'lláh came downstairs. A white donkey was brought for Him to ride on it. This donkey was a gift of the late Áqá Ghulam-`Alíy-i-Kashi and Áqá Muhammad-Hashim-i-Káshí. The rest of the friends followed Him on foot towards Junaynih. Hájí Khavar<sup>48</sup>, a resident of the Holy Land for many years and a fairly tall man, held an umbrella over the head of Bahá'u'lláh to protect Him from the sun. The air was extremely fresh and invigorating. We sensed that, from the pleasant air of `Akká, the spirit of the poet of Shiraz had soared with the verse:

The morning breeze is fragrant as ambergris today,  
As my beloved moves towards the meadow.

Eventually, we reached the Garden, which had been prepared by attendants and believers. They had assembled all the items necessary for receiving the Blessed Perfection and the other friends. The Garden paths were very charming and attractive. The trees, grass, flowers and orchard danced with joy in the breeze, while the sweet-singing birds were crying out in ecstasy and merriment, all praising the grace and blessing of the presence of their Beloved. On that day, the Countenance of the Blessed Perfection radiated with the greatest joy and He paid tribute to and commended each of the friends. In such an atmosphere, lunch was served.

After lunch, all the believers were present at yet another spiritual gathering in Bahá'u'lláh's presence. It was then that `Abdu'l-Bahá arrived from the city [of `Akká] and the Ancient Beauty commanded us: "The Master<sup>49</sup> is coming. Hasten to welcome Him." I should note that a similar event occurred on several other occasions. I will describe the details at a later stage. It was evident that, from that time, the Blessed Perfection was planting in the spirit and hearts of the friends seeds of humility, submissiveness, mindfulness of the Covenant and faithfulness towards Him Whom God hath purposed [`Abdu'l-Bahá]. He would always teach the believers about the exalted station and hidden reality of the beloved Master.

And so we went out to welcome `Abdu'l-Bahá and, in His company, once again attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. With extreme humility and attention, `Abdu'l-Bahá sat in His presence and gave permission for the pilgrims to sit as well. Then, the Tongue of Purity spoke words with this meaning: "The garden was not pleasant enough this morning. But now, with the arrival of the Master, it has become most pleasant." Then, turning towards `Abdu'l-Bahá, He observed, "It would have been exceedingly good if you had come this morning." `Abdu'l-Bahá replied, "The Mutasarrif Pasha and some other of the city's inhabitants sent word that they were coming. On Your behalf, I had to receive them and offer them hospitality."

<sup>48</sup> An attendant of Bahá'u'lláh's household.

<sup>49</sup> The word 'Áqá' has been used throughout the original as the term Bahá'u'lláh used to refer to `Abdu'l-Bahá. This has been rendered as 'the Master.'



The Blessed Perfection smiled and said, “The Master is Our shield and the shield of everyone else. All live at ease, all know utmost comfort and tranquility. Associating with men such as these is very, very difficult. It is the Master who stands up to everything and supplies the means for the well-being and peace of all the friends. May God preserve Him from the evil of the envious and inimical.” “One day in Baghdad,” Bahá’u’lláh continued, “a beggar asked for alms. We gave him one majídi<sup>50</sup> and he told Us: ‘Go in peace, young man; may Hadrat-i-`Abbás<sup>51</sup> give you support.’ He prayed for Us – it was a good prayer.”

In short, on that day, the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh towards all [of us] were extremely generous. About an hour before sunset, the Sovereign of the world decided to return to the Mansion and, as in the morning, we all walked back. At the gate, we were dismissed from His presence.

The distance between the city of `Akká and the Mansion is about four to five kilometers. The Bagh-i-Jamál is one of the gardens on the outskirts of the city, near the Mansion. When you pass by this garden, one comes within full view of the Mansion. The door to the chamber of the Blessed Perfection opened this way. Whenever `Abdu’l-Bahá approached by this route on a steed, He would dismount as soon as the Mansion came into view and walk the rest of the way to the Mansion with the utmost humility and reverence.

One day, all the friends and the Aghsán were in Bahá’u’lláh’s presence. I well remember that among them were the following: Nabíl-i-A`zam, Afnán-i-Kabír, Áqá Ridá [Qannád] Shírází, Ustád Muhammad-`Alíy-i-Salmání<sup>52</sup>, Mishkin-Qalam, my late father, and attendants such as Áqá Muhammad-Hasan of the Pilgrim House. Suddenly, the Blessed Perfection turned round to look at the plain and, seeing `Abdu’l-Bahá approaching the Mansion, said, “The Master is coming; go and welcome Him.” We all hurried out and attained the presence of “Him round Whom all names revolve”<sup>53</sup> and, in His company, went back to the presence of the Blessed Perfection.

On that day, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí<sup>54</sup>, the other Aghsán, Mírzá Áqá Jan, Siyyid `Alíy-i-Afnán, and [Mírzá] Madji`d-Din<sup>55</sup> were present. At a later

<sup>50</sup> A currency of the Ottoman Empire, installed by Sultan `Abdu’l-Majid (1823-61).

<sup>51</sup> `Abbas (d. 680), a brother of Imam Husayn, was the standard-bearer on the plain of Karbala and the last of His men to stand with his Brother. Subsequent to his martyrdom, he has been greatly revered and extolled by the Shi`i community. `Abdu’l-Bahá was named `Abbas after His grandfather, Mírzá `Abbas-i-Nuri (d. 1839).

<sup>52</sup> A poet and native of Isfahan and Bahá’u’lláh’s barber. He is the author of an important narrative, translated Salmaní, Muhammad-`Alí. *My Memories of Bahá’u’lláh*. Translated by Marzieh Gail. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982. The original text is published electronically as *Sharh-i Hal*. East Lansing, Michigan: H-Bahai, 1997.

<sup>53</sup> One of the titles of `Abdu’l-Bahá given in the Tablet of the Land of Bá (Beirut); see Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1955., p. 136. Bahá’u’lláh. “Lawh-i-Ard-i-Bá (Tablet of the land of Bá).” In *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Pp. 225-228.

<sup>54</sup> During Bahá’u’lláh’s ministry, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí was known by the title Ghusn-i-Akbar (the Greater Branch). After he broke the Covenant, believers referred to him as the Naqid-i-Akbar (the Arch-Covenant-breaker), a title Mírzá Habib uses for him throughout the text. However, for clarity, his given name is used in this translation.

time, however, these same people were among the Covenant-breakers and, with the greatest vehemence and infidelity, rose against the Cause of God. After the ascension of the Blessed Perfection, this servant himself witnessed their treachery, betrayal, hypocrisy and imposture. During that period, which outwardly constituted Bahá'u'lláh's final days in this nether world, His words mostly focused on the issues of the protection of the Covenant and firmness in the divine Testament. On that occasion, He fervently admonished the people of the world to remain loyal to the Covenant and not to raise the standard of discord in the Cause of God. Then He raised His blessed hand and, pointing to the Aghsáns and Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, said, "Should one of Our Aghsán ever for a moment pass out from the shadow of the Cause, he will cease to be of any consequence." These words, emanating from the Source of compassion and the Heaven of divine will, were spoken so forcibly and with such a strong resonance that all in His presence were thunderstruck and shaken to their very core.

Another day, when we were in the presence of the Blessed Perfection, Mírzá Diyá'u'lláh<sup>56</sup> came in to ask, "Áqá seeks permission for us all to go with the friends to the Garden of Junaynih." "Who has said this?" Bahá'u'lláh inquired, to which Mírzá Diyá'u'lláh replied, "Áqáy-i-Ghusn-i-Akbar." Sternly, Bahá'u'lláh said, "There is only one Áqá; all the others have names. That one Áqá is 'Him round Whom all names revolve', the Ghusn-i-A`zam."<sup>57</sup> Throughout those days, the blessed Person of the Ancient Beauty used various statements and means to educate the friends on the sacred station of `Abdu'l-Bahá and warn them against breaking the divine Covenant. He constantly affirmed the unique and exalted station of the beloved Master so that the satanic whispers and intrigues of the enemies of God's Cause would not lead those clinging to the Sure Handle<sup>58</sup> away from the straight path, or cause the inhabitants of the Crimson Ark to drown in the sea of neglect and ignorance.

One late afternoon, we were in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván. The air was very fresh and redolent, and it was raining lightly. He spoke about the days in Baghdad and the harm inflicted upon the Cause of God by the Azalis<sup>59</sup>. He said, "Consider how unfair and truly void of faith they are. Because of the Mu'tamu'd-Dawlih's supplications in Isfahán, the Primal Point took the sister of Rajab-'Alí [Qahyir] as a wife so that she could look after His household needs. After the great Martyrdom and the most mighty Tragedy<sup>60</sup>, notwithstanding the explicit Text forbidding

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<sup>55</sup> A notorious Covenant-breaker of later years. He was a son of Mírzá Musa Kalim (d. 1887), Bahá'u'lláh's faithful brother.

<sup>56</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's son from a second marriage.

<sup>57</sup> See Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'is at the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 163.

<sup>58</sup> An allusion to the religion of God; see, for instance, Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>59</sup> The text refers to the followers of Mírzá Yahya Azal (1831-1912) as "Yamutiha" (literally: the dead).

<sup>60</sup> The martyrdom of the Báb took place on 9 July 1850.

marriage with the Báb's wives<sup>61</sup>, with utmost impudence, Azal at first took her as a wife and then, having absolutely no sense of shame or compunction, gave her to Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahání.<sup>62</sup> This act resulted in the mother of the Báb refusing to give her allegiance to the Faith for some time." As He spoke these words, the sorrow on His Countenance was evident and the friends, especially my father, were greatly affected and wept bitterly. Then the Blessed Perfection said, "Do not grieve. Praise be to God, the mother of that Blessed Being came to believe at the end. Their station is well above the conception of peoples and the understanding of Our servants."

Then, He continued to recall the days of Baghdad: "One day, several of the clergy came to visit Us. One of them asked, 'Where are you from?' 'We are from `Amá<sup>63</sup>,' We responded. He asked further, 'Where is `Amá? What sort of place is that?' We replied, '`Amá has a pleasant, heavenly air; the trees are fruitful; the plain is lusciously green; the rivers are flowing; its inhabitants are spiritual people.' He asked, 'Is it possible for us to go there?' We responded, 'No, it is impossible. Your place is not there.'"

He then related, "The day We left Baghdad, We moved to the Garden of Najíb Pasha and stayed there for 12 days. Each day, scores of the city's inhabitants came to visit Us and bid Us farewell. One day, among those who came was a group of the learned theologians. After attaining Our presence, one of them said, 'We were anticipating the appearance of the promised Mihdí, and the Siyyid-i-Shirází came forward with a claim. A number became His followers, gathered around Him, and did certain things. After that, we expected the manifestation of Husayn, and now You claim that Station. What are we to do now?' On that day," Bahá'u'lláh continued, "We told them what they were to do and said to them, 'You are to continue reading *Sharh-i-Lum`ah* and *Saybawayh*<sup>64</sup> until you return to where you belong.'"

<sup>61</sup> The Text of the Báb's injunction has not been located so far. However, there is a Qur'anic verse (Surah al-Ahzab) that provides for this restriction: "Nearer of kin to the faithful is the Prophet, than they are to their own selves. His wives are their mothers."

<sup>62</sup> During the Báb's six-month sojourn in Isfahan, He married Fatimih (1822?-1916), the sister of Mulla Rajab-`Alfí-i-Qahir, a prominent Bábí of that city. Some time after the Báb's martyrdom, she traveled to Baghdad, where she came under the influence of Siyyid Muhammad Isfahani and Mírzá Yahya Azal. Despite the Báb's injunction forbidding marriage with either of His wives after Him, Azal married her. A month later, however, after protests from his other wives, Azal divorced Fatimih and gave her in marriage to Siyyid Muhammad. She died in December 1916 in Tihran, aged 84. For further details, see Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*. London: George Ronald, 1970, pp. 34-5 n. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Rendered typically as 'eternal,' 'immortal,' or 'divine,' this term has many connotations, which all mean 'that which pertains to God'. An Islamic hadith maintains that Muhammad was asked, "Where is God?" and He responded, "In `amá."

<sup>64</sup> Both texts are used in the Shi'i seminarian training. The complete title of *Sharh-i-Lum`ah* is *ar-Rawdat al-bahíyyah fí sharh al-lum`ah al-Dimashqíyah* and was authored by Shaykh Zaynu'l-'Abidin Shahid ath-Thani (1506-1559). It is an exposition of *al-Lum`ah ad-Dimashqíyya* by Shaykh Muhammad ibn Makk Shahid al-Awwal (1333-1380). The text is used today in the madrassih for teaching jurisprudence (*fiqh*) at the secondary (*sutuh*) level. The second reference, *Saybawayh*, is named after a Shirazi jurist whose resting-place is located in Sang-i-Siyah, near the Masjid-i-Mushir (see Fasa'i, *Tarikh Farsnamih-i-Nasiri*, vol. 2, pp. 1021-3).

On another day, the Blessed Perfection mentioned the days of Baghdad and the tyranny and oppression of Shaykh `Abdu'l-Husayn [Tihrani]<sup>65</sup>, saying, "With the aid of Nasiri'd-Din Sháh and [Sultan] `Abdu'l-`Aziz, Shaykh `Abdu'l-Husayn tried hard to extinguish the light of God's Cause. But the effulgence of the Faith of God has illuminated the East and the West, and the vengeance and victory of the religion of God has made the necks of sovereigns bow down in humility. Before long, you will see all systems rolled up, and the peoples and nations of the world gather under the shade of the canopy of the Cause of God."

He then said, "Another day in Baghdad, a learned divine came to see Us. He had a tall, heavy frame and thick beard, was quite corpulent and was wearing a large turban. He greeted Us with a guttural tone and, when he sat down, began to recite convoluted and incomprehensible Arabic verses. We said to him, 'Kindly introduce yourself so that We might learn something about you.' He said, 'I am the seal of the ecclesiastics.' We responded, 'Insha'lláh, insha'lláh.'" On that day, the Blessed Perfection was extremely joyous and smiled frequently. He said, "Pray that God does not create another sect like the Shi`i."

On another day, Bahá'u'lláh spoke of Mullá `Alí-i-Sabzivari<sup>66</sup>, saying, "When Mullá `Alí was led to the place of his martyrdom, he instructed the executioner to open one of his veins. When a bit of his throat was cut, with his own sacred blood, he dyed his white beard red, calling out to the crowd, 'O people! On the day of His martyrdom on the field of Karbalá, Husayn ibn `Alí spoke these words: "Is there anyone truly capable of dispensing victory who will come to aid me?" But I say unto you, "O people, is there anyone truly capable of seeing who will come to behold me?"'" Bahá'u'lláh repeated several times: "What weighty words did that man speak, and how he bore witness to the truth of this Faith with his precious blood! People witnessed it but were not moved, and barbarously put to death that innocent soul." He then added, "All these strange events support the greatness of this blessed Cause. They will all be recorded in the pages of history and future generations will feel proud of them."

The late Hájí `Abú'l-Hasan [Bazzaz] Shirázi<sup>67</sup> was present and asked Bahá'u'lláh, "After the martyrdom of Husayn ibn `Alí, the sovereignty of

<sup>65</sup> Known as Shaykhu'l-`Iraqayn (d. 1869), he was a close ally of Mírzá Taqí Khán, the Amir-Kabir (d. 1852). He was sent by Nasiri'd-Din Sháh to the `Atabat to regild the dome of the Shrine of Imam Husayn and to cause trouble for Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>66</sup> One of the seven Bahá'is martyred in May 1891 in Yazd. Earlier, he had asked Bahá'u'lláh for this high station and, in a Tablet, was told to seek his heart's desire in Yazd. Forty days later, he attained his wish. For details, see Malmiri, *Tarikh-i-Shuhaday-i-Yazd*, pp. 32-56.

<sup>67</sup> In 1844, he had traveled on the same vessel with the Báb and Quddus, when They were going on pilgrimage to Mecca. He later recounted many details of that historic journey to Mírzá Habíb; see Rabbani, "The Báb in Shiraz: An Account by Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan", *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 2004, 91-127 (See also Afnan, Mírzá Habibu'llah. "The Báb in Shiraz." Translated by Ahang Rabbani. *Translations of Shaykhi, Bábí and Bahá'í Texts* (East Lansing, Mich.) no.11 (January 1998). ). He attained full certitude during the Báb's appearance at the Masjid-i-Vakil. He was the father of Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir Khán-i-Dihqan, a very influential Bahá'í in the administrative apparatus of Fars (see *In the Land of Refuge*).

Yazid lasted no more than three years. Why is it that, 50 years after the martyrdom of the Exalted One, Nasiri'd-Din Sháh still rules with full powers, inflicting day and night much injury on the Faith; and God has [seemingly] spared him?" Bahá'u'lláh replied, "God has given him this clemency because of the error of some believers in the early days and their assassination attempt on him. But he too will have his day. You will see."

### Departure from the Holy Land

Our stay in the Holy Land had been nine months long. Each day, we had been showered with new favors without deserving them. The infinite grace of God had surrounded us. The happiness of our good fortune was the wish of all the Prophets and saints of the past. The spread of cholera and illness had subsided and the day for us to leave was quickly approaching.

One afternoon, we were summoned to the presence of the Blessed Perfection in the Mansion of Bahjí. His blessed Person was standing in the middle of His chamber when we entered. Immersed in deep grief and sorrow, we circumambulated His Person and prostrated ourselves at His feet, as tears like spring-showers streamed uncontrollably from our eyes. With our emotions and words, we expressed our heart-felt gratitude for the glorious days we had in His presence. Then the Tongue of Purity spoke these sacred words: "Do not be sad; do not lament. If you attained Our presence once, your attainment was complete. Be assured that, under all conditions, We are with you. Why are you downcast? Port Said is very near. Whenever We call, you will hear Us. Do not be sorrowful; do not grieve. Be confident. The divine favors have surrounded you and will continue to envelop you." Again, He repeated, "If you attained Our presence once, your attainment was complete." Then He added, "For no other pilgrims were the blessings and circumstances as complete as they were for the Afnáns. Be happy; be thrilled; be radiant. The grace of God has surrounded you and will continue to embrace you everlastingly."

He sat down and invited us to sit also. With His blessed Hand, He passed to us the sacred Tablets that He had revealed for each one of us.<sup>68</sup> We reverently kissed His fingers and read the Tablets. They venerated and glorified each one of us. After nine months of being in His presence, we were now bidden farewell with these words: "God be with you."

From there, we went to `Akká and attained the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá. With tearful eyes and hearts set on fire, we anticipated our coming separation. We prostrated at His feet and, clinging to the hem of His robe, begged for His help with divine favors and confirmations. His blessed Being

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<sup>68</sup> The Tablet bestowed upon Mírzá Habíb on that occasion is in Bahá'u'lláh, INBMC, *Majmu'ih Athar-i-Qalam A`lá*, vol. 51, p. 354, no. 363; the original is kept in the Bahá'í Archives of the House of the Báb. A translation appears as the frontispiece of the publication.

lifted us from the ground and, kissing the brow of each of us, bid us farewell.

While these ephemeral servants were in `Akká, the Blessed Beauty called our mother and sister into His presence and showered them with much admiration and untold praise. As they were leaving, my mother kissed His blessed hand. The thought came to her that, if His ring were given to her as a means of attracting divine blessings and as a source of healing, all her wishes in this world would be realized. Shortly after, when they were in the presence of the Greatest Holy Leaf, one of the maidservants came in to present the ring as a gift, saying, “Bahá’u’lláh told me to present you with this ring.” For this divine favor, my mother cried out in joy and gratitude. She then bid farewell to the Khánúm, the other Varaqát<sup>69</sup>, and the wife of Bahá’u’lláh<sup>70</sup>. The ring of the Blessed Perfection is now held in the Archives of the House of the Báb. It has been a source of pride and joy for this family and our descendants.

Afterwards, my mother and sister attained the presence of `Abdu’l-Bahá one last time. Then, filled with deep sorrow, we all left the sacred city of `Akká for Haifa.

Outside the city gate, our much-loved companions, who had been friends to my father and our spiritual comrades for nine months, had gathered. With deep affection we all embraced and kissed each other farewell. They helped us board our carriage and we left for Haifa. In Haifa, the late Manshádí, along with our father, secured our boarding pass from the Namsavi Shipping Company. About an hour before dusk, accompanied by the honored Áqá Siyyid Taqí, we were on our way by boat to the destined ship. Our ship left [the Bay of Haifa] at about sunset. It is impossible for me to describe the feelings we experienced at that time and how the fond memories of those days overwhelmed us.

This was a brief summary of the memories of the days we beheld the countenance of God, which have remained with me after 50 years. God willing, I will now give my recollections of visiting `Abdu’l-Bahá and what I observed next.

One thing we came to realize after the ascension of the Blessed Beauty was that, at the moment we left, He had twice said to us, “If you attained our presence once, your attainment was complete.” The meaning of this blessed utterance was now clear: we would never be worthy to see His blessed

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<sup>69</sup> Literally ‘leaves,’ signifies the women of the Holy Household.

<sup>70</sup> Navvab (Asiyiyih Khánúm) had passed away in 1886. Therefore, this reference is to either Mahd-i-`Uliya or Gawhar Khánúm and, most likely, to the former.

countenance in this world again; outwardly He would be hidden behind veils, and His passing was near.<sup>71</sup>

### Education and Commerce in Egypt

The headquarters of my late father's commercial enterprise was in Cairo and he also had a branch office in Port Said. The late Áqá Ahmad [Yazdí]<sup>72</sup> and my older brother, the late Áqá Siyyid Áqá, were responsible for its affairs and supervised the branch office.<sup>73</sup> A few days after arriving in Port Said, we traveled to Cairo, where my late father had a room in Saray-i-Jawahiri. In that city, once again, he was immersed in business activities. While we assisted him in his daily work, we also continued our education, to develop a strong command of the Arabic language.<sup>74</sup>

In those days, several of the eminent friends in Cairo were engaged in commerce. This included men such as the late Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-i-Afshár<sup>75</sup>, Mírzá `Alí-Muhammad-i-Shirází, Hájí `Abdu'l-Karim-i-Kaziruni, Hájí Lutf-`Alíy-i-Namaziy-i-Shirází, Hájí Muhammad-i-Yazdí<sup>76</sup>, the late Hájí Niyyaz<sup>77</sup>, and several others that were either related to these individuals or worked in their place of business. The Iranian Consul-General<sup>78</sup> at that time was the late Mírzá Ridá Khán, the Bananu'l-Mulk<sup>79</sup>, the father of Áqá Mírzá Fadlu'lláh Khán-i-Banan<sup>80</sup>.

Before the ascension of the Blessed Beauty, Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání and Hájí Niyyaz were given permission to go on pilgrimage and had left for the Holy Land.

<sup>71</sup> Though the date of the Afnáns' departure is not noted, it is estimated to be in late March 1892. The ascension of Bahá'u'lláh occurred on 29 May 1892.

<sup>72</sup> The fourth and youngest son of Hájí `Abdu'r-Rahim-i-Qannad-i-Yazdi, he had married Munavvar Khánum, the youngest daughter of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Years later, both husband and wife broke the Covenant.

<sup>73</sup> When he arrived in Egypt, Núri'd-Dín established an import-export company called Shirkat-i-Ruhaniyyih.

<sup>74</sup> In a Tablet, `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed Mírzá Habib: "At nighttime, you must put effort into your studies and learning languages. Likewise, make an effort to learn as much about sciences and literature as you can. Since the divine confirmations render the Afnán victorious and triumphant, soon you will advance in all areas". `Abdu'l-Bahá. *Majmu'ih Makatib-i-Hadrat-i-`Abdu'l-Bahá*. Vol. 52, *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [c 1977], 348, no. 390, [Hereafter INBMC 52].

<sup>75</sup> A native of Yazd, he is best known for an important proof treatise known as *Risalih-i-Afshar* or *Bahru'l-Irfan*.

<sup>76</sup> The father of `Aziz Yazdi (1909-2004), a Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre during 1973-86.

<sup>77</sup> A native of Kirman and a travelling jewelry salesman.

<sup>78</sup> The Iranian Embassy was in Istanbul, with various branch consulates throughout the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>79</sup> His name was Rida Mustawfi. He was often referred to as Hakim-Banan. In 1884, he was given the title Bananu'l-Mulk and, four years later, was appointed as the chief of staff for the Zillu's-Sultan, the Governor-General of Isfahan. However, in 1890, out of fear for his life, he left Iran and took residence in Egypt. In the middle of 1892, he was appointed to the consulate in Cairo. After a while, he was dismissed from office and returned to Isfahan, where he passed away; see Bámdád, Mahdí. *Sharh-i Hál-i Rijál-i Irán dar Qarn-i 12, 13, 14 Hijri*. 4 vols. Tehran: Kitabfurushi-i Zuvvar, 1347-1353 Sh. [1968-1974]., vol 2, pp. 1-2.

<sup>80</sup> The secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz during much of the 1930s and 1940s; see *In the Land of Refuge*.

### News of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension

The great calamity and the supreme tragedy of the ascension of the Blessed Beauty – may my life be a sacrifice to the dust of His Sacred Threshold – happened two months and a few days after we left the Holy Land. With broken hearts and spirits and consumed by the fire of His separation, tears of sorrow, anguish and lamentation poured from the eyes of every denizen of the Crimson Ark and dweller beneath the tabernacle of His Cause. He Himself is my witness, I can never describe the unbearable pain brought on by knowing that I could not once again behold His blessed Countenance on this plane of existence! God alone knows that this pen is utterly incapable of recounting what happened during those dark days!<sup>81</sup>

The late [Mírzá Hasan] Khúrásání and Hájí Niyyaz were in `Akká at the setting of the Sun of Truth in the Holy Land. Also present was the honored Áqá Mírzá Taraz-i-Samandari, son of the illustrious Samandar, who had been among a group of pilgrims from Iran. He had arrived in the Holy Land a few months before the ascension and remained there for a while after that event. As a token of Bahá'u'lláh's grace, the bonds of our friendship and fraternity, first established during our days together in the presence of the Blessed Perfection, has grown ever stronger with the passage of these 55 years.<sup>82</sup>

In the days after the ascension of the Blessed Perfection, hearts were melted, spirits were downcast, and eyes cried bitter tears of anguish. It was a particularly unbearable and sorrowful time for those who had been in His presence and had beheld that mighty Sovereign of the world of being. Many of the friends, men and women alike, gathered at night or during the day, in various homes, raising the cry of “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!” and supplicating for the honor of martyrdom and self-sacrifice in the path of His glorious Cause.

The month of Dhi'l-Qa`dih passed and, on 10 Dhi'l-Hajjih [6 July 1892], the `Id-i-Qurbán (the festival of Sacrifice) was observed. As was customary in those days, all the Iranian merchants would go to the Iranian Consulate, visiting the Consul-General and wishing him well. Typically, on such occasions, they would be served lunch and would stay until late in the afternoon. Because the Bahá'í merchants and Muslim merchants associated very little, each would occupy a different side of the reception hall in the course of their visits.

Because of his age and prominence in the community, my late father was the senior member and leader of the Bahá'í merchants. Consequently, we went

<sup>81</sup> A detailed and poignant description of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension is given in Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhuru'l-Haqq*, vol 5, pp. 433-72.

<sup>82</sup> See Samandari, Taráz Alláh. *Moments with Bahá'u'lláh, Memoirs of the Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandari*, translated by Mehdi Samandari and Marzieh Gail. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996.



to the Consulate led by him. [Because we were mourning Bahá'u'lláh's ascension], our intention was to leave after visiting for a few minutes, and not participate in the celebration.

When we arrived at the Consulate, as was customary, we sat on one side. At that moment, however, the Bananu'l-Mulk [Consul-General], without realizing that a number of Bahá'ís had arrived, said, "According to a report in a recent issue of the Hikmat Newspaper, the Prophet of the Bábís has passed away." He made this comment with such a mocking tone that it greatly offended the friends [the believers]. With a quick signal from my father, the Bahá'í group left the gathering without the least acknowledgement to the host or bidding anyone farewell.

Noting our departure, the Bananu'l-Mulk was greatly surprised by the turn of events. Later, we heard from other Iranian merchants present [in the gathering] that they had all reproached him, saying, "This place is not Iran and you cannot say things that are not civil or good mannered. Those people who left the gathering are not ordinary and commonplace people. They rank among the most respected merchants and should be seen as a source of pride by the Iranian government. If an amiable reconciliation is not brought about immediately, this incident will become a cause of great inconvenience, directly affecting you." This warning from the Muslim merchants, coupled with the powerful effect of our departure, left the Consul-General terrified of its possible consequences.

From the consulate building, we all went to my father's commercial office. We gathered in a room adjacent to his office where all the Bahá'í meetings took place. This room was decorated with a very large and unique calligraphy by Mishkin-Qalam, depicting two ornamented birds that made up the words of the Greatest Name. There was also a large circular table in the middle of the room. Most of us gathered around this table to discuss the event that had just taken place in the Consulate.

Some of the friends thought that our departure had insulted the Iranian Consul and that he had unwittingly acted in an impertinent way. I remember vividly that my late father was very upset and cried out in a raised voice, "He has erred greatly on something that he should have known better! I know him very well from our days in Shiraz and we have been friends ever since. However, we acted in the name of the Blessed Beauty and out of respect for the Greatest Name. I am prepared to have my blood spilled in this path! Mark my words: the Bananu'l-Mulk is now greatly repentant and ashamed [because of our departure]."

While this discussion was taking place, Hájí Sayyah<sup>83</sup>, who lived in Egypt at the time and was a confidant to both the Bahá'ís and the Muslims, entered the room. He related that the Bananu'l-Mulk had asked him to convey, with great reverence, his apologies for what he had said and further begged the Bahá'ís to return to the festivities so that the Consulate's traditional celebration could continue amiably. Hájí Sayyah added, "The Consul must send a report of the event to the Iranian Embassy in Istanbul. If you do not participate, it is possible that certain ill-wishers will connive and cause trouble for the Consul." My father replied, "Inform the Bananu'l-Mulk on our behalf that, as he has noted, we are currently mourning the departure of our Beloved and cannot participate in the festivities. Our visit this morning was only for the purpose of meeting him. However, we expect that, from now on, he will show proper respect to everyone with his remarks. This country is not Iran, where one can say and do as one pleases."

This warning and the gathering of the friends had greatly frightened the Bananu'l-Mulk. Hájí Sayyah had also added his own flavor to the message by reporting [to the Consul], "They have all gathered in Áqá Mírzá Áqá's office and are deliberating on plans to unseat and impeach the Consul." Consequently, before we had ended our discussions, Hájí Sayyah returned and, once again, on behalf of the Bananu'l-Mulk, fervently implored everyone to return to the Consulate and participate in the festivities. My father reiterated, "The Bahá'ís will not take part in your celebration," and repeated what he had said earlier.

Ultimately, the result of this incident was that the Bananu'l-Mulk became a loyal friend of the Bahá'ís and would not make the slightest decision without consulting my late father or Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání. The friends enjoyed full freedom to do as they saw fit and became the envy of all the Muslim merchants.

### Núri'd-Dín Departs for Iran in 1894

Two years passed. As before, we were carrying out our commercial activities from Cairo, Port Said and Alexandria, when my late father was called by `Abdu'l-Bahá to return to Iran. As a prelude to this, a Tablet was revealed in his honor and he was instructed to go to the Holy Land. Before leaving for Iran, he set up a company with Áqá Ahmad [Yazdí], Hájí Muhammad-i-Yazdí and Hájí Siyyid `Alí-i-Yazdí.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, I was working in his office in Cairo under the supervision of Áqá Siyyid `Alí and

<sup>83</sup> In a second copy of this manuscript, the following parenthetical comments are recorded: "This was the same Hájí Sayyah who had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and had been the bearer of letters from the Zillu's-Sultan and the Mushiru'l-Mulk-i-Shirazi." And, in the margin, it is written "Hájí Muhammad-`Alí-i-Sayyah-i-Mahallati." Although I have been unable to confirm the identity of this carrier, it is clear from *Khátirát Hájí Sayyáh* that Hájí Sayyah Mahallati was imprisoned in Iran throughout the period under discussion and the intended person is someone else. Sayyáh, Muhammad-`Alí. *Khátirát Hájí Sayyáh*. Edited by Hamíd Sayyáh. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Tehran: Amír Kabír, 1359 [1980].

<sup>84</sup> The Yazdí brothers had previously formed a company known as Sociéte Ruháníyyih. However, because of some misfortunes, they now needed fresh capital and new partners; for details, see Yazdí, *Blessing Beyond Measure*, pp. 12-14. At this time, Núri'd-Dín was very affluent and was able to bankroll his fortune into this new joint venture.

my late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and in Alexandria under the supervision of Hájí Muhammad. Even though some of the friends were not optimistic about the prospects of this business merger, my late father did not heed their warnings and left for his pilgrimage. On this journey, my late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and I did not have the honor of attaining the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá. My father went with my mother, older brother Áqá Siyyid Áqá, younger brother Áqá Siyyid Diyá', and sister Tuba Khánum.<sup>85</sup>

After attaining the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá, and gaining further spiritual sustenance and insight from Him, they left for Búshihr by sea. En route, my father visited the renowned cleric [in Baghdad], Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Hasan-i-Shírází, the Hujjatu'l-Islam (known as the Mírzáy-i-Shírází), at the cleric's request. He was a close relative of the Báb. I have recorded the details of this visit elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

Regarding his visit with the above-mentioned person, my father received a Tablet from `Abdu'l-Bahá during his stay in Baghdad. In that blessed Tablet, He wrote:

To the attention of the illustrious Afnán, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, upon him rest the Glory of God, the Most Glorious.

He is the All-Glorious.

O thou twig, who hath excelled in propagating the Word of God! From what hath been heard, thou didst travel from Baghdad to Sámarrá for the purpose of conversing in utmost wisdom with the desired person<sup>87</sup>. Even though that person is physically weak and no doubt hath little strength and joy for discourse and communion, however, the divine fragrance bringeth immeasurable vigor, and the spiritual ecstasy hath eternal influence. It will convert a barren land into a flourishing city, and a dead and sterile realm into luscious earth. Bounties of the Holy Spirit will quicken moldering bones and the outpouring of the rain will bring forth pure pearls. Thus thou shalt see the earth giving praise and thanks, as we observe upon it everything delightful and verdant.

I hope that, in that region, thou wilt succeed in disseminating the words of truth and spreading the divine fragrance, in such wise that its sweet scent will perfume all nostrils and confer life upon the dead.

<sup>85</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:329-30, no. 368) addressed to Núri'd-Dín's son, Mírzá Jalal, who had stayed in Shiraz to serve at, and protect, the House of the Báb, `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the imminent arrival of Núri'd-Dín. The Master recounts the bounties showered upon Núri'd-Dín during the days of Bahá'u'lláh, and how he had stayed in Egypt at His behest. He further states that Núri'd-Dín was now travelling to Iran in order to propagate the divine teachings and raise the banner of God's Cause.

<sup>86</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 11.

<sup>87</sup> A reference to Mírzáy-i-Shirazi.

His Glory rest upon thee and all who stand firm in the Covenant.

`Abdu'l-Bahá `Abbás.<sup>88</sup>

My late father related, "The Hujjatu'l-Islam had declared his belief in the validity of the Báb's claim, the truth of the Blessed Beauty's Manifestation and the greatness of `Abdu'l-Bahá's station. I asked him, 'When did you learn about the Faith?' He responded, 'During the days when I was busy with my studies as a student in Isfahán. Your maternal uncle, Mírzá Siyyid Hasan (the Afnán-i-Kabír), was a student there as well. His Holiness [the Báb] had come to Isfahán and, one day, at the home of [the Sultanu'l-`Ulama,] the Imam-Jum`ih, one of the divines asked Him a scientific question. He gave a sufficient answer, but the akhund [cleric] spoke most unfairly and inappropriately. The injustice of the divine and the impeccability of the Exalted One awakened me to the truth of His blessed Cause." The details of this meeting have been written in a separate volume<sup>89</sup>.

### Arrival of Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl

In 1311 A.H. [1894], in accordance with `Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl<sup>90</sup> came to Cairo. The Master instructed the prominent Bahá'is not to associate openly with him so that he would not attract undue attention and notice.<sup>91</sup> After he arrived, he moved to an apartment with two furnished rooms, situated above my father's business in Saray-i-Jawahiri. He began teaching philosophy and logic at Al-Azhar University and meeting and associating with the learned and accomplished men of his time. He organized and taught classes in various branches of knowledge and philosophy. Among his students were Shaykh Faraju'llah Ziky-i-Kurdí<sup>92</sup>, [and his brothers,] Shaykh Muhay'd-Din and Shaykh Badru'd-Din.

When he had been in Cairo for a while and had become acquainted with certain of its inhabitants, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl would occasionally allow a few of the friends to attend his classes. I remember vividly one day, when I was present in his class, the important philosophical question of life and the nature of the soul was being discussed and explained. He quoted extensively, and cited many references, from well-known scholars and learned men and, employing solid reasoning and indisputable evidence, totally rejected the position of the naturalists and the theologians. On that

<sup>88</sup> INBMC 52:315 no. 353, *Kháندان-i-Afnán* 16-7 and *Ma'idih-i-Asimani* 5:261-2. Although Mírzá Habíb quotes only a portion of this Tablet, the full text is given here for ease of reference.

<sup>89</sup> A reference to *Tarikh Amri Fars va Shiraz* (forthcoming *In the Land of Refuge*).

<sup>90</sup> The text, and most other Persian sources, refer to him as Abu'l-Fadá'il, but this translation uses the more commonly recognized transliteration.

<sup>91</sup> Mírzá Habíb means that Abdu'l-Bahá did not want the public to know that Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl was a Bahá'í, so that he could freely pursue his contacts among the intellectual circles of Cairo.

<sup>92</sup> He published the first series of Bahá'í books in Egypt, including the first compilation of `Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets. 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Makatib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*. 3 vols. Cairo: Matba'a Kurdistan al-'Ilmiyya, A.H.1330 [1910-1921].

day, all his students testified that Jináb-i-Mírzá's [Abú'l-Fadl's] deductions were perfectly correct.

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl then continued, "During my stay at Bukhara and Samarqand, I saw a commentary by Bahá'u'lláh that adequately clarified this problem and resolved all questions." His students asked, "Who is Bahá'u'lláh?" "The Leader of our honored guests," he replied [pointing to us]. With real excitement, all students said, "Well, we will secure a copy from them." But Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl responded, "Our guests are among the ordinary people and laity. Such texts and commentaries are in the possession of their learned and scholars. I must contact them for copies to be sent here." And so, he concluded this subject and began discussing another topic. With every subject, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl would do the same as described above, helping his students to grow receptive to hear [the Divine Call] and sowing the seeds of the Word of God in their hearts.

A month later, he told them that the commentary he had mentioned had arrived. His students eagerly competed with one another to see and read the Text, which they took home and spent countless hours discussing with one another. After all the discussion, he would often remind them, "Without a trace of religious prejudice, study the scientific and rational arguments of these Texts, and correlate them with your own deductive and intellectual understanding. Consider the ease and facility with which they resolve all complex issues. As for me, the more I study and ponder them in the light of logic and reason, the more convinced I am that the contents of these Commentaries are alone sufficient for all seekers of truth and only these Writings contain undeniable proof."

In this manner, he taught the Word of God. As a result, a number [of his students] enrolled under the banner of the Cause. Those who did not convert, such as Shaykh Muhammad-i-'Abduh, who was among the professors of Al-Azhar University, became sympathizers. Such was the way that Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl taught and served the Faith in Egypt.

### **The Greatest Holy Leaf in Egypt**

I have mentioned earlier that, during the time of the most great calamity of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, the late Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání and Hájí Niyyaz-i-Kirmaní were in the Holy Land and later returned [to Egypt]. Afterwards, the believers were not given permission to go on pilgrimage or were very rarely given the privilege. This was because of the faithless behavior of the Covenant-breakers and the manifold tests besetting the friends in the Holy Land, or for reasons that remain concealed in the divine knowledge. Consequently, we remained deprived of meeting the denizens of

the Crimson Ark and those circumambulating “Him round Whom the names of God revolve”.<sup>93</sup>

During this year [circa 1894], our late father returned to Shiraz and this servant and my late brother were busy with our commercial activities in Port Said and Alexandria. We would mostly spend the rest of our time in the honored presence of Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl. To a certain extent, and according to our abilities, we were able to benefit from his fellowship.

It was this very year, as well, that the Remnant of God, the Greatest Holy Leaf, honored Egypt with her footsteps. She stayed at the residence of the late Khúrásání. As a result of her visit, a rejuvenating breath of life was breathed into the spirit of the friends, and a marvelous bliss and enthusiasm developed among the community.<sup>94</sup> Each one of us sent to her glorious presence letters expressing our humility and absolute nothingness, and asking for her intercession and confirmations. For the most part, they were answered verbally.

### **The Effect in Egypt of the Sháh's Assassination**

Not long after the Greatest Holy Leaf returned to the Holy Land, Nasiri'd-Din Sháh was assassinated.<sup>95</sup>

One morning, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl came to our office greatly perturbed and agitated. Until that day, he had concealed his belief [in Bahá'u'lláh]. He said, “Last night, I had a frightening nightmare. Since then, I have not had a moment's rest and fear that great trouble lies in store for the friends in Iran or the Holy Land.” He proceeded to describe his dream: “I dreamt that I stood in a vast field and a ferocious lion was chasing me to the point where I was thoroughly exhausted and could no longer escape his vicious grasp. I sensed that, at any moment, I was about to be devoured by this wild beast. I despaired and could find no way to save myself. Amidst this, a small door appeared before me, and I entered it trembling with fear. Then I woke up filled with terror and did not sleep a wink for the rest of the night.”

He had not quite finished his description when we heard the cry of the newspaper boy from the streets, “The Iranian King is slain; the Iranian King

<sup>93</sup> That is, the believers in `Akká and companions of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

<sup>94</sup> The following was revealed by `Abdu'l-Bahá on the occasion of Bahíyyih Khánúm's departure for Egypt (*Bahíyyih Khánúm: The Greatest Holy Leaf: A Compilation*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982., pp. 14-15). For a considerable period - that is, from the day of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension - my sister had grown so thin and feeble, and was in such a weakened condition from the anguish of her mourning, that she was close to breakdown. Even though it was her dearest wish to drain her cup and wing her way to the realms where the Divine Essence shineth in glory, still this servant could not bear to see her in that state. Then it occurred to me that, God be thanked, I have such an unfailing comforter as Jinab-i-Hájí [Hasan-i-Khúrásání], and it would be well to make him my partner in distress. I therefore determined to send her to Egypt, to provide her with a change of air. Although this will certainly cause thee trouble and inconvenience, still, I trust that, out of God's bounty, it will also bring thee joy and good cheer.

<sup>95</sup> See Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, pp. 430-55.

is slain!” Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl immediately said, “Now I understand the meaning of my dream!” We bought a copy of the Hikmat Newspaper, which had devoted its lead column to this subject. It said in part, “Yesterday, while the Royal Court was preparing for the festivities of the anniversary of the 50th year of the Sháh’s ascent to the throne and the monarch was on a visit to the Shrine of Hadrat-i-’Abdu’l-’Azim, an Iranian Bábí by the name of Mírzá Ridá Kirmaní shot and killed him.” Since this news was being disseminated by Siyyid Jamalu’d-Din [Afghani]’s sympathizers, with gross exaggeration and embellishments, it was obvious that they were trying to attribute the Sháh’s murder to the friends in Iran and the Bahá’í community there. These accounts were aimed solely at provoking public reaction against the Faith and its adherents.

Soon the news spread throughout the city and all the friends gathered in our office, fervently supplicating divine protection for the Bahá’í community of Iran, so it would stay safe from the claws of the barbarous wolves. They further prayed for celestial intervention, so that this event would not become a situation where the innocent friends’ blood would be spilled and a number of them martyred. In truth, all the believers were profoundly disturbed and anticipated imminent tragedies.

At any rate, resigned to the will of God and submitting to His good-pleasure, we waited for news from Iran. The other newspapers and magazines were reporting the assassination of the Sháh in the same way, and discussed its implications in a provocative fashion. They inflamed the fire of enmity and hatred among the Iranians living in Egypt, preparing the ground for massive disturbances and convulsions [for the Bahá’ís] in Cairo.

During that period, the Consul-General of Iran was Mírzá Ishaq Khán<sup>96</sup>, [the Mafkhamu’d-Dawlih,] who was from Kurdistan and a Sunni. Incited by Mírzá Mihdí, the Za’im’d-Dawlih<sup>97</sup>, who was the secretary of the Consulate and one of the followers of Siyyid Jamalu’d-Din [Afghani], the Iranian merchants appealed to the Consulate. They reportedly said, “Now that the Bábís have killed the Sháh, all the Bábís in Iran are [or will be] massacred in reprisal. Therefore, we must also kill all those that live in this region and completely uproot their community.” They further noted, “We have arranged for each of us to kill the Bábís from his native town. For instance, the Shírází Muslims are to kill the Bahá’ís from Shiraz, and Khúrásánís will do likewise with Bahá’ís from that region, and so forth.”

<sup>96</sup> From 1894, he was the Consul-General in Egypt for five years. Afterwards, he was the Iranian Ambassador to Washington for six years; see Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran*, vol 1, pp. 108-11.

<sup>97</sup> A native of Tabriz, he was the publisher of the Hikmat (wisdom) Newspaper in Cairo and the author of an Arabic polemic against the Faith, titled *Miftáhu Bábí’l-Abwab* (the Key of the Gate of Gates). Initially, he had written this attack to extract money from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but failed in his purpose. See Browne, Edward G. *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia: Partly Based on the Manuscript Work of Mírzá Muhammad-’Ali Khán ‘‘Tarbiyat’’ of Tabriz*. Reprint. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983., p. 18.

From the outset, the late Mírzá Isháq Khán admonished them by saying, “This is not Iran where one can commit such heinous acts with impunity and spill the blood of people for no reason. Whoever has murdered the Sháh is now in prison and will be killed. In accordance with Islamic jurisprudence, one cannot kill another in place of a murderer.”

The more he reasoned in this way, the less effect it had on them, and they rejected his arguments by advancing further threats. Eventually, Mírzá Isháq Khán replied, “The people that live in Cairo and are known by this name [Bahá’í] are not ordinary and commonplace folk. They are all among the best known and most respected merchants and are engaged in business activities in all corners of the world. How are you going to deal with companies and merchants that they trade with and how will you compensate their customers?” They said, “We stand ready to provide a guarantee that we will settle all their accounts and are willing to sign a surety to this effect.” Mírzá Isháq Khán finally managed to still their fury by saying, “I will telegraph [the Amínu’s-Sultan,] the Atabak<sup>98</sup> [and find out the identity of the Sháh’s assassin]. Should he be a Bábí, you are free to do as you please and neither you nor I will be held responsible before the government. However, if he is not a Bábí, there is no reason to inflict injuries upon innocent people. Give me three days. If I haven’t received a reply by then, do as you please.”

On the third day, a memorial service was organized in the Consulate for the fallen monarch, and no response [to the telegram] had been received from Tihran. I remember well when the Bahá’í group, led by the honored Khurasani, arrived at the gathering. The Za`imu`d-Dawlih snapped, “The rascals have killed the Sháh and now occupy the seat of honor too!” This comment greatly offended the illustrious Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl and he rose to defend the friends. The Za`imu`d-Dawlih asked, “Jináb-i-Mírzá, it seems that you are a Bábí as well?” To which Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl responded, “I am a Bahá’í and what harm is there in that?” That gathering was the occasion when, without the least hesitation, Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl openly and publicly declared himself to be a Bahá’í and, with his characteristic courage, heroically defended the Bahá’ís.

However, the Consul-General, fearing that the [Iranian] Muslims would commit an unseemly act, was extremely perturbed and worried. He was thoroughly unmindful of the representatives of various governments and officials of different embassies [who were there to pay homage]. With an agitated face that betrayed his inner turmoil, he sat in his designated position. Most people, however, thought that the loss and death of the monarch had brought about deep grief. The worry did not last very long however. At the final hour of the gathering, a telegraph arrived from the Royal Court in Tihran to the effect that the murder of the Sháh was committed by a certain Mírzá Rida of Kirman, who was a follower of Siyyid

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<sup>98</sup> During the reign of Nasiri`d-Din Sháh, the Prime Minister carried the title of the Atabak.



Jamalu'd-Din-i-Afghani and who was wholly unconnected with the Bábís or Bahá'ís. [The telegram further emphasized that] Iranian subjects, wherever they lived, must remain unmolested and protected.

After reading this telegram, the Consul-General was elated. He instructed the Za'imud-Dawlih to read its entire text out loud to the gathering. He read it once. The Consul ordered him to read it so emphatically that even pedestrians outside would hear him. So, he read it a second time. And likewise, a third time!

The Consul-General then got up from his seat and greeted the distinguished guests. He said to the Iranians, "Now you understand that Bahá'ís are not killers. Rather, they are supportive of the government and the Sháh. It is important that you now recognize the identity of the true enemy of the monarchy and our nation." In such a way, this potential disturbance was diffused.

## **Second Pilgrimage: In the Presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá**

### **Departure from Egypt**

In the year 1314 A.H.<sup>99</sup>, I sought permission to attain the sacred presence of the Center of the Covenant and visit the Holy Threshold of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. This request was graced with acceptance and I was invited to the Holy Land. Together with my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, we left Port Said.

In Cairo, there had been occasional talk of the faithlessness of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and his collusion with the Holy Family and the widow<sup>100</sup> of Bahá'u'lláh against [the provisions of] the *Kitab-i-`Ahdi* and `Abdu'l-Bahá. However, since `Abdu'l-Bahá had not yet disclosed this secret, none of the believers was sure it was true or knew any of the details. Those that had gone on pilgrimage were told by the Master, "When you return, leave whatever you have heard or seen by the sea." As such, the friends heard some things about what was going on, but did not dare repeat them. In particular, this subject was discussed by the elders of the [Bahá'í] community in Cairo. They would say things like, "If `Abdu'l-Bahá is in debt and has not been able to pay the expenses incurred during the days of the Blessed Perfection or associated with the funeral of the Ancient Beauty, why are the Aghsan living so luxuriously and lavishly?" Others would say, "Why do the Aghsan have excessive expenses, such as maintaining carriages, horses, and multiple servants, and incur the exorbitant cost of entertaining government officials, nobles, and influential citizens, especially at this time of widespread terrible financial recession when the Bahá'ís have very little

<sup>99</sup> June 1896 to June 1897

<sup>100</sup> Presumably, a reference to Mahd-i-`Uliya, Bahá'u'lláh's second wife.

means? Beyond the expenses [in the Holy Land], the critical obligations of the Cause in Iran must also be met! The actions of the Aghsan directly conflict with the interests of the Faith!" In short, there was talk like this about the news and events in the Holy Land.

Shortly before we left Cairo, I attained the presence of the honored Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl. After graciously welcoming me, he said, "Surely, you are familiar with some of the concerns expressed by the pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. When you have attained the presence of the beloved Master, reverently relate [this] on my behalf: 'The fragrances of love and fellowship do not show in the comments of some pilgrims returning through Cairo. Some say that `Abdu'l-Bahá's sanctified heart is not happy with the actions and activities of certain individuals. The illustrious Aghsan do not attain the august presence of the Master and, in turn, His blessed Person does not visit the Mansion. Others say that the sacred Figure of `Abdu'l-Bahá has not been able to repay loans incurred during the period of Bahá'u'lláh's illness, nor have the expenses associated with His ascension been paid. However, we are told that the honored Aghsan spend excessively and live in great luxury. And yet, `Abdu'l-Bahá is obliged to pay for all of this. Inevitably, when the pilgrims say such things here, they will repeat them elsewhere as well. Consequently, the Master's sufferings will surely multiply. If the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá considers it wise to announce these issues openly, perhaps the apprehension the friends experience when they hear such hearsay would be alleviated.'" Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl particularly emphasized, "Open your ears well and find out all that you can [about what is going on in the Holy Land]. Pass on these things when no one besides yourself is in the presence of the beloved Master."

### **In `Akká**

Once again, after the passage of five years, I was returning to the Holy Land.<sup>101</sup> Memories of our last pilgrimage during the Days of God, and beholding the Countenance of the Blessed Beauty, and our nine-month stay under His blessed shadow were coming back and setting my heart and soul on fire. The beloved Master had recently returned to `Akká from the cave of Elijah.<sup>102</sup>

When we arrived, we attained His blessed presence. He showered us with His measureless favors and infinite bounties and asked after the friends in Cairo. He then warned, "This region is beset with turmoil. The gale of tests from the Blessed Beauty blows in every direction. Calamity's tempest has agitated the sea of the world of being. You must exert yourself and be

<sup>101</sup> Though the exact date of Mírzá Habib's second pilgrimage is not known, from the text's internal evidence, it is estimated to be in the spring of 1897.

<sup>102</sup> Finding the situation in `Akka intolerable, `Abdu'l-Bahá had moved to Haifa's Retreat of Elijah on Mount Carmel for two months.

vigilant lest, God forbid, the dust of rancor, enmity and infidelity to the divine Covenant should sully your pure hearts.”

The beloved Master’s comment left me very sad and pensive, as I thought about the subject that had been discussed in Cairo. I was certain that something ominous was stirring. Some of the resident believers, whom I had known during the time of the Blessed Beauty and who had served with great humility and sincerity, were no longer radiating the same spirituality and reverence. It occurred to me to discuss my perplexities and questions with two of my close friends in that land. Perhaps they could help alleviate the storm that had unexpectedly engulfed my heart and had caused the sacred city of `Akká to become like a cage to me.

What the Master said to us had profoundly saddened my heart, withered my spirit and paralyzed my whole being. I asked myself: what has happened that the One designated by both the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and the *Kitab-i-`Ahd*, and Who is the focus of adoration for the people of Bahá, must now warn the pilgrims in this way? I remembered vividly that every day during our pilgrimage at the time of the Ancient Beauty, we attained the presence of `Abdu’l-Bahá [and, as such, I knew His personality well]. Now I wondered: what had robbed Him of His strength and vitality? What had diminished His radiance and those heavenly smiles? His hair and beard had turned white; His luminous cheeks were now full of lines; and His blessed eyes, which at the time of the Ancient Beauty were full of life and brilliance, now looked bitterly tired. He seemed very sad and grief-stricken. At times, I thought perhaps it was the Blessed Perfection’s ascension that had so profoundly affected the Master and aged Him so much. But then I would reason: the supreme Spirit of the Ancient Beauty prevails over all things and envelops the world of being. Therefore, it could not cause such sorrow in `Abdu’l-Bahá. He knows best that Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension was His own will – a fact not only alluded to, but clearly enunciated in His sacred Writings – and this truth is one of the divine attributes.

Overwhelmed by anxiety and unable to resolve any of these perplexities, I would pace the streets like a crazed man and talk to myself. Eventually, I went to see one of my old friends, the late Áqá Rida Shirazí<sup>103</sup>, whom I truly loved like a father. I began to discuss these things with him, but being a wise and experienced man, he responded in such a way that I did not understand his meaning and was not enlightened any further.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> He embraced the Faith in Baghdad, where he owned a confectionery shop with Mírzá Mahmud-i-Kashani. He accompanied Bahá’u’lláh in all stages of His exile and served the Master until his death in 1912. In the early 1880s, he penned a stirring account of Bahá’u’lláh, which remains unpublished. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Memorials of the Faithful*, translated by Marzieh Gail. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 39-41.

<sup>104</sup> In accordance with the Master’s instructions to all resident believers and in order to protect the young Afán, the wise and veteran believer had refused to share any details about the events of `Akka and the rebellion of the Aghsan against `Abdu’l-Bahá.

Several times in the streets, I saw Mírzá Áqá Jan<sup>105</sup>, whom I knew Bahá'u'lláh had expelled<sup>106</sup>. He expected me to show him respect, bow down in deference to his station and greet him warmly, the same way that I esteemed him during the time of Bahá'u'lláh. But I did not take any notice of him, even though I knew he resented my discourtesy. One day, he asked me about my father. I pretended I had not heard him. He said, "Jináb-i-Afnán, what sin have I committed that you hold me in such contempt? Such acrimonious behavior is not in keeping with the quality of the Afnáns' holy lineage." I responded, "I dislike you and do not want to talk with you. From now on, please do not converse with me and agitate my fatigued soul."

All strength and confidence seemed to have been drained from me. I was very frightened and consumed with the thought that the talk circulating in Cairo would become a divine test for this unworthy soul as well.

Eventually, I went to see another of my old friends, Mírzá Jalál<sup>107</sup>, the son of the Sultánu'sh-Shuhadá [the King of Martyrs]. We were very close during the period that had he lived in Cairo. One time, he came down with dysentery and was near death. The Master had instructed that he be sent to the Holy Land. However, none of the believers dared to take him to Port Said so that, through Siyyid Yahya [Nahri], the brother of `Abdu'l-Bahá's wife, he could be sent to the Holy Land. Even though I was discouraged from doing so by the honored Khurasani, I volunteered to take him, arguing that he might pass away in Cairo and `Abdu'l-Bahá's wish would remain unfulfilled.<sup>108</sup> Because of this incident, he developed a particular fondness and affinity for me. As such, I went to visit him and asked him the truth of the matter.

At first, he was reluctant to answer and said to me directly, "Such speculations will harm you and it is best to disregard them. Focus your

<sup>105</sup> For a short biography, see Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 181-92.

<sup>106</sup> The original word is 'tard,' which, in this context, means excommunication. During Bahá'u'lláh's last years, He banished Mírzá Áqá Jan from His presence because of certain acts and attitudes. However, through the intercession of `Abdu'l-Bahá, he was forgiven and resumed his services. He was finally expelled two months before Bahá'u'lláh's ascension.

<sup>107</sup> He had married Rúhá Khánúm, `Abdu'l-Bahá's third daughter. This marriage produced two sons, Munib and Hasan, and three daughters, Maryam, Duha and Zahrá. The family name was Shahíd [martyr]. Mírzá Jalál and his family eventually lost their faith.

<sup>108</sup> Mírzá Jalál arrived in `Akka severely ill and at death's door. Abú'l-Qásim Afnán relates that he heard the following story from his father, Mírzá Habíb, on numerous occasions. His father deeply believed in `Abdu'l-Bahá's ability to work miracles. "Sometime after Mírzá Jalál had been sent to `Akka desperately ill, I saw him well and in perfect health. He told me, "I have no memory of how I came from Cairo to Port Said and from there to `Akka. I remember, however, that when I arrived in `Akka, I was laid up unconscious in bed and `Abdu'l-Bahá would come to visit me each day. One day, all of a sudden, I noticed that I had become very light, soaring in the air and completely conscious. In that condition, I saw my body lying in bed while my mother and sister were pulling a white sheet over me and sobbing profusely. After they left the room still weeping, they met the Master, who asked them, 'What happened?' They answered, 'Mírzá Jalál has died.' `Abdu'l-Bahá came into the room, removed the sheet from my face, and began to chant certain verses. Instantly, I returned to my body, opened my eyes and saw His luminous Countenance. The Master asked, 'Mírzá Jalál, what do you desire?' With a hushed voice, I replied, 'Yogurt.' `Abdu'l-Bahá went outside and told my family, 'Mírzá Jalál is well. He wants some yogurt. Give him some.' After I was fed a few spoonfuls, I began a full recovery and, in no time, was thoroughly well and strong."

thoughts instead on the Threshold of the Ancient Beauty. Such affairs are not worthy of mention or your consideration.” I insisted on my request. There was no one in the room except the ever-present God and the two of us. He made me take an oath on the hair of the Master that I would not divulge to another soul what he was about to share, not even to my brother. Then he proceeded to recount all that had happened since the night of the ascension, when `Abdu'l-Bahá had noticed that the Aghsan were busy searching the papers and Tablets [of Bahá'u'lláh]. From beginning to end, he described to me everything he had seen or heard. At the end, he emphasized, “It is `Abdu'l-Bahá's wish that the believers not know these things and you should pretend to be ignorant of them as well.”

The world turned dark before my eyes. Uncontrollably, I went by the seashore and, facing the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, began to weep and supplicate: “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá! Is it possible that Your religion, planted so firmly through the Covenant that You have established with each of Your servants, is now divided and fragmented? Is it possible that different sects will now appear in it? And if so, what was the good in the Sacred Blood of the Báb [being spilt] or the sufferings endured by the resplendent Person of ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’<sup>109</sup>? How is it that the blood of the martyrs of the Cause has come to naught so quickly?” I would say such things and shed bitter tears. After several days of anguish, my sobbing and tears calmed my heart and stilled the storm that raged in my soul. I was afraid to speak with anyone or associate with any of the old friends.

As the grace of God always surrounds us, several pilgrims arrived from Iran at that time who were without equal in their humor and always made everyone happy. These were: Mírzá `Abdu'llah Khán<sup>110</sup>, the father-in-law of the martyred Varqa; the late Mírzá `Azizu'llah Khán, a son of the martyred Varqa; the honored Dr. [Yunis Khán] Afrukhtih<sup>111</sup>; and Áqá Mírzá Fadlu'llah Kandí<sup>112</sup>, known as the Mufsidu'l-Mamalik. Mufsid [corrupt] was a title that Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí used for the thabityn<sup>113</sup>. When Áqá Mírzá Fadlu'llah arrived in the Holy Land, it was said, “Another mufsid is added to the mufsidyn!” `Abdu'l-Bahá humorously would refer to him as the Mufsidu'l-Mamalik<sup>114</sup> and, thereafter, he was known by this name among the friends. Often in the Pilgrim House, Mishkin-Qalim, Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin and Áqá Rida [Qannad] Shirazi would entertain the friends with witty stories and, as such, lessened the pain of our hearts.

<sup>109</sup> That is, Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>110</sup> A senior official in the Treasury Ministry of Tabriz.

<sup>111</sup> For a biography, see the *Bahá'í World*, vol. 12, pp. 679-681; and Afrukhtah, Yúnus. *Khátirát-i nuh sáláh*. Rev. ed. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983. Translated by Riaz Masrouf, *Memories of Nine Years in `Akká*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2003.

<sup>112</sup> The father of Mírzá Ashraf Khán and Fu'ad Ashraf.

<sup>113</sup> The thabityn [the steadfast] were those who had remained faithful to `Abdu'l-Bahá. They, in turn, referred to the followers to Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí as naqidyn (the Covenant-breakers).

<sup>114</sup> Literally, Corrupt in all realms.

The day after Mírzá Jalal told me the details and, to some degree, clarified the situation for me, I was thinking that the friends were not aware of these events. They did not know that the Aghsan had broken the Covenant of the Cause of God and were raising a rebellion against the Wronged One of the world [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. Further, despite the emphatic injunction [of the Master], the pilgrims leaving the Holy Land would, sooner or later, tell others what they had found out, and this would sprout seeds of doubt in all hearts. And I further reflected that perhaps an inner agitation, similar to what had engulfed me during these few days, might overwhelm others as well. I thought that perhaps it would be better if His blessed Person allowed the friends to be generally acquainted with the details. At the least, the kind of rumor that was current among the believers in Cairo would subside. They would know how the Master was suffering daily at the hands of His jealous brothers and other enemies inside and outside the Cause, and how He bore the enormous expenses of the Mansion, which had become the center of sedition and the headquarters of His ancestral enemies. Each day, a long list of food and other necessities – from hay and barley, to meat and poultry – was sent from the Mansion to be bought. Áqá Rida [Qannad-i-Shirazi] was in charge of the expenditures and knew better than anyone else about the unwarranted expenses demanded by the Aghsan. Each day he had to borrow a sum to administer the affairs and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concealed all these activities.

I did not sleep the whole of that night. Early in the morning, without telling any of my companions where I was going, I set out directly for His blessed House<sup>115</sup>. En route, on a street corner, I saw His sacred Figure coming towards me. I bowed down and kissed His feet. He raised me from the ground and showered me with His infinite kindness, saying, “Were you coming to visit Me? I too was coming to see you. Today, I want to visit the poor and needy. Come, so we may be together.”

I began to follow behind His blessed Temple. I knew that He was fully aware of one’s inner thoughts and, therefore, knew my condition as well. The resident believers were called on not to disclose what had happened [regarding the Covenant-breaking], and the pilgrims were instructed to leave behind by the seashore whatever they had heard or seen, and return home. Surely, [I thought,] He was well aware that Mírzá Jalál had described all the details for me. Also, I had heard some other things from Áqá Rida and Mishkin-Qalam. He must certainly know the kind of whispers that circulated among the believers in Cairo and the thoughts they commonly had.

He asked after the honored [Mírzá] Abu’l-Fadl, “How is Jináb-i-Mírzá and how is his health?” He continued with the same theme and asked about the friends in Cairo and their ways and thoughts. Characteristically, He

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<sup>115</sup> At the time, the Master and His family lived in the House of ‘Abdu’lillah Pasha in ‘Akka.

showered me with so much kindness that I found the courage to say, “My Master, it has been rather difficult for some of the friends in Cairo to accept that Your blessed Person should be under the burden of so much debt, and yet the Aghsan live luxuriously, spending their time merrymaking.” Before I could continue, His countenance was filled with rage and He exclaimed, “How is that?!” and proceeded to walk on. I no longer had the strength to follow Him and started to tremble uncontrollably. It was as if soul had left my body. All I could do was lean against a wall. He had taken about 20 steps before He realized that I was not following behind. Seeing my condition, He returned, touching this servant on the shoulders. He said, “Tell Me, what has happened?” He poured out so much kindness and offered such favors and cheers that I gradually came to myself and began to follow Him.

At His bidding, I explained all that I knew and had heard. I also gave my own assessment about the sort of talk that was circulating among the friends and what the Jináb-i-Mírzá [Abu'l-Fadl] had said, namely, “If the believers were to know the details, such concerns would surely be alleviated.” The beloved Master exclaimed several times, “Well said!” He then added, “Until now, I had not wanted this talk to go beyond `Akká. But now it is clear that it is already too late and that the foul odor of the Covenant-breaking has reached the nostrils of the entire world.<sup>116</sup> What you see or hear, you are to share with the friends, but descriptively, not complainingly.” He then explained many things about the Covenant-breaking of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and the sufferings that He had been forced to endure, adding, “Recently, a Commission of Inquiry has arrived from Istanbul. Each day, I go to the government office and they interrogate Me. My brother has filed an official complaint. If I were to tell you the details, you would be grieved. Surely, you have heard and seen certain things here, or will hear of them. You must never complain. Tell the friends about them, but descriptively, not complainingly.” (I will tell the rest of this story when I recount the subsequent events in Egypt.)

That day, His blessed Being visited the homes of several of the town's poor and destitute. At each place, with His own hand, He provided them with a sum of money. He caressed all the small children, hugged them tenderly in His bosom and kissed them affectionately. Several of those visited were ill and He ordered their medicine. It was about midday when we returned. Near the Khán [Avamid] I was given leave from His presence.

<sup>116</sup> The following, by Dr. Yunis Afrukhtih (*Khatirat-i-Nuh Salih*, pp. 51-2), further explains the effort that `Abdu'l-Bahá's brothers went to spread the news of their split with Him: “`Abdu'l-Bahá often used to say, ‘One day, Mírzá Diya`u'llah came to see me. I noticed he was looking at his fingers, which were stained with ink, expecting Me to comment on them. I did not say anything, so he volunteered the information, saying, ‘Last night until the early hours of the morning, we were engaged in writing letters and gelatin printing. Consequently, my fingers are stained. My brother [Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí] had written a letter, and we printed several copies and sent them away this morning.’ I asked him, ‘Did you really write and dispatch them?’ And when he answered that he had, I said, ‘I swear by the Righteousness of God! A day will come when Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí will wish that his fingers had been cut off so that he could not have taken the pen to proclaim his break with the Covenant. For four years, I have concealed this matter so that the beloved of God may not learn of your unfaithfulness to the Covenant. It is now beyond My power to hide it any longer. You have announced it yourselves to the believers.’”

The agitation of the past few days had now completely evaporated. My heart was assured. I had no worries. I would converse, laugh and not avoid my companions, knowing that if I divulged anything [about Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and his followers], I had the permission of the beloved Master and that I need not feel repentant about it. Also, [I felt elated] since, on that day, I had spent several magnificent hours in His presence, benefiting enormously from His utterances. It was a meeting that transforms even bitter venom into sweet honey.

When I joined my companions again, they asked me where I had been that morning. I told them that I had been in the Master's presence. Each of them expressed his joy for my good fortune in his own way and jested with me, especially Jinab-i-Mufsidu'l-Mamalík and Dr. Yunis Khán [Afrukhtih], may my spirit be a sacrifice to their dust.

### **The Dream of Salih Áqá**

Salih Áqá had been a devoted, black slave and one of the eunuchs of Cairo's royal court. After the Khedive<sup>117</sup> of Egypt, Isma'il Pasha, fell from office, all the slaves and eunuchs of his household that had been taught correct manners and etiquette were freed. At the time when the Greatest Holy Leaf came to Cairo, this black slave was introduced to her. As he possessed a pure and luminous heart, and had mastered all manners and etiquette [related to serving a royal audience], he had the good fortune of being employed to serve the Greatest Holy Leaf and to return with her from Cairo to the Holy Land. In his new capacity, he served the andaruni<sup>118</sup> of the house of the Master as well as His guests and pilgrims.

One day, all the friends, both pilgrims and residents, were in `Abdu'l-Bahá's presence in the biruni when Salih Áqá came in and said, "My Master, last evening I had a dream that I would like to recount for You." With utmost compassion and infinite loving-kindness, `Abdu'l-Bahá responded, "Do so." Salih Áqá spoke an eloquent and engaging Arabic and always stood in a punctilious manner before the Master. As he related his dream, his words and expressions revealed the emotion that had prompted him to share his thoughts. Salih Áqá recounted:

Last night, I dreamt that a very large legion of soldiers had camped on the plain between `Akká and Haifa. [They were garrisoned so densely that] passing through them was almost impossible. I stood at the top of a small rise and, wherever I looked, I saw nothing but soldiers and munitions. Armaments of all kinds were ready at the camp. I stood in wonder at their order and discipline and how thoroughly they prepared. At the very heart of

<sup>117</sup> A title belonging to a series of governors who ruled Egypt as viceroy to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1867 to 1914.

<sup>118</sup> The inner quarters of the house, typically accessible to the family and a few close friends. The reception hall is known as the biruni.



the camp, a magnificent and enormous tabernacle was raised as the headquarters for the army's Commander.

Your blessed Person [ʿAbdu'l-Bahá] summoned me to Your presence and instructed me to saddle a horse. I brought a wonderfully large, white horse and the Effendi [ʿAbdu'l-Bahá] rode towards the camp, while instructing me, "Come, let us go and meet the Chief of this compound. This army has come to help us." On foot, [I followed You], passing by the tents, where all the soldiers would immediately salute You and stand to attention in accordance with military custom. We came before that glorious tabernacle, erected in the midmost heart of the camp, with majestic, golden lanterns displayed above it. You dismounted and gave the horse to me and, with extreme reverence, entered the tabernacle. I was lost in bewilderment. Who, I thought, could the Commander of this army be that He could invoke such profound veneration in You? I followed You inside and saw inside the tabernacle a Person whose countenance I could not look upon. His beard was black and His eyes brilliant.

Salih Áqá then proceeded to describe all the features of the Ancient Beauty. He then continued:

When Your blessed Person went in, You prostrated and kissed the dust, and then offered declarations of praise and glorification to that Commander. He [came forward,] embraced You affectionately, showered You with His tender kindness, and began to converse with You. Battle plans and maps hung on the walls of the tabernacle and all were placed at Your disposal. You were viewing them, conferring with One another on the battle strategy. It was then that I woke up.

As Salih Áqá was describing his dream, tears streamed from ʿAbdu'l-Bahá's eyes. The friends too were deeply moved. The tongue of grandeur then spoke these sweet words: "Blessed is your pure heart and luminous is your spirit. You serve the sacred Threshold of the Ancient Beauty so faithfully and are, indeed, among the near ones and His noble servants! The army in your dream is the Army of God and represents the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty. The Commander of the army that you saw in the world of dreams is none other than the Greatest Name, the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, and the Author of this Cause. Those maps and charts that hung on the walls were plans for the edification and reconstruction of the world."<sup>119</sup> ʿAbdu'l-Bahá then gave a detailed explanation of the importance of the divine Covenant, the magnificent future of the Cause, and its distinguished and superior feature over the Dispensations of the past. Afterwards, we left His presence [for the day].

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<sup>119</sup> See Afán, Abú'l-Qásim. *Black Pearls in the Household of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1999. pp. 49-52.

### **Actions of the Covenant-breakers**

At that time, a Commission of Inquiry had arrived from Istanbul and was causing enormous anxiety for the Master, the pilgrims and the resident believers. It was investigating the constant barrage of false and calumnious reports that Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí had sent to the Sublime Court<sup>120</sup> and the string of lies and deceptions that he had woven.

[Yahya] Tabur Aghasi was [‘Akka’s] Chief of Police and a constant companion and close friend of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí. He frequently visited the Mansion [of Bahjí], and, together with Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán, [Mírzá] Majdu’d-Din, Mírzá Áqá Jan and some other Covenant-breakers, was a principal figure in designing schemes against `Abdu’l-Bahá. These people occupied the Mansion like a beehive – a place that once witnessed the revelation of Tablets and was the seat of God’s Supreme Manifestation.

In the early hours of every morning, `Abdu’l-Bahá would leave His house and return about one hour after noon or perhaps a bit later. As the Master was leaving, Salih-Áqá would stand with the greatest dignity and reverence by the entrance door and leave it open until `Abdu’l-Bahá returned home. His attention to his duties and sense of responsibility towards his Master were indescribable. I well remember on one occasion, the entrance had been left open as several of the friends were awaiting `Abdu’l-Bahá’s return. Strong winds began to blow dust inside the house and one of the servants decided to close the door. With an agitated face, Salih-Áqá roared in protest, admonishing him, “How dare you close the entrance to the house of a Person Who desires to have it open to the entire world!”

When `Abdu’l-Bahá returned home that day, His blessed visage betrayed His deep inner turmoil and it was clear that He was very tired. Consequently, the friends were excused from His presence. That afternoon when we were summoned, He informed us:

These honored persons<sup>121</sup> have sent a report to the Commission of Inquiry, which has resulted in the Commission’s head moving with a vengeance to eradicate the Cause of God. He is now raising a tumult by saying, “The claims of Your Father and Yourself are at variance with Your deeds and the objections of Your brother. We have a Hadith that states: ‘The Messengers and Prophets do not inherit and have no heir.’ Your Father claimed the station of Prophethood and gave You His successorship. Your brother states that You have confiscated the estate of the Shaykh-i-Kabir<sup>122</sup> and deprived them of their inheritance.”

<sup>120</sup> A reference to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>121</sup> That is, the Covenant-breakers.

<sup>122</sup> That is, Bahá’u’lláh.

I realized that, with such slanders, they sought to shatter the foundation of the Cause. However, at that moment, the confirmations of the Supreme Concurrence poured down and the sun of the favors of the Blessed Beauty shone upon me. I said to him, “The Shaykh-i-Kabir has left a Will and Testament in His own hand and seal, and defined in it the inheritance of His heir:

‘Although the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage. Earthly treasures We have not bequeathed, nor have We added such cares as they entail. By God! In earthly riches fear is hidden and peril is concealed. Consider ye and call to mind that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur’an: ‘Woe betide every slanderer and defamer, him that layeth up riches and counteth them’<sup>123</sup>.”<sup>124</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then added, “I said this to him and the words choked his breath!”

In those days, certain mischievous and disingenuous individuals<sup>125</sup> often frequented the gatherings of the friends, and were also present in that meeting. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá therefore said, “Inform my brother that I am not ‘Alí, nor is he ‘Umar. I am much greater than ‘Alí and he is much slighter than ‘Umar.”<sup>126</sup> Then He smiled and talked about many subjects, none of which I have remembered. Afterwards, we left His presence. After we returned to the Khán [Avamid], each of us was filled with grief and sadness over the actions of the Covenant-breakers and their lack of faith.

### Mírzá Áqá Jan

At that time, the Covenant-breakers could generally be divided into two groups. One group consisted of those who had completely severed their relationship with the thabityn and, having crawled into a corner, spent their days and nights in close companionship and fraternity of Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí. The other group consisted of those who associated with the friends and the thabityn. This latter group would [openly] attend the presence of the beloved Master. But they were really agents of Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí and Mírzá Madju’d-Din, and were told to try and undermine the confidence of the friends, agitate their hearts and cloud their thoughts. This group was extremely insidious and dangerous. For instance, when a new pilgrim arrived [in the Holy Land], they would befriend and engage him, presenting themselves as deeply devoted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, so

<sup>123</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitab-i-Ahd*, in *Tablets of Baha’u’llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahai world Centre, 1982, p.219.

<sup>124</sup> Qur’an 104:1-2

<sup>125</sup> Allusion to the agents of Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí.

<sup>126</sup> Dr. Afrukhtih reports a slight variation of this story: “On numerous occasions, He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] sent word to the Naqid-i-Akbar [Arch-Covenant-breaker], ‘Neither are you ‘Umar to shoulder such a mighty Cause, nor am I ‘Alí to cry over your doings in the palm-grove.’” (*Khátirat-i-Nuh Salih*, p. 235)

that the unsuspecting visitor would think that they were sincere and loyal to the Covenant and Testament. However, their motive was, through whatever means possible, to plant seeds of discord in the heart of their victims, poison their soul and undermine their faith. [These agents] would attend the gatherings of the friends in the Pilgrim House [of `Akka] and participate in their conversations, which they would gradually begin to dominate. They would talk of the days of the Ancient Beauty and express their disappointment over the events subsequent to His ascension. They would describe the state of affairs in the Mansion, the condition of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, the anguish of [Bahá'u'lláh's] widow and others, thereby causing sincere believers to be uncontrollably moved with sorrow.

For example, after 40 years of being in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, serving as amanuensis for the Divine Revelation, and in the end losing both this world and the next, the faithless and wicked Mírzá Áqá Ján would attain the presence of the Master, [falsely displaying] humility and reverence. He would stand at the threshold of the room, by the spot where shoes were removed. After receiving `Abdu'l-Bahá's permission, he would sit at the very back of the room pretending to be in rapture and consumed with adoration for the beloved Master. And, outside of the gathering, he would engage the friends with the utmost consideration and charm. However, this abominable man was in constant contact with the Mansion and the Covenant-breakers.

And so it was until the events of the commemoration of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension [in May 1897]. On this day, his malicious nature and sinister character surfaced and became evident. The following is an account of that day.

A few days before the anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, evidence of grief and deep sorrow were apparent on the Master's countenance and the friends visiting the Holy Land were pensive and heartbroken as well. The Master's appearance was such that the resident believers like the late Áqá Rida [Qannad] and Mashkin-Qalam, who had been with `Abdu'l-Bahá [for many years], expressed bewilderment over His condition. They said that they had never seen so much despondency on His face. Everyone thought that `Abdu'l-Bahá's heart was heavy with anguish and sadness because of the approaching eve of [the anniversary of] the Blessed Beauty's ascension.

These few days passed with great difficulty and gloom, until the 70th day after Naw-Ruz<sup>127</sup>. The friends were gathered at the Pilgrim House and `Abdu'l-Bahá was present in that meeting as well. We remained there until about two hours before the time marking the ascension. At that time, His

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<sup>127</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's ascension occurred 70 days after Naw-Ruz, on the eve of 29 May 1892, at 3 a.m. It is customary to recite the Tablet of Visitation at that time. Bahá'u'lláh. "Tablet of Visitation." In *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and `Abdu'l-Bahá*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, pp. 230-233.

blessed Person summoned all the believers and gave each a candle and a bottle of rosewater. With unreserved grief and sorrow, we proceeded towards the Mansion of Bahjí and Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine, following His blessed Figure.

[Along the way,] `Abdu'l-Bahá called on several of the friends to chant prayers. Áqá Fadlu'llah began to chant Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnavi*<sup>128</sup> and, in such a meditative atmosphere, we arrived at the Shrine. `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed us to pour the rosewater on the inner garden of the Shrine and to plant the candles in the same soil. With His heavenly and soul-stirring tone, `Abdu'l-Bahá chanted the Tablet of Visitation. Tears were streaming from His eyes and the mourning of the friends soared heavenwards. The sound of sobbing and yearning filled the court of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Until morning, each person was occupied offering prayers and supplications to the Threshold of the Beloved, oblivious of his surroundings.

At `Abdu'l-Bahá's bidding, we returned to the Pilgrim House of the Mansion, had tea and rested. His blessed Being went to an adjacent room next to the Shrine. After tea, we visited the Shrine once again. Later, we all gathered in the building of the Pilgrim House under the shadow of the Mansion of Bahjí.

On that day, Mírzá Áqá Jan, who, over the span of 40 years, had partaken immeasurably of Bahá'u'lláh's ocean of favors and munificence, had asked the friends to be his guests for lunch, so that the feast on that occasion would be marked in his name. This invitation was accepted by `Abdu'l-Bahá. Mírzá Áqá Jan had prepared bread and broth for lunch. A few hours before sunset, while some of the friends were sleeping in the Pilgrim House and some were awake, he came to the Pilgrim House and started saying, "O ye believers in the Blessed Beauty! Today is not a day to rest. Because of this calamity [the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh], today the world and its inhabitants are in lamentation. Today, the denizens of the Supreme Concourse are fervently sobbing and are bitterly grief-stricken. Arise! Arise!" So, everyone got up and gathered about.

Mírzá Áqá Jan ascended a stool - that same *Khadimu'llah*, that same `Abd-i-Hadir<sup>129</sup>, that same person who, because of countless favors bestowed on him by Bahá'u'lláh, had attained a great station and possessed an unequalled prestige in the Faith, to the point where the most prominent believers were humbled before him. He spoke like this: "In a dream, the Ancient Beauty bequeathed the station of divine revelation upon me," and then proceeded to belittle and speak disparagingly of the sacred station of `Abdu'l-Bahá. After voicing only a few sentences, the *thabityn* and the

<sup>128</sup> Bahá'u'lláh. "Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví-i Mubárák*: Introduction and Provisional Verse Translation." Translated by Franklin Lewis. *Bahá'í Studies Review* (London) vol. 9 (1999/2000), pp. 101-57.

<sup>129</sup> *Khadimu'llah* (the servant of God) and *Abd-i Hazir* (the ever-present servant) were titles given to Mírzá Áqá Jan by Bahá'u'lláh.

believers were so greatly enraged that they decided to slay him. Two of them, Habíb Áqá<sup>130</sup> and Taraz<sup>131</sup>, the son of Áqá Mírzá Muhmud-i-Kashi, who were stronger than the rest, rose to their feet, grasped his throat and pulled Mírzá Áqá Jan from the stool. They started to punch and kick him, with the intention of taking his life. [Through Mírzá Áqá Ján's death,] the plan of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and the other Covenant-breakers was about to be fulfilled and their malicious desires realized. However, before it was too late, Mírzá `Alí-Akbar, son of the honored Mishkin-Qalam, rushed to the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá and told Him the situation. `Abdu'l-Bahá came quickly. He pulled Mírzá Áqá Jan from beneath the hands and feet of the friends and took him to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

The author of this scheme, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, had invited [Yahya] Tabur Aghasi, the Chief of Police, and a number of other notable enemies of the Cause to the Mansion. He hoped that, when Mírzá Áqá Jan made his accusations, it would provoke the believers into a violent response and result in a brawl between the two sides. He expected that the Police would be forced to intervene and the situation would end in their favor. However, with `Abdu'l-Bahá arriving on the scene [and rescuing Mírzá Áqá Jan], their plans came to naught and the officers had no reason to intervene.

In `Abdu'l-Bahá's company, Mírzá Áqá Jan was taken to the Shrine. The Master locked the Shrine's entrance from inside. There, this abominable man, who had been freed from the grasp of the friends [by `Abdu'l-Bahá], made an attempt on the Master's life. Furious and deeply upset, the friends stood outside the Shrine and the Holy Family waited in the adjacent rooms, while `Abdu'l-Bahá remained inside. We were truly distressed and agitated, until the Master opened the Shrine's entrance. He instructed Mírzá Habíb and Taraz to take Mírzá Áqá Jan to a stable near the Mansion. He confiscated all the papers he had hidden inside his pockets and returned only his seal to him. Mírzá Áqá Jan had wrapped large handkerchiefs containing seditious papers around his waist and under his `aba, and had many similar materials stuffed in his side pockets as well. `Abdu'l-Bahá then dismissed us from His presence and we returned to `Akká.<sup>132</sup>

Through this scheme, the Covenant-breakers intended to create an unfavorable situation, so that police officers would interfere in the affairs of the Cause and seize control of the Shrine. Even though the divine plan has always been, and will always be, more powerful than their sinister schemes, they didn't stop. They used cash, gifts, [Chinese] ceramic vessels<sup>133</sup>, and

<sup>130</sup> Better known as Mírzá Habíbu'llah. He was a son of Áqá Ridá Qannád-i-Shirazí and the father of `Abbas Huvayda, a long-time Prime Minister of Iran during the rule of Muhammad-Reza Sháh Pahlavi.

<sup>131</sup> In the latter years of `Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry, he broke the Covenant.

<sup>132</sup> With some minor variations, another eyewitness account of this event is recorded in *Khatirat-i-Nuh Salih*, pp. 80-84.

<sup>133</sup> The Afnán family had extensive trade with China and the Far East, and several of them had offices in these countries as far as Shanghai. Throughout Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, they presented the Holy Family with many pieces

Persian carpets from the days of Bahá'u'lláh that were used by His sacred Person, to bribe government authorities, political officials and anyone else associated with the State, hoping to win their sympathy. They either presented them with these gifts or sold the items at a nominal price until, eventually, their activities resulted in the Commission of Inquiry coming [to the Holy Land] and the amazing events that then happened.

O dear readers, who may one day peruse these notes! I swear by the oneness of the Author of the Cause, that no pen, save the august pen of the Center of the Covenant Himself, is able to convey a thousandth part of the calamities and tribulations that beset the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá in those days. They were filled entirely with pain and sufferings. Innumerable Tablets revealed in honor of friends throughout every corner of the world bear witness to this humble statement.

The papers discovered in the pockets of Mírzá Áqá Jan, or hidden elsewhere on his person, were found to be all written in the style of Revelation Writing and addressed to different friends, particularly prominent believers throughout the Bahá'í world. Each was given a mission and a [new] title. According to their scheme, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and [Mírzá] Madju'd-Din hoped that the letters would confuse the friends and undermine their confidence [in `Abdu'l-Bahá]. Such was the lifelong harvest of a man who had been singularly favored by the Almighty, but now had lost both this world and the next. I beseech God, through His subduing Might, omnipotent Authority, encompassing Favors and ever-present Grace, to protect all believers from the whisperings of evil-doers and worldly passions, and to guard the friends throughout all ages within the stronghold of His Covenant and the shelter of His Cause.

The following day, when we attained the presence of the beloved Master in His house, we noticed that He had spread all of Mírzá Áqá Jan's papers on a table and was looking through them. On seeing us, He laughed and handed us a blue sheet of paper, saying, "Look, one of these tablets was addressed to your illustrious father!"

In short, the atrocities committed by the Covenant-breakers against the body of the Cause was so heart-wrenching and harrowing that they truly defy description. The heat and flames of this fire engulfed and encircled the pilgrims and visitors alike. At last, due to the uncertainty in the Holy Land, the constant agitation of the Covenant-breakers and the arrival of the Commission of Inquiry, the entire company of pilgrims was dismissed. `Abdu'l-Bahá specifically instructed me to keep all correspondence, received from the believers in Iran or other corners, in Port Said. It was not to be forwarded to the Holy Land, as danger was always present. After that,

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of fine china and other service utensils. Some of the remnant pieces are currently displayed at various Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and `Akka, such as the House of `Abbud.

the Iranian pilgrims returned to Iran and the pilgrims from Egypt traveled to Port Said.

### **Departure from the Holy Land**

One day, the custodian of the Pilgrim House, Áqá Muhammad-Hasan, came and informed us that the beloved Master had instructed us to leave the Holy Land within a week. The next morning, `Abdu'l-Bahá called this servant and my late brother into His presence and said, "Because of the uncertainties in this land, return [to Egypt] aboard next week's ship. The Covenant-breakers have reported to the Commission of Inquiry that, in addition to the luxury of our lives in this House, the Pilgrim House has become very crowded because, day and night, we are entertaining a large number of pilgrims and resident believers. They claim that, with a large salary, we have hired for our own service a eunuch from the court of the [Egyptian] Pashas. Although I do not want to part with Salih-Aqa, there are compelling reasons for him not to remain here. It is best for him to return to Cairo as your guardian." We both bowed down in respect [and obedience].

The following day, we were once again called into His presence, and Salih Áqá was there as well. After showering His infinite kindness upon this fortunate black slave, who was the envy of all whites, the beloved Master said, "Salih Áqá, I did not want to send you away and had desired for you to remain in the Holy Land and continue serving the friends here. However, I am in a quandary. These two youth are very dear to me and are the trust of one of my closest friends. I wish now to commit this trust to your care and pray that you will do your best to look after them." Though not a believer, Salih Áqá profoundly adored the Master and, in tears, implored Him, "Effendi, I desire to remain close to this Threshold and serve it until my last breath. Would it be possible for the request of this servant to find acceptance in Your sight? Had it been Effendi's wish, in a single moment, a hundred guardians would have been found for these two." The Master responded, "Would you allow these two youth, whose father has entrusted them to me, to travel to a strange land? No one is more trustworthy than you." At last, with tears pouring from his eyes, this noble black man said, "Whatever is Your blessed will, I shall obey and resign myself to Your good-pleasure." `Abdu'l-Bahá consoled him, "I will summon you back here as soon as these honored youth have established themselves in Cairo, started a business and familiarized themselves with the Arabic language."

Because the time to leave the presence of the Center of the Covenant was near, we were particularly depressed and downcast during the last few days of our pilgrimage. In this period, all His blessed utterances centered on the activities of the Covenant-breakers, the hardship of the Baghdad period and the sufferings that the Blessed Perfection had endured at the hands of the followers of Azal.



During this pilgrimage journey, immeasurable divine favors and bounties were showered upon this undeserving servant. I considered myself thoroughly unworthy of these, as I found nothing but shortcomings and neglect in my deeds. With His own hands, the Master graciously bestowed upon me His Arab `aba, which I thankfully received, kissed and placed to my brow. That `aba is now kept among the sacred relics of the Archives of the House of the Báb in Shiraz.

In those days, each morning, the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá had to go to the government house and would not return until late afternoon. Many of the days, the pilgrims and resident believers could not behold His heavenly countenance or attain His presence. The exception was when they saw Him on the streets and en route. Then He would briefly greet the friends and quickly go on His way.

With `Abdu'l-Bahá's permission, the day before our departure, we visited the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and offered our last homage. The next morning, the Master called us into His presence and, with a world of sadness, we bid Him farewell. We traveled to Haifa and, from there, to Port Said.

### **Back in Egypt**

As mentioned earlier, the veil concealing the deeds of the violators of the divine Covenant was not yet lifted. They continued to associate with some of the friends. Through various means, they sought to spread their polemics and tried to undermine the believers' confidence and confuse their thinking. `Abdu'l-Bahá had instructed me to share [with the friends] all I had heard [while on pilgrimage] in a descriptive way.

In Cairo, the same rumour and speculation as before was still circulating. When this servant arrived, the friends gathered at our house and Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl came as well. [During our discussion,] the subject of the Holy Land and the afflictions surrounding the beloved Master came up. I explained all that I had seen or heard and the sufferings that beset `Abdu'l-Bahá. I called the Ghusnu'llah Akbar [the Great Branch of the divine Tree] by his given name Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí. Similarly, I referred to Mírzá Badi'u'llah and Mírzá Diya'u'llah by their names only and did not refer to them as the Aghsan of the Tree of Holiness. Suddenly, quite angrily and with fury, Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl addressed me, "How dare a youngster like you be so presumptuousness towards the Branches of the Tree of Sanctity and insult the text of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*! The spirit of the Prophets and Messengers circle in adoration around these sacred figures and no one in the world is permitted to belittle them. The explicit text of the *Kitáb-i-`Ahd*, the Will and Testament of the Blessed Beauty, states that the entire world must respect Bahá'u'lláh's widows, the [members of the] Holy Household and the

Aghsan.”<sup>134</sup> He voiced his views with such passion and indignation that I felt paralyzed. The more I repeated, “I saw and heard `Abdu’l-Bahá relate these things and do not share them on my own accord,” the more he roared back that, “I do not accept hadith.” Finally, I was forced to say, “Write to His sacred Threshold. What He favors with a reply is verily the essence of truth.” He replied, “Of course I shall write!”

Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl immediately sent a supplication to the Holy Land. In response to his letter, a Tablet similar to the Lawh-i-Hizar Bayti<sup>135</sup> was revealed in 16 pages in `Abdu’l-Bahá’s own hand. It started with these sweet words: “He is the Most Glorious. O thou who hath devoted thy life to the propagation of the Word of God!” This Tablet detailed the deeds of the Covenant-breakers and the jealousy and enmity of the people of rancor.

In short, this is how the efforts of the Covenant-breakers [to subvert the Cause] became known to the friends throughout Egypt. [The believers] immediately severed all connection with them.

After receiving this Tablet, Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl showered this servant with the greatest kindness. He apologized so frequently that, to this day - some 50 years later – I am embarrassed [by his extreme generosity]. Later, he gave that Tablet to Áqá `Abdu’l-Husayn Samandari<sup>136</sup>, who was in Egypt at the time, to make a copy for him, and gifted me the original Text as a momento. That Tablet is currently in a safe place.<sup>137</sup>

As instructed by `Abdu’l-Bahá, I related the events of the Holy Land and the activities of the Covenant-breakers to my father [in Shiraz]. He informed the friends throughout Shiraz, Abadih, Sarvistan and Nayriz. As a divine favor, during the Days of God, the seeds of firmness and faithfulness had been planted in the hearts of the friends in [the province of] Fárs. Throughout the ministry of the Center of Covenant, all the believers [in Fárs] were immune to the temptations and satanic whisperings of the Covenant-breakers. The sole exception was a certain Mullá Husayn-`Alí Jahrumi<sup>138</sup>, who fell under the influence of the violators of the Covenant in

<sup>134</sup> The two injunctions of the *Kitáb-i-`Ahd* are: “It is incumbent upon everyone to show courtesy to, and have regard for the Aghsan...”, and “Ye are bidden moreover to respect [My wife,] members of the Holy Household, the Afnán and the kindred.” (Bahá’u’lláh. “Kitáb-i-`Ahd (Book of the Covenant).” In *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. pp. 222-3).

<sup>135</sup> Revealed in the same year, 1897, for Mírzá Jalil-i-Khu’i. Because of its length, it is known as the Tablet of One Thousand Verses. The original is found in INBMC 52:551-605. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Lawh-i-Hizar Bayti.” In *Majmu’ih Makatib-i-Hadrat-i-`Abdu’l-Bahá*. Vol. 52, *Iran National Bahá’i Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu’assasih-i Milli-yi Matbu’at-i Amri, [c 1977], pp. 551-605.

<sup>136</sup> The older brother of Tarazu’llah Samandari.

<sup>137</sup> The original text of `Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet remains among the Sacred Writings and other Holy relics in the Archives of the House of the Báb. Mírzá Habíb left instructions with his sons to publish the text of this Tablet with his memoirs. The Bahá’i World Centre has advised the present translator that they will publish a translation of this important Tablet in due course.

<sup>138</sup> In his memoirs, Hájí `Alí-yi-Yazdi states that Jahrumi was influential in the Covenant-breakers’ scheme to use Mírzá Áqá Jan against the Master. For a summary translation, see, Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 184-5.

India and became wayward. When he returned to Jahrum, he was shunned by all, near and far, and died in the utmost poverty.

### **A Pilgrim from Mecca**<sup>139</sup>

During the time that my brother and I were engaged in commerce at Port Said, the Consul-General of Iran gave us the seal of the Consulate in Egypt so that we could stamp the passports of the Iranian pilgrims returning from Mecca. This was to prevent them from proceeding to Cairo and further burdening the Consulate Office in that city. One of the pilgrims who came to us to process his passport was a tall and corpulent Siyyid who appeared to be a dignified man. He said to us, "I do not wish to return to Iran with my fellow travelers so soon [after our pilgrimage]. I want to journey in this region." However, his traveling companions were adamant that he should return, saying, "We have paid all his travel expenses so that, throughout the h.ajj journey and our return home, he would be our prayer-guide and example, informing us of our religious duties. Now that we are returning from the House of God [in Mecca], it is unfair of this Siyyid to leave us stranded and unguided in mid-journey. Furthermore, we have taken an oath in the name of his illustrious Ancestor to pay for his return [to Iran] and we do not want to betray our promise."

In private, they had earlier asked me to convince the Siyyid to comply with his solemn agreement. Therefore, I said to him, "This is a foreign country and you have no friends or acquaintances here. In addition, you do not speak the vernacular Arabic or its Egyptian dialect and may find yourself inconvenienced. Reason dictates that you not hurt the feelings of your traveling companions and comply with their request. Further, this country is not like Iran, where it is customary to organize passion plays and Siyyids are paid for their sermons. If you stay in this region, I am certain that you will be disappointed." With a face flushed with anger, he responded sarcastically, "I am responsible for myself. Should I come to your house, you may refuse me hospitality!" I had nothing more to say. Since their ship was ready to pull anchor, the other pilgrims left and the Siyyid stayed.

The following day, the Siyyid came to my office in the same state and said, "The reason I didn't want to return to Iran with my fellow pilgrims is because I want to visit `Abbás Effendi in `Akká." The enmity of the Covenant-breakers in those days had reached its peak. The Holy Land was in turmoil and many perils surrounded the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá. I didn't consider it prudent for such a Siyyid to visit `Akká at that time and offered many excuses. I said, "Attaining His presence is not an easy task. First, one must receive His permission and it may well take over a month for the post to deliver your letter and bring back a reply. It is best if you go back

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<sup>139</sup> This section consists of the recollections of Mírzá Habíb kept by his son, Hasan Afnán. Mírzá Habíb intended for them to be inserted here.

to Iran and leave this visit for another opportune time.” “How do you make a visit?” he inquired. I responded, “We first pray fervently and focus our thoughts on His sacred Being. Then, with the utmost sincerity and humility, we send a request. After that, we wait for His response. If we are given a favorable reply, with utter elation and yearning, we attain His presence and stay for however many days He allows. Upon leaving, we [once again] pay homage at the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and return home.” He responded, “I will not go in this manner. I will join whoever is traveling to `Akká.” I finally surrendered, “The route to `Akká is known. Travel as you think best.”

Immediately, I sent a telegraph to Áqá Siyyid [Muhammad-] Taqi Manshadi in Haifa, warning him that such a person was arriving and giving him the vessel’s details. Áqá Siyyid Taqi went by the ship and took the Siyyid first to Haifa and, from there, sent him to `Akká on a hired coach. He also telegraphed `Abdu’l-Bahá about the matter. Mishkin-Qalam related the details of his visit for me:

When the Siyyid arrived at the Khán-i-`Avamid, he called out in a loud voice, “Are any of the honored gentlemen [Bahá’ís] present?” I replied, “Please come upstairs.” After he arrived, tea was brought for him. After tea, he asked, “Are there any waterpipes ready?” I responded, “There are no waterpipes here, but there are some at the coffee shop.” Surprised, he said, “Tell them to bring me one.” I sent a message and they brought him one. I was greatly disturbed by his rudeness and impolite manners. Several times he repeated, “I want to go see `Abbás Effendi.” At that point, I became angry and said to him, “Siyyid, calm down. When you arrived, your name was presented to Him. You will attain His presence whenever you are summoned. If you are not given permission, you may not go. This place is the sacred Threshold of the Lord and not a caravansary where any intruder without prior notice may enter.” At that point, the Siyyid became silent and refrained from comment.

Late in the afternoon, we were all summoned to `Abdu’l-Bahá’s House and the Siyyid joined us as well. When we came to the room where the Master was, he entered and greeted Him with a guttural voice in the custom of the clergy. With great pride, he occupied a seat of honor facing the Master. `Abdu’l-Bahá ignored him completely. He spoke at length about the life of the Messenger of God [Muhammad], the deceit and trickery of the Quriyish, the enmity of Abu-Jahl and other oppressors in Mecca. I noticed that, as soon as the Master began to speak, the Siyyid collected himself and, with hands out of his pockets, politely began to listen most attentively to Him. At the end of His comments, `Abdu’l-Bahá said, “There is a tradition passed down from the Prophet Muhammad that states, ‘The wrath of God be upon those who claim to be My relation, but are a

stranger to Me.” The Master then dismissed us, but the condition of the Siyyid had changed dramatically. That night, they brought supper from the House of `Abdu'l-Bahá for all of us.

The next day, I noticed that the poor Siyyid had changed his black turban for a white one. Therefore, I asked, “Until last night you were a Siyyid and a descendent of the Prophet [and signified it by wearing a black turban]. How is it that this morning your situation has changed?” He replied, “You are unaware that everything the Master, `Abbás Effendi, said yesterday, from beginning to end, was meant for me and that He was not speaking to the rest of you. Even the hadith quoted at the end was for my benefit, as I am a commoner. A few years ago, I went to Tihran and presented myself as a Siyyid and people have believed me ever since. However, `Abbás Effendi was aware of my deceit and the tradition He quoted was meant for me.”

The Siyyid was in the Holy Land for 15 days. `Abdu'l-Bahá paid his travel expenses to Beirut and wrote to Áqá Muhammad-Mustafa Baghdadi to ensure his comfort and arrange his travel to Iran.

[Some years later], I asked Áqá Muhammad-Mustafa about this Siyyid and what had become of him. He replied, “When he arrived by boat, I went to welcome him and brought him home. After we began to converse, I asked him, ‘Now that you have spent 15 days in the presence of `Abbas Effendi, what have you learned and what impression did this meeting leave with you?’ He replied, ‘In truth, and between us and God, `Abbas Effendi is the most accomplished of men. He is knowledgeable in all branches of learning and knows of divine truth hidden from us. However, when it comes to the science of Islamic jurisprudence, He appears wanting.’” Áqá Mustafa continued, “I said to him, ‘He has left the science of “unclean and clean”<sup>140</sup> and such unworthy things for people such as you to ponder and devote your time to.’ After a few days, the Siyyid was sent to Iran through Damascus.”

### **Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán**

Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán<sup>141</sup> was the second child of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan, known as the Afnán-i-Kabír. As a result of supplications [to Bahá'u'lláh]

<sup>140</sup> *`Im-i nájasat* is a sub-branch of Shi'i jurisprudence.

<sup>141</sup> The writings of the Guardian record that a son-in-law of Bahá'u'lláh, Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán, was an entrenched enemy of `Abdu'l-Bahá and that he had previously caused the untimely death of Khadíjih Bagum by abandoning his promise to escort her to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. The following telegraph from Shoghi Effendi refers to this: “Inform National Assemblies that God’s avenging wrath having afflicted in rapid succession during recent years two sons, brother and sister-in-law of Arch-breaker of Bahá'u'lláh’s Covenant, has now struck down second son of Siyyid `Alí, Nayer Afnán, pivot of machinations, connecting link between old and new Covenant-breakers. Time alone will reveal extent of havoc wreaked by this virus of violation injected, fostered over two decades in `Abdu'l-Bahá’s family. History will brand him one whose grandmother, wife of Bahá'u'lláh, joined breakers of His Covenant on morrow of His passing, whose parents lent her undivided support, whose father openly accused `Abdu'l-Bahá as one deserving capital punishment, who broke his promise to the Báb’s wife to escort her to Holy Land, precipitating thereby her death, who was repeatedly denounced by Center of the

from the wife of the Báb, Khadíjih Bagum, and `Abdu'l-Bahá, he was honored with becoming a son-in-law to the Blessed Beauty.<sup>142</sup> At first, he promised the illustrious wife of the Báb that, should she intercede on his behalf by sending a letter to the sacred Threshold of Bahá'ulláh, he would come to Shiraz and travel with her to the Holy Land. His father also wrote to her in this vein. The wife of the Báb longed to attain the blessed presence [of Bahá'u'lláh] and behold the countenance of the Sovereign of the world.

Therefore, in order to enlighten the reader further, it is best that I now share a letter written by the wife of `Abdu'l-Bahá [Munirih Khánum] to the honored wife of the Báb. It illustrates the extent of the latter's intense desire to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and her eagerness to share in the blessings of such a pilgrimage:

... In short, you had written, "On every occasion [that you are] in the presence of the Divine Effulgence [Bahá'u'lláh], may my spirit be a sacrifice unto Him, kindly mention this desolate one. Perhaps, through the blessings of the pure souls, this remoteness will pass and I will attain the banquet of His presence." This supplication was brought especially to His divine presence and, in response, the Ancient Tongue spoke these words: "Through His unceasing favors and mercies, God has ordained that that Holy Leaf live at the shore of the sea of Our presence forever and the Lord has given her to taste the wine of Our union. At all times, the Tongue of the Merciful makes mention of her. In light of this, there is no reason [for her] to feel separation or remoteness. From the heaven of benevolence, an exalted Tablet was revealed in her honor and sent through the letter Sin<sup>143</sup>. God willing, on future occasions, other Tablets will be dispatched as well."

Be assured those expressions of salutation, devotion and enthusiasm that your good self wrote for the Divine Effulgence were shared in their entirety in His sanctified presence.<sup>144</sup>

Even at this moment, all are present and avidly remember that blessed Leaf. The Blessed Perfection conveyed these sentiments: "By God, in truth, not a moment passes that We do not occupy Ourselves

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Covenant as His chief enemy..." (Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 24-25) In this chapter, Mírzá Habíb records some of the details associated with Siyyid `Alí's broken promise and its devastating effect on Khadíjih Bagum.

<sup>142</sup> Siyyid `Alí married Furughiyyih, a daughter of Bahá'u'lláh from His third wife, Gawhar Khánum.

<sup>143</sup> Presumably, Shaykh Salman, the courier of Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>144</sup> Munirih Khánum visited Shiraz on her way to `Akka to marry `Abdu'l-Bahá and recorded the following (*Khándan-i-Afnán*, pp. 165-6): "...The wife of the Báb said: 'Please supplicate the Blessed Perfection to grant two wishes of mine. The first, one of the exalted leaves of the Blessed Family may be permitted to join in wedlock with a member of the Family of the Báb, so that even outwardly the two Holy Trees may be knit together. The other, to grant me permission to attend His presence.' I conveyed this message when I attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He readily assented to both her requests." An additional request of Khadíjih Bagum was for the House of the Báb to be renovated and this was also accepted.

with the joy of your mention. We beseech Him Who does what He wills to gather all the Leaves of His divine Lote-Tree in one spot, so that all will raise their voice in His praise and glorification and quaff the sweet wine of union from the chalice of immortality passed from one to another.” ...<sup>145</sup>

The supplication of the wife of the Báb was accepted into the presence of the Lord of the world of being. In a letter written by Munirih Khánum to the blessed wife [of the Báb], the following was noted:

You wrote about the matter that we had agreed.<sup>146</sup> Know, then, that your request was presented in the Sacred Presence and considered with favor. Praised be God and glorified be His name! The grace of God has surrounded your esteemed self in such wise that even such a tremendous petition has found acceptance before His throne!<sup>147</sup>

After Bahá'u'lláh consented to this union, Siyyid `Alí went to Simnán for his commercial activities. His father remained in Yazd and his older brother, Siyyid Mírzá, went to Bombay. The illustrious wife of the Báb passed on the news of the blessed permission [of Bahá'u'lláh] to [her brother,] the Afnán-i-Kabír. She also expressed her extreme excitement and eagerness to take part in this journey. She further wrote, “Day and night, I expectantly look for your arrival [in Shiraz].”

After waiting a considerable time, she received a letter from the Afnán-i-Kabír<sup>148</sup> and Siyyid `Alí, saying:

Since the means for our journey to Shiraz are not available at this time, we have arranged to leave by way of Khurasan and through Istanbul. Therefore, you may wish to go to Port Said with Hájí Mírzá `Abdu'l-Hamid<sup>149</sup> and Áqá Siyyid Áqá<sup>150</sup> so that, after we have completed our hajj [obligatory pilgrimage], we may join you in Port Said and, from there, leave for the Holy Land in your company.

Numerous letters are extant from them on this subject. However, we must content ourselves with quoting just one as evidence, so that the reader can plainly see how unfaithful the Covenant-breakers were to the blessed wife

<sup>145</sup> This letter is also quoted in *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>146</sup> Reference to the confidential agreement about the marriage of Siyyid `Alí with Furughiyyih Khánum.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted also in *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, pp. 175.

<sup>148</sup> The term ‘Afnán-i-Kabir’ was originally bestowed upon the uncle of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad (see Bahá'u'lláh; *Collection of Tablets revealed in honor of Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i-Núri 'd-Dín*; MS, n.d., p. 60). However, in later years it became a designation for Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan.

<sup>149</sup> He embraced the Faith during the Báb's sermon at Masjid-i-Vakil and, subsequently, was taught the Faith through the loving-kindness of Khadjjih Bagum. He became a resident in the House of the Báb after the Báb's martyrdom and Khadjjih Bagum's departure for the home of the martyred uncle. He passed away around 1897.

<sup>150</sup> Parenthetically, Mírzá Habib has added, “my older brother”.

of the Báb. She had suffered so long and so bitterly in the path of the Faith, and the one solace for her broken heart would have been attaining the presence of the Blessed Beauty. Siyyid `Alíy-i-Afnán, in a letter dated 19 Ramadan 1299 A.H. [14 August 1882], writes from Simnán:

Humbly submitted to the presence of that honored noblewoman, may she be blessed with a long life:

Your blessed letter spoke of your perseverance and health, and this caused us to raise our voice in praise and gratitude to the threshold of the Almighty. May God perpetually keep you shielded under the shadow of His protection and custody.

However, your blessed letter was bereft of kind sentiments towards this servant and therefore rendered this ephemeral one perplexed and thoroughly disappointed in [his] self as to what has occasioned such a response. I have exerted efforts in [your] service and carried out my duties to the best of my ability. Nevertheless, I remain hopeful that, God willing, the Almighty will fulfil our arrangements in a splendid way.

At the time of my departure from Simnán, I was not fully apprised of my father's travel arrangements, and did not know whether he intended to go only to Mashhad or wanted to travel further. When he left Yazd, he told me, "I am setting out for Mashhad and you must depart in that direction as well." However, when he arrived in Mashhad, it became clear that he intended to leave directly for the Holy Land. I was thinking about this when your letter arrived, which caused deep sadness and disappointment. God willing, the Lord will conclude these affairs in a most agreeable fashion.

At the moment, it is impossible for me to return from here, otherwise I would attain the presence of that eminent personage [Khadíjih Bagum]. Such has been decreed. My own health is not the best. Be assured and rest confident knowing that this insignificant one remains devoted to his oath and promise.

Even now, should you agree and consider it appropriate, I have asked my honorable maternal uncle, Áqá Mírzá Buzurg, to arrange your travel. My honored cousin, Áqá Siyyid Aqa<sup>151</sup>, and Hájí Mírzá `Abdu'l-Hamid have gone to Mecca, which will not benefit you. You should journey from Bushihr to Alexandria and remain there for a few days. This servant will also travel to Alexandria and join you there and help Áqá Siyyid Aqa to leave for Bombay.

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<sup>151</sup> Parenthetically, Mírzá Habib has added, "my older brother."



And should this [suggested] arrangement fail to please you, then, God willing, I will come from there [the Holy Land] and we will travel together. ...”

In a letter to the wife of the Báb, the Afnán-i-Kabír, expresses the following sentiments:

Again I submit that, concerning the travel of that exalted lady [Khadíjih Bagum], Áqá Siyyid `Alí has written to the honored Háji Mírzá Buzurg. God willing, arrangements for your departure will be made with ease and facility. In order to avoid any alarm, Áqá Siyyid Aqa, son of Áqá Mírzá Aqa, will accompany you to provide privacy and the honored Háji Mírzá `Abdu'l-Hamid will serve as your attendant and entourage. From Shiraz, you should travel directly to Alexandria, where Áqá Siyyid `Alí will join you and accompany you to the desired destination [the Holy Land].

One after another, the blessed wife of the Báb received communications from Áqá Mírzá Muhsin and others that thoroughly dashed her hopes of ever attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>152</sup>

During that time, my late father was doing business in Bombay, and my paternal grandmother, [Zahra Bagum], told him in writing what had happened. Each week, my late father would write to the wife of the Báb. He was filled with gratitude to her for affection governed their relationship. On this occasion, too, my father wrote a letter describing some of the misdeeds and the infidelity of these kinsmen. I quote a portion of this letter here:

To the presence of that honorable and exalted lady, may my life be a sacrifice unto you:

My sole supplication at the Threshold of the All-Glorious Lord is your well-being and health. Through the grace of the Exalted God, may happiness ever surround you!

Previously, the details were recorded for your kind consideration and submitted in a humble letter. God willing, it has been perused by your good self. On this occasion, I humbly note that your cherished and most gracious letters of 9 Sha'ban [26 June 1882] and 2 Ramadan [10 July 1882] were received. Through your most kind and benevolent letters, I learned of their [the Afnán-i-Kabir and Siyyid `Alí's] departure for Mecca and their unfulfilled promises. Their misdeeds are not surprising; what bewilders me is that your esteemed self would have any confidence in their empty and worthless words. I

<sup>152</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge* for the text of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet on the occasion of the passing of Khadíjih Bagum.

have yet to see a truthful word spoken by them. God knows the secrets of all hearts. There should be no need for my explanation.

That honorable lady must not be sad, nor should you dwell on what has happened. There is a station for everything, and the exalted honor of this task [to accompany you] was not to be theirs. God did not decree for this blessing to be bestowed on them. Otherwise, events would not have turned out as they have.

Consider what He [Bahá'u'lláh] has revealed in honor of your journey and note well the way He has spoken of its importance. Furthermore, call to mind the bygone days of the illustrious Báb, may my life be a sacrifice unto Him. To be sure, the Exalted One would not have wanted them to be in your service. However, what this desolate one writes is of no consequence, given that your own honored self is well aware of their character. Nothing at all is concealed from God and everything is known to Him.

I will forward your letter to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, and will write separately to Áqá Siyyid Mihdi<sup>153</sup>.

In short, my father wrote extensively to console the wife of the Báb. Even at the end of this letter, he noted:

I have now sent the letter of that esteemed lady [to Baha'ullah] and I have also informed Áqá Siyyid Mihdi. Do not give way to despair. God will decree what is best for all. Of a certainty, His Holiness the Báb was not pleased with this arrangement [that you should journey with them]. You know best that they have always treated you in this way. If you reflect on the details, you will come to the same conclusion. Concerning the question of faith, if someone is truly faithful, he will consider it an obligation to obey your every command and never fail in your service. In any case, what has happened to the consideration [one should have for] one's sister<sup>154</sup>?!

In short, these thoughts have set me on fire. God will set all things right; whatever else I say is unworthy.

8<sup>th</sup> Ramadán 1299 A.H. [24 July 1882]

[Signed] Mírzá Áqá

The profound disappointment of not having the privilege of going on pilgrimage and attaining the presence of the Blessed Beauty shattered the

<sup>153</sup> Most likely, a reference to Siyyid Mihdi Afnán; private communications from Dr. Moojan Momen, April 2004.

<sup>154</sup> The Afnán-i-Kabir was an older brother of Khadíjih Bagum.

blessed wife of the Báb and burned in her soul.<sup>155</sup> Her illustrious self soon became seriously ill through acute depression and she contracted dysentery. Within two months of hearing the news from her brother and faithless nephew, she left this transient life for her eternal abode within the everlasting divine paradise and for perpetual consort with the sacred spirits of the Prophets and His chosen ones. Her unique and exalted station is evident from the Tablet of Visitation revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in her honor, which adorned these pages earlier.

I wish, also, to quote a letter of the late Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim-i-Afnán, the older brother of Khadíjih Bagum. He selflessly and devotedly served his noble sister until her last breath. This letter is addressed to my late father in Bombay. In it, he describes the events during and after the passing of Khadíjih Bagum.

Dated 28 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1299 A.H. [10 November 1882]

Beloved light of my eyes, may God preserve you.

Monday last week, I wrote you a letter that I mailed immediately. God willing, it has been seen by your illustrious self. I pray that, through the decree of God, you remain protected and preserved from harm and injury. As the mail for Bushihr is about to leave soon, it is necessary to write a few words about what has happened and give the details.

In my previous correspondence, I described the condition of my most cherished sister and her infirmity, and said I had no hope that she would be cured and recover. I also expressed my fear that the illness was at an advanced stage and had become very acute. The honored Áqá Mírzá Ahmad-i-Tabib was her physician, and the honored Hájí Mírzá Hasan (the Hakim-Bashi-i-Buzurg) frequently attended as well. On occasion, we troubled the honored Aqay-i-Hakim-Bashi to help Áqá Mírzá Ahmad and he would confirm that the right medication had been prescribed. However, "All bounties are in the hand of God"<sup>156</sup>, and the decree of God and his predestined will cannot be delayed.

Finally, on the eve of Monday the 2<sup>nd</sup> [Dhi'l-Hajjih 1299 A.H.<sup>157</sup>], about three hours after sunset, she left this world and winged her

<sup>155</sup> Bahá'u'lláh notes in a Tablet addressed to Núri'd-Dín that the wife of the Báb always longed for the privilege of pilgrimage: "O My Afnán! My Glory of God be upon thee, as well as My Bounty, My Peace, My Favor and My Mercy! Day and night, that esteemed and late lady wished to attain Our presence and desired to behold Our Countenance. This was the object that her heart longed for, her tongue spoke of, her eyes searched for expectantly and her whole being yearned for; and yet, the divine decree prevented." INBMC 51:332-3, no. 338

<sup>156</sup> Qur'an 3:73

<sup>157</sup> This letter does not give the exact date of Khadíjih Bagum's passing. However, Mírzá Habib has noted that it was in the month of Dhi'l-Hajjih; see *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 9. This is consistent with Mírzá

flight for the unseen realm. Yet, how great the anguish of those that are left behind. [I have] no strength or spirit left to describe the details. My only prayer is that the merciful God will grant us all patience and perseverance.

Kindly inform Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and Áqá Mírzá Aqa<sup>158</sup> [of this news]. The lights of my eyes [your sons] are in no condition to write and are otherwise occupied elsewhere.

This lowly one knows perfectly well how painful and disturbing this bitter news will be for you. But what is to be done? Whatever is destined will happen, and what God decrees shall come to pass.

During her illness, she said nothing that can serve as her will, nor did she leave any directions about what to do with the household goods. On the night of her passing, we stayed behind and, with great care, arranged for her blessed remains to be washed [and prepared for interment] in the Hammam-i-Khaiyri<sup>159</sup>. From there, it was moved to ... and buried in a grave next to ...<sup>160</sup> The undertakers came in the middle of night. When they finished their work, she was interred before the hour for the dawn obligatory prayer, and we returned.

Prayer vigils were held in her memory on Monday and Tuesday at the burial-place. On Tuesday afternoon, a group of the city's noblemen, which included the honored [Abu'l-Hasan, the] Mushiru'l-Mulk and his Excellency the honored Imam-Jum`ih<sup>161</sup>, attended and helped to conclude the prayer vigil. From the burial-place, we returned home and continued the prayer sessions there. The friends that did not have the opportunity to come by her graveside troubled themselves to come and visit. We are now occupied with the memorial services. In short, the customary duties have all been carried out.

However, since she did not leave a will, I am at a loss about what to do. I am thinking of making an inventory of the residence's furnishings and her other possessions. You must write [to Bahá'u'lláh] and ask for guidance. Whatever He commands will be done. I am unclear about the status of the title of the House [of the

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Abú'l-Qásim's statement that her death occurred on the second of the month, which is a Monday. Therefore, it seems clear that she passed away on 2 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1299 A.H. (16 October 1882). Based on this evidence, the dates given in *Khadíjih Bagum*, p. 35 (15 September 1882) and *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, p. 179, (29 Dhi'l-H.ajjih) must be incorrect. The latter date must also be incorrect because it falls after Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim wrote this letter.

<sup>158</sup> He also lived in Bombay at the time.

<sup>159</sup> Named after its owner, Khayr, this public bathhouse is otherwise known as the Hammam-i-Guldastih. It is situated near the House of the Báb and next to the Masjid-i-Naw.

<sup>160</sup> For security reasons, the exact location is not given in this translation.

<sup>161</sup> Shaykh Abu-Turab

Báb] or what I must do.<sup>162</sup> The property that she owned and was leased to the gentlemen in Yazd<sup>163</sup> earned three tumans a month. She also had some property with Mírzá Siyyid Hasan and Siyyid Mírzá, for which they paid 12 to 13 tumans a year. This year, even though Siyyid Mírzá sent a draft for the due amount to Siyyid [Muhammad-]Husayn, when it was presented to her, she refused it because of the bitterness they had caused – a matter that she had repeatedly complained about to me.

I also do not know the situation with the House [of the Báb] or what I must do about it. I have heard that Hájí Mírzá Buzurg has said that, after the return of Hájí Mírzá [Siyyid] `Alí and his mother, who is the sister of Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, they may take up residence there. Your mother said, “I cannot accept anyone in this house in place of my sister. I will stay here for the rest of my days. ...”<sup>164</sup>

I do not know the situation with the dedicated properties that my late cousin<sup>165</sup> gave to Khadíjih Sultan Bagum, or to what extent they have been renovated. Surely, you know.<sup>166</sup>

You must write as soon as possible and ask for guidance [from Bahá’u’lláh] about what to do with the Blessed House [of the Báb], the property leased to the Yazdi gentlemen, the property with Áqá Mírzá Siyyid Hasan and Áqá Siyyid Mírzá, and all the furnishings, carpets and clothing in this House, and other things. Once we have His directions, we will attend to whatever is decided.

Please carry out this vital task in the quickest way possible, so that we can have an early answer and know how to divide the estate and distribute the inheritances. You must also mention in your letter [to Bahá’u’lláh] that she has been survived by a [natural] sister (my maternal grandmother) and two brothers (Hájí Mírzá Abú’l-Qásim and Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan, known as the Afnán-i-Kabir), and a stepbrother and a stepsister (Hájí Muhammad-Mihdiy-i-Hijab, the wife of the martyred uncle of the Báb), and no other. It is critical that whatever action is taken is done through His [Bahá’u’lláh’s] guidance and direction.

<sup>162</sup> Hájí Mírzá Abú’l-Qásim was unaware that, some time earlier, the title of the House of the Báb was lost in a robbery at the home of Mírzá Zaynu’l-`Abidin (Núri’-d-Dín’s father).

<sup>163</sup> A reference to the sons of the Afnán-i-Kabir, who lived in Yazd.

<sup>164</sup> During the early days of the Afnán family, there was considerable competition within certain quarters of the family over the House of the Báb. On several occasions, the issue was brought to Bahá’u’lláh. He consistently reaffirmed the hereditary custodianship of Zahra Bagum and her descendants. By the time of `Abdu’l-Bahá’s Ministry, only a few family members questioned the custodianship rights. However, to ensure complete unity, the Master reaffirmed the hereditary right of Núri’-d-Dín and, thereafter, Mírzá Habíb. Before his passing, Mírzá Habíb passed the custodianship to his oldest son, Abú’l-Qásim Afnán.

<sup>165</sup> A reference to Fatímih Bagum, the mother of the Báb.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Vafq’ properties are donated to the Faith for the promotion of its best interest, either during the person’s lifetime or as part of their bequest.

If there is anything that you have become aware of recently that I do not know, kindly inform me as soon as possible so that I know what to do and how I should dispose of various articles. The sooner my duties are made clear, the better her interest will be served.

In her latter days, she was deeply saddened and disheartened by the false promises of Siyyid Mírzá, Siyyid `Alí and Siyyid Muhsin to be available for the journey to Mecca<sup>167</sup> and their eventual betrayal. She used to repeat, “For 20 years or more, Áqá Mírzá Siyyid Hasan<sup>168</sup> never once wrote to me. Why did I write to him on this occasion and about this journey, so that he would make a promise and then betray it?” She used to add, “As soon as I read his letter [about not taking her to the Holy Land], I felt an acute emptiness and depression inside me.” And it was then that she began to experience the symptoms of dysentery. From the same illness, she left this nether world and ascended to the immortal realm.

What am I to write?! It seems as if they [the Afnán-i-Kabir and his progeny] have become proud and think too much of their accomplishments. I am bewildered at their motives. This should not be the conduct of people. In this new Dispensation, such characteristics have been forbidden - nay, we are commanded to be righteous. Then what manner of behavior is this?! ...”

This was a portion of a letter of the late Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim, who wrote it shortly after the passing of the wife of the Báb in Shiraz. [I have] included it in these pages to acquaint us with the details.

In accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's instructions, in 1308 A.H. [1891], Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí<sup>169</sup> went to Bombay to publish some of the Holy Tablets. As the Blessed Beauty instructed, he purchased a gravestone for the resting place of the wife of the Báb. The following verse, revealed from the heaven of divine will, was engraved on it: “He is the Everlasting. Verily this exalted leaf hearkened to the Call of the Tree beyond which there is no passing and winged her flight towards it. 1299.”<sup>170</sup> This stone was left as a trust in the home of the late Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí-i-Afnán (a son of the

<sup>167</sup> A coded reference to `Akka, where Bahá'u'lláh resided.

<sup>168</sup> The following Tablet of the Báb addressed to Khadjjih Bagum is quoted in *Eminent Bahá'is During the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 216-17: “Do not expect any assistance from thy brothers. They will not help; it is enough that they refrain from insults. Overlook their faults. Even Our enemies have not caused the like of what resulted from the acts of Siyyid 118 in Isfahan. God grant that when the light of thine eyes Mírzá Áqá reacheth maturity, he will be thy help and support. O God! Preserve him from all the evil of the envious and the contumacious.” It should be noted that “118” is the numerical equivalent of Hasan. All evidence indicates that Siyyid Hasan, the Afnán-i-Kabir, was never supportive of his sister, Khadjjih Bagum, or other family members.

<sup>169</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's son

<sup>170</sup> In a Tablet (*Núri'd-Din's Collection*, p. 91), Bahá'u'lláh revealed for Núri'd-Dín: “The other matter is that, at thy previous request, three verses were revealed and sent specially for the gravestone of the illustrious exalted leaf, upon her rest the Most Glorious of the Glorious and the Most Exalted of the Exalted. Any of these that thou consider to be in accord with wisdom and deem prudent may be engraved.”

illustrious maternal uncle of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad). Áqá Mírzá Abdu'l-Vahhab (a son of the late Áqá Mírzá Aqa, son of the late Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí) brought it to Shiraz when he returned from the Holy Land through Bombay in 1327 A.H. [1909]. At present, it is in my safe-keeping in the House of the Báb. When God's will decrees the time is right, it will be placed on her grave.<sup>171</sup>

In summary, Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán grieved the wife of the Báb and prevented her from attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. With his parents and brother, he traveled to the Holy Land through Mashhad, Russia [Ishqabad] and Istanbul. When he arrived, he arranged the wedding ceremony, which took place in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.

On our [first] journey to the Holy Land [in 1891-2], the Afnán-i-Kabir was still alive. Shortly after that, perhaps within only a few months of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, he too passed away. Subsequently, Siyyid `Alí and his brothers, Siyyid Mírzá<sup>172</sup> and Siyyid Muhammad, who were in Bombay, began to collaborate with Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, [Mírzá] Majdu'd-Din and other brothers of `Abdu'l-Bahá. They rose up fiercely to oppose Him. Using various schemes and deceitful methods, they tried to cause division among the friends. His brothers in India were particularly involved in undermining the confidence of the believers by disseminating polemic papers.

This same Siyyid Mírzá had a son named `Abdu'l-Husayn, who was my first cousin on my mother's side. He lived in Yazd and was firm and steadfast in the Divine Cause. He wrote to his father with great conviction, "If you return to Yazd in this state, I will not accept you in my house and will shun you!" During the days of the Ancient Beauty, Siyyid Mírzá had observed, and knew about, the singular spiritual bond that connected Bahá'u'lláh to His Center of the Covenant. He had witnessed the pilgrims pleading with Bahá'u'lláh, "We have been deprived of beholding Your blessed Countenance for several days," and Him telling them, "When you attain the presence of the Master, it is as though you have beheld My Countenance." On many occasions, Siyyid Mírzá had heard the Tongue of Grandeur say, "The only Master is the Greatest Branch and all others dwell beneath His shadow." Siyyid Mírzá had been the recipient of infinite favors. And yet, this same Siyyid Mírzá rose up to dispute with, and oppose, `Abdu'l-Bahá in the most vehement manner and caused tumultuous storms in the Faith. With satanic schemes he would make his way into the gatherings of the friends, acquaintances, Holy Family and other kinsmen and deceive them for his own ends.

After hearing the news of the Covenant-breaking, the very first letter that my father wrote to my brother and I contained certain glimpses of the evil

<sup>171</sup> Abú'l-Qásim Afnán informs the translator that this gravestone is safe in an undisclosed location in Iran. (Private communication, Aug 1997.)

<sup>172</sup> Siyyid Mírzá was an older brother of Siyyid `Alí.

deeds they perpetrated during the days of the wife of the Báb. It gave us a better idea of their activities. A section of this letter follows:

Concerning Siyyid Mírzá and his schemes and aims, I am very familiar with the situation. In Bombay, I spent over 10 years, day and night, with him and never perceived him to be firm in the Faith of God. All his thoughts were focused on worldly matters.

In one instance, he had received a sum of money from Hájí Siyyid `Alí-Akbar [Dahaji], and the two of us<sup>173</sup> were discussing this situation with Hájí Muhammad-Ibrahim, the Muballigh<sup>174</sup>. The latter was speaking to him and offering friendly advice, "You must never use this money without the owner's permission, as this sum has been placed with you in trust. The best course is to deposit it in a bank and earn interest on it. This way, whenever Hájí Siyyid `Alí-Akbar asks for the principal to be returned, it is readily available. Otherwise, you ought to forget about this capital." But Siyyid Mírzá roared back, "What are you saying?! We are the heirs to the Throne and Sovereignty of the Báb!" This ephemeral servant replied, "But the Báb detested you and disavowed any relation with you!"<sup>175</sup> In no time, we were arguing heatedly and Hájí Muhammad-Ibrahim had to intervene.

If you remember well, when His blessed Temple [Bahá'u'lláh] lived in the Abode of Peace [Baghdad], the wife of the Báb had a Tablet revealed in her honor by her illustrious Husband during His confinement in [the citadel of] Mah-ku. She gave me that Tablet with the instructions: "Write to the Blessed Beauty on my behalf. Also write another letter of your own and fold this Tablet of the Báb in your letter. Then place both letters in an envelope and give me the envelope."

I did as asked. She arranged for that envelope to be submitted through Shaykh Salman to the presence of the Ancient Beauty. Subsequently, I was informed that our letters and the Báb's Tablet were received. [This confirmation came] in a Tablet revealed in honor of this evanescent servant in the hand of the beloved Master, which is in my possession. The point is that, in the Tablet [forwarded to Bahá'u'lláh], in truth the Báb had recorded His Will and Testament.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Meaning, Núri'd-Dín and Siyyid Mírzá.

<sup>174</sup> Lit. the Teacher. He was a son of the merchant Hájí `Abdu'r-Rasul and the recipient of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Letters (Lawh-i-Hurufat). Years earlier, he wrote a proof treatise on the appearance of the Báb.

<sup>175</sup> See the Tablet of the Báb quoted above.

<sup>176</sup> The Will and Testament of the Báb is published in The Báb. "Lawh-i Vasaya." (Will and Testament) In *Majumu'ih-i Athar-i Hadrat-i A'la*. Vol. 64, *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [c 1977], pp. 95-102. INBMC 64.



Similarly, in a letter dated 1 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1314 A.H. [3 May 1897], my father wrote from Shiraz to my late brother Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and myself in Port Said:

About the matter that the light of my eyes, Mírzá Habíb, had written, "Siyyid Mírzá and his brethren have committed such deeds that have greatly dishonored the name of 'Afnán' and, because of this, we must disassociate ourselves from this family..." This is not so, my son. Do not allow this situation to dishearten you. The more mischief they<sup>177</sup> commit, the more manifest your nobility.

The Blessed Perfection, may my soul and the spirit of all creation be a sacrifice to the dust trodden by Him, had already disassociated Himself from them. But, unfortunately, at that time we did not see the wisdom in, and the reason for, His words. Now His foresight stands manifest, that He prepared for such a day beforehand.<sup>178</sup> Many times, He spoke of this to the friends present before Him. He also instructed Mullá Muhammad-'Alí Dahají, "Whatever town you arrive in, inform the believers that Our union<sup>179</sup> was only due to the request of the wife of the Báb and the supplication of [Aqa] Mírzá Aqa, the Afnán. We consented only for the sake of her wish and his request. Otherwise, We knew Mírzá Hasan<sup>180</sup> not, nor Siyyid `Alí."

Bahá'u'lláh often spoke such words to many of the friends, including Hájí Niyyaz and Áqá Siyyid `Alí. They were present on two occasions and heard Him speak in this way. Now [because of the misdeeds of these brothers] it is clear why the Blessed Perfection made such pronouncements. ...

In a letter dated 5 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1314 A.H. [7 May 1897] addressed to [my brother,] the late Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and this ephemeral servant, my father wrote:

You wrote about the undertakings of Áqá Mírzá Muhsin and his brethren. All their deeds and actions are plain to see. Hájí Siyyid Muhammad is also in collaboration with them. This humble servant wrote a detailed account to Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taqi and Hájí Mírzá Aqa in Yazd. In response, they wrote a most informed reply, expressing their own frustrations and complaining about the situation [of these brothers]. However, you must not let yourselves be discouraged by their activities. The Blessed Beauty, may my soul and

<sup>177</sup> Reference to Siyyid `Alí and his brothers.

<sup>178</sup> This suggests that early steps for the expulsion of Siyyid `Alí had been initiated by Bahá'u'lláh and later confirmed during the ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

<sup>179</sup> Reference to the marriage of Furughiyyih and Siyyid `Alí Afnán.

<sup>180</sup> The Afnán-i-Kabir.

every other spirit be a sacrifice to the dust of His Shrine, has closed the door on them from all directions. No matter how openly they manifest their evil nature, the noble character of the other [Afnán] family members will be more evident. Under all conditions, you must remain tranquil.

### Third Pilgrimage: 1898

My late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzúrg, and I [lived] in Cairo while our late father remained in Shiraz. Months and days went by, each filled with priceless, yet momentous and pregnant, events. A year and a half passed in this way, from the time the goings of the believers to the Holy Land had increased somewhat and the intensity of the calamities and upheavals had subsided to some extent.

When petitions intended for the Holy Land were received, I immediately submitted them to the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá. They were not delayed in Port Said with Áqá Ahmad [Yazdi], as was done previously. The sun of the Covenant and its life-giving rays shone very brightly, and these ephemeral servants sent supplications to the blessed presence of the Master frequently and also corresponded with each other. We also corresponded with the honored [Siyyid Muhammad-Taqi] Manshadi and Áqá Rida [Qannad-i-Shirazi]. Whenever supplications were received from our late father, these were forwarded at once to the threshold of `Abdu'l-Bahá as well.

Toward the beginning of 1316 A.H.<sup>181</sup>, we sought permission to attain His Holy presence for a second time. Our request was readily accepted and we were invited to the Holy Land. On this journey, we were accompanied by the honored Shaykh Salman, who had been the courier of the Merciful, the late `Alí Aqay-i-Khayyat [the tailor] Shirazi and several believers from Sarvistan and Shiraz. There was also Áqá Mírzá `Inayatu'llah Isfahani<sup>182</sup>, who I remember fondly, but I haven't known his whereabouts for many years.

With incredible joy and felicity, we left Port Said. The extent of our bliss none can fathom except God. He alone knows the profound heavenly ecstasy that overwhelms the heart of pilgrims. In truth, you lose all consciousness and find yourself in a flower-filled paradise of happiness, intoxicated with the breezes of spirituality and fragrances of bliss – the very thought of which is well nigh impossible.

We arrived in `Akká and beheld the Holy Land. When I attained the presence of the Master, my unworthy eyes were illumined once more by the beauty and divine radiance of the Center of the Covenant. My whole being

<sup>181</sup> Circa summer 1898

<sup>182</sup> He was a merchant. He lived in Haifa into the ministry of Shoghi Effendi and returned to Iran, where he passed away.

was spellbound by His sweet and soul-stirring melodies. By now, the tumult of the Covenant-breakers had subsided somewhat and was not as evident as it was before. The majestic station of `Abdu'l-Bahá and His august sovereignty had humbled the necks of the skeptics and reduced the evil of the mischief-makers. Now, everyone, such as the Mufti<sup>183</sup>, the Qadi [the judge] and other influential members of society, clearly saw how Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí was enveloped in the wrath of God. No matter what he planned, only he was caught in his web of intrigues. It was an amazing scene and in no way comparable to our previous pilgrimage after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. Then the violators of the Covenant associated closely with the believers. Now there was a complete break and the foundation of discord and division uprooted. Those here and there who had tried to betray the Cause were now well known and it was clear to pilgrims who they could associate with. `Abdu'l-Bahá was devoting most of His time to revealing Divine Verses and meeting with the friends.

One day in an afternoon, a large number of resident believers, pilgrims, friends and non-Bahá'ís were gathered in the biruni [the outer apartment] of the Master's house. He was engaged in revealing the Lawh-i-Nuh-Sha'n [The Tablet of Nine Modes]. The Mufti of `Akká was sitting next to the Master. He was a man of remarkable qualities. He had a pleasant nature and was deeply devoted to `Abdu'l-Bahá; he was sitting next to the Master. Next to him was the Qadi of the city of `Akka, and seated after him was the Mutasarrif<sup>184</sup> of the city. The Master was busy revealing verses. His pen moved extremely rapidly across the page. Meanwhile, He was conversing with the Iranian believers in Persian, with the Mufti and the Qadi in Arabic and with the Mutasarrif and several of the Pashas in Turkish. All the while His pen never stopped moving. The divine spirit had enveloped the atmosphere and anyone who ventured a question was favored with an answer until that blessed Tablet was completed and `Abdu'l-Bahá sat the pen down.

Thereupon the Mufti implored the Master to read what He had written. However, [ `Abdu'l-Bahá ] responded, "Mufti Effendi, this letter is an answer to a letter from one of My close friends. As such, it is not possible for Me to comply with your request." The Mufti asked for a second time and the response was, "You are asking for a difficult thing." Again, the Mufti insisted, "All the dwellers on earth are close friends of the Effendi and Your blessed Person considers them all in the same light." The Master [still not wishing to read the Tablet] answered, "But portions of what has been written are in Persian, while other segments are in Turkish; not everyone

<sup>183</sup> In Islamic law, the mufti is the trained jurist who writes opinions (*fatwa*) on legal subjects for private clients, or assists judges in deciding cases. Only *fatwas* given in the areas of marriage, divorce and inheritance make binding precedents. *Fatwas* on other subjects may be set aside. In the Ottoman Empire, the muftis were state officials, responsible also for civil administration at a given level. The mufti of Istanbul was the highest of these. The British retained the institution in some Muslim areas under their control. They gave the office of Hussayni, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, great political importance.

<sup>184</sup> The highest ranking provincial military commander.

will understand.” The Mufti replied, “The Qadi Effendi knows Turkish and others speak Persian.” Eventually, he beseeched the Master in the name of the Blessed Beauty and insisted so much that `Abdu'l-Bahá consented and read the first three Modes, which were revealed in Arabic. With extreme humility, the Mufti asked the Master to continue and He recited the whole of Tablet.

God knows that every time I think of that magnificent day, my entire being trembles with wonder and joy. After `Abdu'l-Bahá had finished reciting the Tablet, the Mufti patted the Qadi on the hand, saying in Arabic, “Did you understand? Did you understand? Do you now see that the Effendi’s knowledge is innate and ours is acquired? I have studied the science of religious jurisprudence and the doctrines of faith and its laws at the Al-Azhar University, which has allowed me to gain an *ijtihād* and I am now the Mufti of `Akka. Likewise, you have studied in the various schools of Istanbul and Egypt and acquired the advanced degrees bestowed upon you by others learned in the field of law. And, after much exertion, you have become the Qadi. The Mutasarrif Pasha also started as a soldier in the service of the government, participating in many battles and campaigns. Today, he has risen to the office of chief command and been confirmed as the Mutasarrif of `Akka. As such, our attainments are acquired, whereas the Effendi has never studied in a school, nor has He received tuition from anyone. The knowledge He possesses is God-given and most extraordinary. The source of His innate erudition is God and its origin the fount of the invisible world.”

That day, we realized that the Qadi had been antagonistic towards the Faith and that the Mufti was an honorable man and deeply devoted to `Abdu'l-Bahá. His purpose in being so bold in the presence of the Master had been to impress upon the Qadi the innate character of the Master’s knowledge.

In short, those were wonderful days. Previously, this same Mufti had taken ill and was sent to Beirut for treatment. `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Áqá Muhammad-Mustafa Baghdadi<sup>185</sup> urging him [to look after this man]. Baghdadi received the Mufti with the utmost compassion and consideration. He housed him in his own home, arranged for all his medical treatment and saw him through to a full recovery.

One morning, during the first days of our arrival in the Holy Land, the Master called one of the resident believers and me, informing us, “This morning I want to visit the Mufti, who has recently returned [to `Akka].” We followed in attendance. `Abdu'l-Bahá reached the entrance to the Mufti’s home and called out, “Mufti, where are you?” [The Mufti] immediately ran out to throw himself in prostration at `Abdu'l-Bahá’s feet. `Abdu'l-Bahá

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<sup>185</sup> A son of Hájí Muhammad-Shibl. He and his father accompanied Tahirih on her return to Iran from the `Atabat. He resided in Beirut and served the Faith as the focal point of communications with the Holy Land.

prevented the Muftí and, instead, raised him and kissed his face as He entered the room. We followed inside as well. That day [as a sign of respect,] the Muftí would not sit in the Master's presence and stood by the threshold of the room.

After `Abdu'l-Bahá insisted several times that he should sit, he finally sat on a chair at the lowest part of the room [by the entrance]. Addressing those present, the Muftí said, "Gentlemen of Haifa and `Akká! You have come to visit me and inquire about my health. I have been granted a new life through a favor bestowed on me by [ `Abbás] Effendi. He wrote a few lines to one of His subjects in Beirut asking him to accept me and care for me. As a result, despite my being a total stranger and unknown to them, I was received by that family with such warm hospitality. I have never experienced [anything like it before], even at the hand of my own children and kinsmen!" In short, it is impossible to describe his expressions of appreciation and gratitude and the way that all those present showed humility and submissiveness before the Master.

On another occasion, we were in the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá when one of the Turkish Pashas arrived to visit Him as well. He spoke Persian in a sweet manner and was very knowledgeable about Persian literature. He was also profoundly devoted to the Master and loved Him dearly. As a token of his affection, the Pasha said, "No words can adequately express our thanks to the Iranian monarch, or the government, and the people of that land for exiling with their own hands this priceless Treasure, the blessed Person [of `Abdu'l-Bahá], and sending Him to our land. What extraordinary bliss and exhilaration has surrounded us and how truly we pride ourselves in this stupendous blessing! As the Shaykh-i-Shirazi<sup>186</sup> has written:

The candle must be removed from home and extinguished,  
so neighbors remain unaware that thou art among us."

`Abdu'l-Bahá smiled and replied in verse:

In fear of rivals, quenching the candle is of what use?  
when the radiance of thy beauty tells that thou art hither.

Surely, in whatever world the spirit of Sa`di is dwelling, he must have been filled with pride and ecstasy!

Among the events that I remember vividly from this journey is the following. One day, `Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of His Holiness the Primal Point, referring to the ways He conducted His business transactions as a merchant and associated with people. He related:

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<sup>186</sup> A reference to Sa`di, one of the foremost literary figures in Iranian history.

During the time that His Holiness the Exalted One lived in Bushihr and was in the trading business, a few merchants bought some Prussian blue dye from His blessed Person. When their negotiations were over, the goods were delivered to their office and the time came to settle the account. But they abandoned their agreement and began bargaining anew. This was the practice of the merchants in Bushihr in former days. When the transaction was concluded, the buyer would dismiss the contract and begin renegotiating, in order to get a better price or a discount. Consequently, the merchants reneged on the price. However, His Holiness did not agree to it. They persisted, but He responded, "Our negotiations were completed. If you do not want to buy [the goods], cancel the contract altogether." No matter how hard they tried, their plea was not accepted. The Báb told them, "I will arrange for the blue dye to be brought back from your office." They replied, "But then our credit will be ruined among the merchant community!" "We have concluded the transaction and made a contract," the Báb responded. "Whether the terms are favorable or disagreeable, you must now pay the full sum." "But it is the custom of the realm," they said. To which He replied, "Soon many of these ignoble customs will be changed."

The Báb did not give in and eventually the Prussian blue dyes were brought back to His office. After a while though, one of the uncles of the Báb arrived in Bushihr and the merchants complained to him, "Your Nephew has thoroughly ruined our credit and you must advise Him to be more considerate in dealing with us." The uncle of the Báb reported the matter to the Latter, Who replied, "Even now, if they wanted to conclude an agreement and then abandon it, I would not agree to it."

On that occasion, the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá noted, "The ways of His Holiness the Báb in Bushihr caused many of the old and sterile traditions to be changed."

`Abdu'l-Bahá also related:

One day in Baghdad, very early in the morning, Mullá Baqir, one of the Letters of the Living, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He asked him, "What were you doing last evening?" "I was reading the Ahsanu'l-Qisas<sup>187</sup>," he replied. Bahá'u'lláh queried further, "How much did you read?" and he replied, "I read several chapters of the Ahsanu'l-Qisas." Then He asked, "What did you understand [of it]?"

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<sup>187</sup> The Báb's *Qayyumu'l-Asma* is a commentary on the Surih of Joseph of the Quran, where the story of Joseph is referred to as the "Best of the Stories," (Qur'an 12:3). The commentary of the Báb is typically referred to by the same title. The Báb. "Excerpts from the *Qayyumu'l-Asma*" In *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and translated by Habíb Taherzadeh. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976.

In a state of extreme joy and ecstasy, Mulla Baqir whirled as mystics are wont to do, snapped his fingers in rapture and replied, "Every word announces, 'I long for My Beloved!'"<sup>188</sup>

That day the Master was extremely cheerful and happy and bestowed upon us His infinite generosity and benevolence.

{One day my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and I accompanied `Abdu'l-Bahá in His carriage from Haifa to `Akka. `Abdu'l-Bahá sat in the front next to the driver and we sat in the back of the carriage. It was raining gently and the sea was turbulent. Occasionally, the drops of rain sprayed the carriage and `Abdu'l-Bahá was whispering this verse:

Gentle sprinkles are joy for the drunkard,  
Divine absolution is bliss for the sinner.

A few strands of `Abdu'l-Bahá's hair had fallen on His blessed shoulders, so I gathered them very gently from behind. Now they are kept in the Archives of the House of the Báb in Shiraz.<sup>189</sup>

On this trip, we were honored to stay for only a short time - perhaps two weeks. When it was time for us to leave, `Abdu'l-Bahá said, "I have summoned your father and he will arrive soon. At that time, you will attain Our presence once again, in his company. For now, return to Port Said and keep working at your business."

As instructed by the Master, we returned and continued our commercial activities in Port Said and Cairo as before. Eventually, because of accounting improprieties in the Ruhaniyyih Company<sup>190</sup>, `Abdu'l-Bahá sent a message [instructing us to] write to our father and tell him, "Your accounts and business transactions have become entangled like a hairball. It is imperative that you return in order to fix the problem." In accordance with the Master's direction, we wrote to Shiraz and told our father the exact message of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Along with it, we forwarded a Tablet revealed in our father's name.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>188</sup> The Báb had told Mulla Baqir that he would attain the presence of the Promised One of the Bayan. For details of his historic mission on behalf of the Báb, see *The Dawn-breakers*, pp. 504-6. *Tarikh Zuhuru'l-Haqq* 5:5 notes the following extract from a treatise of Mulla Baqir addressed to Yahya Azal: "His Holiness the Báb placed all the Mirrors, Witnesses and believers under the command of the Letters of the Living. Therefore, you and those like you, who claim the station of Mirrorship, must obey my behest. Now I testify and confess that the promised 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' in the Bayan and the One lauded in the Tablet revealed in my honor has indeed been made manifest. Since I [received] that assurance from the Báb, I have attained unto His august presence. And you too, as you are under my shadow, must recognize Him and believe in Him."

<sup>189</sup> The bracketed section is based on notes kept by Hasan Afnán. Mírzá Habíb intended for them to be inserted at this point. (private communications, August 1991)

<sup>190</sup> Shirkat-i-Ruhaniyyih was formed in 1305 A.H./1887 in Cairo through the association of Núri'd-Dín, Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khurasani, Hájí Muhammad-i-Yazdi, Áqá Siyyid Aqay-i-Afnán, and Hájí `Abdu'l-Karim-i-Tihriani. The company was dissolved in 1311 A.H./1893.

<sup>191</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:302-4, no. 345) to Núri'd-Dín, `Abdu'l-Bahá says that He reviewed the accounts of the company and concluded that the partners had committed improprieties and owed money to Núri'd-

{Sh[iraz]. The illustrious Afnán of the sacred Lote-Tree, the honored Áqá Mírzá Aqa, upon him rest the Glory of God, the Most Glorious.

He is God.

O thou distinguished offshoot of the sacred Lote-Tree! A while ago, the illustrious Afnáns<sup>192</sup>, upon both be the Glory of God, the Most Glorious, were summoned and they arrived in the Holy Land. It so happened that, during those days, this servant was surrounded with a multitude of troubles, to the point that night and day were indistinguishable, and [I was] unable to see fully to their comfort and felicity.

The Holy Land is tumultuous beyond description. Only the constancy and tenacity of this servant and the resoluteness of the steadfast friends have preserved us. Given that the agents of troubles and difficulties are at the ready in all directions, I worried that further hardships and adversities would lead to other trials. Accordingly, it was considered wise not to entangle them in these matters and to send them to Egypt to wait until word was received from you.

In short, the affairs of that honored person and your sons cannot be resolved without your presence. I have written previously about this.

I wrote about the steadfastness and firmness of the friends of God, and their devotion and attachment to the Covenant and Testament. It is evident that, should the whole earth arise to disturb even slightly the faith of those who believe in God and have certitude in His divine Verses, they would utterly fail. This is because these souls have quaffed from the chalice of favors, seek naught but the celestial fragrances and are attracted to nothing but the divine effulgence. Upon thee rest the Glory of God.

Convey my warmest greetings to the sacred leaf, your honored wife, and assure all the friends of my deep love. The Glory of God rest upon all.

{Abdu'l-Bahá, `Abbas.}<sup>193</sup>

My father left Shiraz on Rabi`u'l-Avval 1316 A.H. [July 1898] and arrived in Port Said on Rabi`u`th-Thani [August 1898]. Since he had told us when

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Dín. Further, the Master encouraged Núri`d-Dín to separate himself from this partnership and move his sons, Mírzá Buzurg and Mírzá Habíb, to Beirut.

<sup>192</sup> Presumably, a reference to Mírzá Habíb and Mírzá Buzurg.

<sup>193</sup> INBMC 52:282-3 no. 334. This Tablet has been added to the memoirs at the request of Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, who believes his father wanted it included.



he was due to arrive, we traveled from Cairo to Port Said and made the arrangements for his landing and stay. He arrived with my mother, my youngest and late brother, Mírzá Diya', and our sister, Tuba Khánum. Without contacting his business partners, he instructed my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and I to establish a separate office in Port Said. Given that we were thoroughly fluent in Arabic and Italian, we did not need any assistance in seeing to the needs of the business.

#### **Fourth Pilgrimage: 1898**

After receiving permission from the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá, we left with our father for the abode of the Beloved in the month of Jamádíyu'l-Avval [September 1898]. When we arrived, we attained `Abdu'l-Bahá's sacred presence, and received His many favors and were showered with His love and generosity. A house next to the Master's residence was prepared for our stay and, each day, we were able to benefit from His blessed utterances.

#### **The Remains of the Báb**

One day, several elders among the resident believers were in the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá when He informed us, "Certain [good] news has been received from Iran. If divulged, the old would dance with joy. But the time for its announcement has not yet arrived." The illustrious Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin and the honored [Hájí] Mírzá Haydar-`Alí, who were present, asked, "Is the time for proclaiming this good news near?" `Abdu'l-Bahá answered, "God willing."

During the following week, `Abdu'l-Bahá informed us, "The good news that I had promised is this: the sacred remains of the Exalted Báb have safely left the soil of Iran and just arrived in the Ottoman land. They are now completely out of danger.<sup>194</sup> After 50 years, what the Blessed Beauty promised has come to pass. In gratitude for this most great divine blessing, lives must be sacrificed! Soon will the effulgence of the Shrine of the Báb attract the attention of the denizens of the world and the blessed prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh will be clearly fulfilled.<sup>195</sup>"

On that occasion, `Abdul-Baha's blessed countenance beamed with joy and excitement. Truly, all the friends were deeply affected by this radiance and were in a state of utmost ecstasy and rapture. `Abdu'l-Bahá spontaneously and repeatedly kept reciting this verse:

<sup>194</sup> Shoghi Effendi notes that the remains of the Báb arrived in the Holy Land a short while later, on 31 January 1899; see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*. New ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974; [1999], p. 274.

<sup>195</sup> For Bahá'u'lláh's instructions regarding the building of the Shrine of the Báb and the development of the Bahá'í administrative nucleus on Mount Carmel, see Bahá'u'lláh. "Lawh-i-Kármil (Tablet of Carmel)." In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Pp. 1-5. For a history of the remains of the Báb, see Rabbani, Ahang. "Efforts to Preserve the Remains of the Báb: Four Historical Accounts." *Bahá'í Studies Review*, vol. 11, (2003), pp. 83-95.

Nayriz burneth with fever,  
and my sorrow-filled heart sheddeth blood,

How consumed my soul is,  
of what Adharbayjan hath wrought.<sup>196</sup>

### Meeting with Siyyid `Alí

During this period, the violators of the Covenant were not quiet. From one corner or another, each tried to spread intrigue through various means. However, unlike the past, far fewer of the friends were gullible and taken in by their vague promises and innuendoes.

Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán was informed of my father's arrival and sent a message saying he wanted to visit him. After my father consulted with the Master and received His permission, Siyyid `Alí came to visit. At the start of the conversation, even before the customary exchange of pleasantries, he launched into a complaint and began listing grievances against me. He said, "Mírzá Habib has acted presumptuously towards my brother, Siyyid Mírzá. He has said to him, 'Because of your actions, I have to cut off my relations with you!' During his previous visits to the Holy Land, he has acted most disrespectfully [towards me], as if I was his most determined enemy or had committed a shameful act! Such base behaviors are the antithesis of the Bahá'í qualities we must possess. You must admonish him to stop this contemptible conduct and these repulsive deeds. Bahá'u'lláh has stated, 'Henceforth everyone ... should refrain from ... whatever causeth sadness in men.'<sup>197</sup> I also have a complaint against your own self. I have written several letters and messages to you, and have forwarded a number of tablets penned by the Ghusn-i-Akbar<sup>198</sup>, which have all gone unanswered."

My father knew him and his family well. This was not only because they were first cousins and had corresponded during the lifetime of Khadíjih Bagum, but because for some ten years my father had been a business partner of Siyyid Mírzá in Bombay. In addition, he was thoroughly familiar with their recent deeds and Covenant-breaking activities. At the same time, my father was extremely intense, law-abiding, and hot-tempered when it came to the affairs of the Faith and its protection.

I noticed that my father's face was flushed with anger over this man's hypocritical ways and I feared that, at any moment, they would end up in a heated quarrel. Therefore, I intervened by gesturing for my father to remain

<sup>196</sup> A decade later, in Naw-Ruz 1909, simultaneous with the interment of the remains of the Báb on Mount Carmel, 19 believers were martyred in Nayriz and, as such, `Abdu'l-Bahá's prophecy that such a sacred act required sacrifice came to pass. See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 16.

<sup>197</sup> *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 219-220

<sup>198</sup> The Great Branch, a title of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí.

calm. After [taking] a few minutes to compose himself, my father began to answer him. First, he recited from memory the whole of the Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh. Then he opened the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and recited a number of verses from it. He followed this with recollections of what he had seen or heard during the days of Bahá'u'lláh. Siyyid `Alí confirmed all that he heard, but would surreptitiously add, "There is no need for a mujtahid in the Faith. God has rendered everyone capable of discernment."<sup>199</sup>

When my father finished, Siyyid `Alí endeavored to expand on his own false views. However, my father cut him short and interjected, "What you have related concerning Habíb'u'llah's impoliteness towards Siyyid Mírzá is unknown to me. As such, I have no opinion on the matter." At this point, I ventured to explain to my father: "One day in Egypt, Siyyid Mírzá came to our office and asked after you. I did not reply and occupied myself with some work. Several times he asked, 'Where is my cousin?' 'Whose cousin?' I finally replied contemptuously. 'My cousin,' he said. I answered, 'My father is not your cousin, since your connection was spiritual and that bond is now broken.' He started shouting, 'My son `Abdu'l-Husayn writes that should I, as a violator of the Covenant, go to Yazd, he would not admit me to his house.' I laughed and answered, 'If truth be known, `Abdu'l-Husayn is not your son; his father is the Holy Spirit.' After that, I did not pay him any further attention. This was the sum total of my rudeness towards him."<sup>200</sup> And, as for not visiting Siyyid `Alí during my pilgrimages to the Holy Land, in all my previous journeys, he lived in the Mansion [of Bahjí] and was always a close confidant and an intimate companion of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí. I, therefore, broke off all connection with him. Moreover, I cannot fathom how it is that Áqá Siyyid `Alí is so intimately familiar with the verse [of the *Kitab-i-`Ahd*], 'Henceforth everyone ... should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men,' but has conveniently forgotten the verse, '...turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who

<sup>199</sup> A strategy of the Covenant-breakers was to undermine `Abdu'l-Bahá's station by suggesting that Bahá'u'lláh's Texts were clear and everyone could adequately understand them without the need for an authoritative interpreter. For a similar situation in Islam that led to divisions, see Chapter 2 above. It is also referred to by `Abdu'l-Bahá in the following Tablet (INBMC 52:304-5 no. 345): "In this day, should a person pay attention to the insinuations of the doubters by a needle's eye, of a certainty he would fall, in such wise that there would be no remedy. Among the sayings of such insidious people is their claim that, 'One must return to the Divine Verses and deduce for oneself.' By this they mean to suggest, 'All are able to discern what they need and no Interpreter is required.' Consider how their claim can truly weaken the Cause of God and how it will bring about divisions and differences. Even though the Book of the divine Covenant is evident and the appointed Interpreter stands manifest, yet such things are spoken. This manner of reasoning was first proposed by `Umar at the time when the Messenger of God, may the spirit of all be a sacrifice unto Him, was on His death bed. He said, 'Bring me a pen and paper.' `Umar responded, 'Do not give Him writing papers as He is delirious,' and then he added, 'Sufficient unto us is the Book of God.' Now that same saying of `Umar has been changed into, 'God has created all competent of discernment. Read the Writings.' By this they mean to imply, 'Do not ask the Interpreter and do not pay attention to His words. Seeking His good-pleasure and following His instructions and example are not necessary. Be your own judge.' Their purpose is naught but to turn all against the Covenant and the Testament."

<sup>200</sup> In a Tablet to Núri'd-Dín (INBMC 52:307 no. 347), `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks very critically about Siyyid Mírzá and states that everything he has written should be considered lies and calumnies. He also says that Siyyid Mírzá is beyond all guidance, admonishment or reasoning and such efforts are fruitless. He traces Siyyid Mírzá's rebellion to the time of Bahá'u'lláh, when the Latter emphatically forbade him from using opium and yet he refused to obey.

hath branched from this Ancient Root. The object of this sacred Verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch.<sup>201</sup>”

Addressing Siyyid `Alí, I further added, “Not only have we, who are outwardly blood-relations, severed all ties with you, but rest assured that all faithful believers and those remaining firm in the Covenant of God will do likewise and disassociate from you. If you want to receive the same consideration as before, then you must go before `Abdul-Baha’s blessed threshold and, with great sincerity and absolute truthfulness, repent [your misdeeds]. You must seize the hem of His garment and implore His forgiveness. If the Head of the Faith accepts you, then count us among your lowliest servants. Otherwise, it is best for you to take your leave.”

My father never thought that I could speak with such force, vigor and resolution. I said all that he had wanted to say, and he was elated and praised [me] aloud, “Well said!” “He got his answer from me,” I replied. My father went on to tell him, “Two years ago, the news of the Covenant-breaking of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and others reached us in Shiraz through Mírzá Habíbu’llah and Mírzá Buzurg. Ever since, I have sent all your communications, and those received from your comrades, unopened to the presence of the Center of the Covenant. As soon as I saw that a particular communication was from you or your associates, without even opening the envelope, I would send it to the presence of the Master.” Siyyid `Alí grew very agitated and apprehensive by this discussion. Now he could plainly see that all his plans had come to nothing and had had no effect on us. My father added further, “Mullá Husayn-`Alí-i-Jahrumi<sup>202</sup> had also written and I have also destroyed his letter.”

This was our first and last meeting.

My late father related what happened to the presence of `Abdul-Baha. After showering us with His infinite favors and kindness, He stated, “From this one incident, you can well imagine the hardship and injuries heaped upon me and calculate the extent to which I must be occupied watching over the friends and how, day and night, I must see to their spiritual health and other needs.”

### **The Company’s Finances**

After a few days, `Abdu’l-Bahá appointed several of the friends to assess the accounts of our commercial enterprise [the Ruhaniyyih Company]. This investigation committee included the honored Áqá Mírzá Hadi, Áqá Mírzá Muhsin, Áqá Mírzá Mahmud-i-Kashi, Áqá Mírzá Husayn-i-Hájí and Hájí Sayyid Javad. After this committee had studied and examined the

<sup>201</sup> *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, The Kitab-i-`Ahdi, p. 221

<sup>202</sup> He lived in Bombay and was a contact for Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and other Covenant-breakers.

company's accounts and books for a few days, it concluded that our partners had embezzled our father's fortune and bankrupted his principal capital.

Through the late Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, my father had already obtained an official writ from the office of the Iranian Prime Minister, instructing the Iranian ambassador in Istanbul to order its consulate in Egypt to arrest the Yazdi brothers<sup>203</sup> in Cairo. This arrest warrant, which was written in an extremely strong and unusual tone, went on to say that, if the Consulate could not evaluate all the business books in Egypt, it should immediately send these partners to Iran by way of Bombay for [criminal] prosecution.

The esteemed believers in charge of the investigation sent the report with their findings to the sacred presence of the Master. One day, very early in the morning, `Abdu'l-Bahá came to our house. After bestowing His immense favors and infinite consideration upon us, He addressed my father, "The gentlemen charged with investigating your accounts have completed their task and forwarded their audit report. They have rendered their decision thoroughly in your favor.<sup>204</sup> What do you intend to do now?" My father immediately replied, "I have no will of my own and am wholly resigned to Your instructions. Whatever You order, I shall obey instantly." He then submitted the decree of the Iranian Prime Minister to the presence of the Master.

`Abdu'l-Bahá studied the royal writ. Putting His blessed hand on His forehead, He stood there in deep thought for a full ten minutes. We were all transfixed during His contemplation. He then lifted His blessed head and addressed us aloud, "According to this writ, you can strip them of all their possessions, but hearken to your qualities as an Afnán."<sup>205</sup> [In immediate obedience,] my late father moved to burn all the papers right there in the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá, when the Master sternly forbade him, saying, "If you destroy these papers, then they can launch a counter suit. You must preserve these papers." In the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá, my father immediately placed all the papers in a box and nailed it secure and instructed that none of us were to ever open that box. At the present time all the books and papers are preserved in the same way that were assembled in the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá and my father never complained about the misconduct of our business partners – not even to us, his own sons. He further wrote separately to each of the former partners and assured them that from that point he had relinquished all claims against them.

<sup>203</sup> For a Yazdi family tree, see Yazdi, Ali M. *Blessings Beyond Measure: Recollections of `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi*. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988., p. xv.

<sup>204</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:303 no. 346), `Abdu'l-Bahá confirms in writing that Núri'd-Dín had been wronged by his partners and that he was owed the principal plus interest.

<sup>205</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá was urging Núri'd-Dín to forego his claims and the criminal investigation against the partners.

## **Return to Egypt**

The abundance of the generosity of the Blessed Beauty and the infinite benevolence of `Abdu'l-Bahá has forever sustained these meek and helpless souls. In the course of this journey, we were honored to remain in the Holy Land for nearly a month and each day were graced with beholding the countenance of the Beloved of all hearts, may my spirit be a sacrifice for His favors, and were rendered joyous as we partook of His generosity and loving-kindness.

After one month we were dismissed and commanded to proceed to Port Said where we would start our business activities afresh.

## **Final Years in Egypt**

In those days, we were thrilled every month to meet a group of pilgrims who had returned from circumambulating the Most Sacred Court<sup>206</sup>. During that period, `Abdu'l-Bahá issued instructions that, under no circumstances, was the Cause of God to be proclaimed or propagated in Egypt. The pilgrims who came through Port Said were told when they arrived not to teach the Cause and, if they were asked about the Faith, not to offer a response.

## **Ibrahim Effendi**

We had become intimate friends with one of the natives of Port Said – an extremely kind and spiritual man by the name of Ibrahim Effendi<sup>207</sup>. We associated with each other freely and without any of the customary ceremonies. On one occasion, a group of Yazdi and Hamadani pilgrims arrived in Port Said on their way to the Holy Land and this group included the honored Nush<sup>208</sup>. We had neglected to tell him [about the Master's instructions] and that he was to conceal his destination.

One day, it so happened that Ibrahim Effendi was visiting us. With a few Persian words he had recently learned, he ventured to ask about the purpose of Jinab-i-Nush's visit. "Each month," Ibrahim Effendi asked, "a large group of Iranians arrive at Port Said and leave here for an unknown destination. A month later, that same group returns and another one leaves in its stead. Where do they come from and what is their destination, and why do they wait in Port Said?" Without the least hesitation or effort to disguise his purpose, the honored Nush began to teach him about the Faith. At this point, I happened to enter the room and, realizing what was happening, motioned the honored Nush to end the discussion. He immediately complied.

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<sup>206</sup> The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh

<sup>207</sup> He served in the Egyptian Custom Office as an inspector.

<sup>208</sup> A renowned Bahá'í teacher from a Zoroastrian background.

At this moment, Ibrahim Effendi turned around and saw me standing [there]. As such, he was deeply agitated. With tears streaming down his face, he protested, “Indeed, you do not have any consideration for our deep bonds of friendship. You possess such wonderful news and do not divulge any of it. And when another one begins to share this truth, you prevent him from continuing.” I realized at that point that it was already too late and hesitantly engaged him in a teaching discussion. After a few meetings, he declared his belief in the blessed Faith and, consequently, became the first native believer of Port Said. In a Tablet addressed to my late father, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, may my life be a sacrifice for His gracious generosity, urged us to show him every consideration.<sup>209</sup>

In short, this believer was greatly favored by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and, truth be told, it was the honored Nush who taught him the Faith in the first instance.

After his recognition [of Bahá’u’lláh], Ibrahim Effendi became a celestial source of light and inflamed with the fire of the love of God. When it came to propagating the Word of God or proclaiming the Cause, he could never stay still and, putting aside all caution, would teach at every opportunity that presented itself. Although many a time he was advised to be more prudent in his ways, he could never conceal what burned within his soul.

Praise be God, he eventually had a family and his children are firm in their faith and have become staunch believers. His oldest son is the honored Dr. Bashir, who I have heard is the chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Alexandria. I met his second son, Fadlu’llah, sometime ago in Iran, where he lived for a while.

### The First Western Pilgrims

One of the important events that took place in those days was the arrival of the first contingent of American and European friends. They arrived in Port Said to go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and attain the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This happened in 1317 A.H. [1899]<sup>210</sup>. Nearly a month before they arrived, my father received a Tablet revealed in his honor by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in which we were told the good news of the arrival of the pilgrims from America. The Master instructed us to look after the needs of

<sup>209</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (INBMC 52:272-3, no. 322) mentions this in the following Tablet: The illustrious Afnán of the sacred Lote-Tree, the distinguished offshoot Áqá Mírzá Aqa, upon him be the Glory of God, the Most Glorious. He is God. The illustrious Afnán of the divine Lote-Tree! In accordance with the unconditioned will: since the honored Ibrahim Effendi is among those who have newly entered the religion of God and have arrived at the shore of the sea of oneness, his heart is illumined by the effulgence of Divine Guidance and his soul verdant with the sweet fragrance of the paradise of the Lord’s benevolence. Therefore, you are to use every means possible to increase his faith and spirituality and to multiply the fire of the love of God in his bosom. To be sure, you are to ensure that he is contented and grateful. May glory and luster, praise and salutations be upon him and his kinsmen. Verily, he is remembered in the hearts of the Holy Household and other friends. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In peace.

<sup>210</sup> According to Stockman, Robert H. *The Bahá’í Faith in America*. Vol. 1, *Origins, 1892-1900*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1985, 36-57, the first group of pilgrims arrived in the opening months of 1899. The year 1317 A.H. corresponds with May 1899 to April 1900.

these friends while [they were] in Port Said. In His blessed Tablet, `Abdul-Baha enjoined upon my father, "The Western friends will arrive; provide Eastern hospitality."<sup>211</sup> In a later Tablet, the Master wrote, "When the American believers arrive in that realm, show them every consideration and greet them lovingly on my behalf. `A `A."<sup>212</sup>

In those days, Port Said was not developed much and there were no hotels. Although there were a number of streets designed in square and perpendicular fashion, very few houses had been built. Our residence was an apartment on the second floor of a three-story building belonging to a Greek man named Dimitri, who showed great respect towards my father. Our business offices were on the first floor and we lived on the floor above them. Dimitri and his wife lived on the third floor and, on the rooftop, there were a few more rooms used mostly for storage and drying clothes. My father asked me to meet with Dimitri and ask him to rent the rooftop rooms for our use, so that we could let the western pilgrims occupy our own apartment. I conveyed my father's inquiry to him. As soon as he understood his request, he responded, "God forbid! My wife and I will move to those rooms and your friends can stay in our apartment. And I will accept no additional payment." No matter how much I insisted, it did no good. I went to my father with the story and he said, "This is all due to the sovereign will of `Abdu'l-Bahá, Who removes all obstacles." He then went to Dimitri's apartment and thanked him for his immense kindness.

We waited until the ship carrying the pilgrims arrived at the port. My father instructed my two brothers and I, along with Áqá Nuru'llah Isfahani, who worked in our office at the time, to go and welcome the visitors.

When [they arrived and] we saw each other, the sound of "Allah-u-Abha" was raised all throughout the Custom Office. And as we tenderly embraced and kissed one another, tears of joy streamed from our eyes because this was the first time that we had met Bahá'ís from the western countries. They numbered fifteen and came to our home.

<sup>211</sup> The following is recorded in *Ru'yáháy-i-Sádiqih*, p. 32 (compiled by Mihrangiz Khursrawi): In 1898 when the late Mírzá Aqay-i-Afnán, surnamed Núri'd-Dín, was engaged in business in Port Said, he received a cable from `Abdu'l-Bahá, stating essentially, "Port Said. Nur. Western friends will arrive. Provide Eastern hospitality." This telegram confirmed for the honored Núri'd-Dín a prediction of the Master made two years earlier during His conversation with Háji Muhammad-Isma'il-i-Yazdi. That is, two years earlier, `Abdu'l-Bahá one day humorously said to the Háji, "I had a dream and you must interpret it for me." The Háji responded, "But how am I to interpret my Master's dream?" For the second time, in humor, `Abdu'l-Bahá insisted that the Háji was to give the meaning of His dream, but the Háji yet again kept his tongue. Thereupon, the Master related His dream: "Last night the Ancient Beauty appeared in my dream and said, 'I have guests that have never been here before. I want you to receive them most befittingly.' I related Bahá'u'lláh's command to the Greatest Holy Leaf. Together, we went to the storage [area] and retrieved the set of fine china that the Khal's son (that is, the honored Háji Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí-i-Afnán) had sent from China and got it ready." After jesting with the Háji some more, `Abdu'l-Bahá explained the meaning of the vision: "The standard of the Faith has been raised in America. A number in that country have embraced the Faith and will come here soon for pilgrimage to the Sacred Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. These friends have never outwardly been here and will now come and share in this blessing." It was only two years later that the Master's prophecy was fulfilled and the first group of American pilgrims, joined by British and French Bahá'ís, came by way of Europe to Palestine for Bahá'í pilgrimage.

<sup>212</sup> Postscript to the Tablet in INBMC 52:319 no. 356.



Without delay, my father telegraphed the Master informing Him of the arrival of the [western] friends. `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed that they be divided in three groups of five. Each group was to leave for the Holy Land only after the previous one had arrived back in Port Said.

I distinctly recall that, one day at lunchtime, Mrs. Lua Getsinger<sup>213</sup> (who was accompanied on this journey by her husband, Dr. [Edward] Getsinger) suddenly began to weep very loudly. We were amazed, and perplexed as to what had caused her sadness and brought about this condition. After a few minutes, with intense emotion, she said, "If, at every moment, we were to offer a thousand thanks at the threshold of the Blessed Beauty, it would not suffice. See how the promises of the Bible and the prophecies of the New Testament and all other Holy Books of the Divine Messengers have come to pass. Consider how it has enabled the cobra to play with the babe, sparrow to dwell in the same nest as the hawk, and the bloodthirsty wolf to graze the same pasture as the lamb.<sup>214</sup> Where is the discerning eye and the hearing ear? Consider how each of us is from a different race, religious background or nationality. And yet, with utmost peace and affection, we have come together under the shadow of God's Sacred Tree, dwell within the tabernacle of unity raised by the Blessed Beauty and sit at the same table spread in the name of oneness. I am from America and of Christian background, while you are Iranian and of Jewish, Zoroastrian or Shi`ah backgrounds<sup>215</sup>, and still this Ibrahim Effendi is Egyptian and of Sunni descent. And consider how, because of our divers backgrounds, we are supposed to be ready to shed each other's blood and to try to destroy one another; and yet, the Word of God has healed our hearts. This is none other than the miracle of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and the result of His regenerative and life-giving revelation."

We spent many wonderful hours and days in the presence of these western pilgrims until, eventually, the preparation for their journey was complete. After their visit to the Holy Land, with spirits brimming with affection and enamoured with love for the Master, they returned to Egypt. Truly, they were made a new creation, each the essence of joy and felicity, yearning to teach the Faith of God day and night. In such condition, they returned to their homeland. Dr. Getsinger gave my father his own photograph, which is now kept safe with my father's papers. Later they sent photographs taken in the presence of the illustrious [Mírzá] Abu'l-Fadl and Hájí `Abdu'l-Karim-i-Tihriani<sup>216</sup>.

<sup>213</sup> See Sears, William and Robert Quigley. *The Flame*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1972.; and Metelmann, Velda Piff. *Lua Getsinger: Herald of the Covenant*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1997.

<sup>214</sup> For the Biblical prophecies, see the Book of Isaiah, chapter 11.

<sup>215</sup> Parenthetically, Mírzá Habíb adds: "At that time, other Iranian and Indian pilgrims from Jewish and Zoroastrian backgrounds were also present and were waiting for a sea vessel to take them to the Holy Land."

<sup>216</sup> At `Abdu'l-Bahá's instruction, he had gone to Chicago to encourage and deepen the believers.

One of the other ladies who came on pilgrimage was Miss Sarah Farmer, with whom my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, remained in communication over the years.<sup>217</sup> I should note that, in addition to Miss Farmer, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg was in constant contact with a number of other western friends until the end of his life.

Several Tablets were revealed by `Abdu'l-Bahá in honor of my father, Áqá Mírzá Aqa, about meeting with the western believers. It was revealed, "Concerning the other matter, the consideration you have shown to the American visitors has brought immense joy and felicity to my heart. Naught short of this is to be expected of your exalted station."<sup>218</sup> At the conclusion of the same Tablet, the Master writes, "However, about your return to your beloved land, I had wanted you to remain in these parts [that is, near to the Holy Land] and for the affairs [of the Cause] to pivot round the desired goals. In this way, you could shoulder some of `Abdu'l-Bahá's hardships, even if you are in that region - much like your efforts during the visit of the American ladies."

### Departure from Egypt

For two years, affairs passed in this way. During this time, certain communications arrived from Shiraz that worried the Master and brought concern to His pure heart. In a Tablet addressed to my father in Port Said, `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

... You had written regarding the blessed Threshold of the Sacred House [of the Báb] – may my soul be a sacrifice unto its dust. From the letters arriving here, we continually hear the supplication of that sacred city. Were I to expand on the details, it would surely bring sadness and sorrow to that honored person and be a source of

<sup>217</sup> The following is the text of the first letter that Mírzá Buzurg received from Miss Farmer (private communications from Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, May 1992):Hotel Chateau-Durieux et des AnglaisAix-lex-Bains, France July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1900 To: Mírzá Bozorg Afnán Dear Brother in the Truth:Your kind letter was most gladly received. Miss Wilson and I both had desired to write and thank you for all the very generous way in which you had received and cared for us, but we waited to learn first from you the address to which to send it – you remember you promised it to us.When it did come, it found me recovering from a serious attack of Roman fever. I am much better but am not permitted to write much yet. Consequently I have much time to think of you all and pray for you, which I do constantly.God was so good to open the doors of His Holy Temple to us, to permit us to come into the presence of our blessed Lord (Rouhi fedah) and to visit the Sacred Tomb that life itself will not be long enough to pour forth our praise and thanksgiving. Miss Wilson and I spend our time reviewing the scenes through which we have passed and the teaching which we have received, meanwhile studying the Old and New Testaments and the Koran. It is a continual feast and we permit nothing to draw us away. We have the opportunity also to unfold the Truth to hungry souls whom we meet, one, a Swedenborgian, confirmed it from the mouth of the Swedish seer, who proclaimed that the next and the fullest revelation of God would be found in Persia and would harmonize all that is true in all other scriptures.I could write for hours but must not. Keep on with your English. If you desire it, I will help you by correspondence and point out any little mistakes which happen to come in. Miss Wilson and I desire to be remembered to all the believers in Port Said, but especially to the dear mother and the other members of your family. We shall never forget your loving-kindness to those who were strangers after the flesh but who in the blessed Spirit are and always will be one with you! We rejoice in the inestimable privilege you are all enjoying in the presence of our blessed Lord to whom be glory forever!With all good wishes,Your sister in the Faith, Sarah J. Farmer

<sup>218</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:308 no. 347.

anguish. However, the intent is this: that Threshold is more important than `Abdu'l-Bahá's soul. From this, you can see how cherished and venerated that House should be regarded. Therefore, your honored person must take on this important task in such a way that it will enthrall the spirit of `Abdu'l-Bahá and bring it gladness. I swear by the blessed Spirit of that Sanctified Being, that Sun of Reality and Lord of the House – may my spirit, my essence and my whole being be a sacrifice unto His dust! It is the ultimate desire of my heart and soul that I may attain that hallowed dust and sweep that Threshold with my eyelashes. Therefore, the honored Diya' Effendi should be sent to sanctify that Threshold of Sanctity and serve that Spot on my behalf.<sup>219</sup>

Several more Tablets on the same theme were revealed in honor of my late father.<sup>220</sup> Reading these over, my father realized that, to achieve `Abdu'l-Bahá's purpose, he would have to go to his native town in a hurry. Therefore, he wrote about this proposal in a supplication to the Master. In it, he asked whether [his plan] met with `Abdu'l-Bahá's good pleasure. If so, he was ready to wind up all his business interests in Port Said and return to Shiraz with his family.

This petition was looked on with favor. After the passing of two years, we were once again permitted to visit the Holy Land and pay our respects. Immediately, we closed our commercial office and ended all financial transactions in Port Said. Our entire family traveled to the Holy Land.

### **Fifth Pilgrimage: 1901**

After arriving in the Holy Land, we went [first] to pay our humble respects at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. The next day, the blessed Person of the Center of the Covenant called our entire family into His presence. Having showered us with His infinite blessings, He said, "It had been my earnest wish for you to stay in this region and to see to affairs related to the Holy Land. In particular, now that I am busy with the construction of the Shrine of the Báb, I had intended for you to help me in every aspect of the raising of this Sacred Edifice. However, as I think about it some more, I note [that there are] certain difficult undertakings; that is, an important task and a befitting service in Shiraz. Therefore, I have decided to send you there. When you arrive in Shiraz, I will give you the complete instructions<sup>221</sup>. This task entrusted to you is the most important of all services and worthy of the greatest reward before the Divine Court. Truly, future kings and monarchs will long to have been present on this day and been numbered among the servants and attendants of that Sanctified Threshold." He then proceeded to

<sup>219</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:320 no. 357 and *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, p. 209.

<sup>220</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 8, for the text of one of these Tablets.

<sup>221</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá is alluding to the rebuilding of the House of the Báb in Shiraz and the significance of this undertaking.

give instructions on the way to receive visitors and pilgrims at the House of the Báb and how to conduct the management of its affairs. “Now is only the emergence of the dawn of the Sun of Truth,” His blessed Person told us. “Soon it will envelop the whole earth.”

Our pilgrimage lasted a total of 40 days. For us, the passage of those days was agonizing and filled with anguish, because we knew that we were about to leave for a far off land, which gave us no further opportunity to attain the presence of the Master.

Among the gifts that we had the privilege of carrying to the presence of the Master on this journey was a piece of marble that the honored Áqá Siyyid Mustafa [Rumi] had sent from Rangoon in the care of my father, intended for the Holy Land. This was a sample of the marble that the sarcophagus for the blessed remains of the Primal Point was to be made from. One day, while contemplating this marble specimen against the sunlight, `Abdu'l-Bahá said, “Observe how you can see the sun’s rays through this stone. It is the finest piece of stone excavated from the mine and purposed for this sacred sarcophagus. In quality, it truly is peerless in the entire world.” The late Mishkin-Qalam was present and entreated, “If it meets with the Master’s good pleasure and should He grant permission, I will draw the designs of the Greatest Name that would adorn this sarcophagus and present them to Your august Self. And should You wish, I am prepared to journey to India to arrange for them to be carved on the side of the sarcophagus.” In accepting this request, `Abdu'l-Bahá said humorously, “You want your name to be preserved for as long as the earth and the heavens endure!” “It is entirely possible,” Mishkin-Qalam responded, “if I am favored by the Master’s boundless grace.”

As proposed, this illustrious person prepared the calligraphic pieces and signed each, “The servant of `Abdu'l-Bahá, Mishkin-Qalam.” I was present when he offered them to the Master. When He saw them, His blessed countenance showed signs of deep indignation and, with great disapproval, He addressed Mishkin-Qalam, “Who told you to sign them in such a way?! I do not wish for anything to be written at all!” With tears pouring forth, Mishkin-Qalam began to implore the Master. He took hold of the hem of His garment and, with great fervor and intense wailing, begged forgiveness for his misdeed. He sobbed and pleaded with much intensity until the ocean of absolution of his compassionate Master was aroused and `Abdu'l-Bahá said, “If you sign your name in the same manner that you did during the time of the Blessed Beauty, then I will accept.” Mishkin-Qalam complied and changed his signature to “The servant of the Threshold of Bahá, Mishkin-Qalam.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Throughout His ministry, `Abdu'l-Bahá greatly disapproved of believers composing verses about, or glorifying, His Person in any way. He would admonish them to focus their praise on Bahá'u'lláh.

In short, in those days, wonderful news about the immense victories of the Faith throughout the world, the vast proclamations of the Cause in the East and the West, as well as very pleasing reports from other corners of the globe, were arriving constantly. Because of this, the heart of the beloved Master was brimming with joy and signs of immense elation were evident on His blessed face. At times, He would go to Mount Carmel and allow some of the friends to accompany Him on such visits. The land for the construction of the Shrine of the Báb, which was designated in the days of the Blessed Beauty, was now purchased and the neighboring grounds had also been acquired. The sacred remains [of the Báb] were also now in the Holy Land. Even though the Covenant-breakers persisted in their evil-plotting and mischief-making, and corresponded day and night with the Ottoman Court in an attempt to pollute people's minds, by the divine favors, the Cause of God was prevailing over all its adversaries.

### **Jamalu'd-Din-i-Afghani**

In those days, Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din-i-Afghani lived in Istanbul. From there, he tried his best to extinguish the Cause of God because he believed that the only obstacle in the way of achieving his evil-minded purpose was the impenetrable fortress of the Faith of God. Therefore, in order to increase his popularity and influence among the Shi'ahs and the Sunnis, and also to attain his ultimate objectives, he rose up to create a situation designed to uproot the Faith of God in Iran and the Ottoman realms.

One night, the beloved Master called Husayn-i-Aqay-i-Khadim [the attendant] and instructed him, "Light the lantern a little later tonight as I want to talk with the friends." In those days, it was customary for a lantern to be lit at night in the biruni [the outer apartment] of the house and His blessed Person would meet with those of the town's inhabitants who wanted to attain His presence and listen to His utterances. That night, He instructed that the lantern be lit later so that non-Bahá'ís would not be present [as He wished to talk confidentially with the believers].

He told us, "Recently Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din has announced that the Bahá'í Faith intends to destroy the foundation of the world and aims at obliterating all religions. For instance, he has alleged that, 'The religious beliefs of Bahá'ís and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are: the destruction of all Islamic mosques, Jewish synagogues and Christian churches; the annihilation of the Baytu'l-Haram<sup>223</sup> and the Baytu'l-Muqaddas<sup>224</sup>; the burning of the Qur'an and the Bible; the eradication of all evidence of religious attainments; and to dislodge the Qajar and the Ottoman dynasties. These are the ordinances of their Books and the religious beliefs of Bahá'ís.' He has further suggested, 'If you want to stop these things from happening and to ensure that none of

<sup>223</sup> A reference to Mecca, the holiest site of Islam.

<sup>224</sup> A reference to Jerusalem, where the Mosque of the Dome of Rock is situated. It is considered particularly sacred by Muslims.

these teachings is ever realised, then you must demolish `Akká, slay `Abdu'l-Bahá, Who is the Center of their Faith and the fount of their inner confidence, and massacre all the Bahá'ís, whether they live in Iran or the Ottoman Empire.' Such are the intentions of this evil man."<sup>225</sup>

`Abdu'l-Bahá then added, "However, this man does not know that even if `Akká is destroyed or `Abdu'l-Bahá slain or Bahá'ís martyred, he can never extinguish the Faith of God. *'Leave them to their inventions.'*<sup>226</sup> Soon you will witness how God deals with the tongue that has spoken in this way and so dishonestly uttered such lies and slander." Then `Abdu'l-Bahá asked for the lantern to be lit and for various people to attain His presence. Subsequently, they were dismissed after having received their fill of His bounties.

Not long after that, the veracity of `Abdu'l-Bahá's prediction about Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din was demonstrated. Of course, it is now common knowledge that, in order to carry out his plans, Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din went from Iran to Istanbul and gathered around him a number of disciples. Sultan `Abdu'l-Hamid was disturbed and horrified by him and his partisans. He instructed that a palace be assigned to him and arranged a haram, where [Afghani] engaged in a life of luxury and indulgence. At the same time, the Siyyid busied himself with making plans for sedition and revolt. However, a short time after `Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about him, a small growth appeared on the Siyyid's tongue. The Sultan's special physician was sent to attend him. [In a number of operations,] his tongue was cut several times until none was left and, soon after, he died. This was the end of a person whose tongue had spoken presumptuously towards the Cause of God and had committed such slander and calumny against the Faith!<sup>227</sup>

### Letters from Iran

On another occasion, while we were in the presence of the beloved Master, the package of correspondence from Iran arrived. In it was a letter from Yazd sent by the late Hájí Mírzá Mahmud-i-Afnán, the honored son of Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taqi, the Vakilu'l-Haqq. He had written two pages in small script, all devoted to the excellence of the Jalalu'd-Dawlih and his very many services to the friends. [It mentioned] such things as his intention to participate in the Feast in Mihdi-Abad<sup>228</sup> and his profound humility and submissiveness towards the Cause of God. `Abdu'l-Bahá read the letter closely, pondered for a moment, and then said, "Because of his pure heart, the honored Afnán harbors no malice, is void of bitterness and radiates

<sup>225</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 11, where the celebrated Mírzáy-i-Shirazi recounts some of Afghani's efforts to assault the Faith.

<sup>226</sup> Qur'an 6:137

<sup>227</sup> On Afghani's life, see Keddie Keddie, Nikki R. *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din 'al-Afghani': A Political Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.; Balyuzi, *Edward G. Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, pp. 23-8 and Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran*, vol. 1, pp. 257-80.

<sup>228</sup> A village in the vicinity of Yazd, where the believers of that region would gather for meetings.

nothing but truth and spirituality. He imagines that the Jalalu'd-Dawlih also tells the truth. The Afnán conflates this man with his own self and is unaware that the Qajars have no faith. The Jalalu'd-Dawlih is a liar and merely wants to use the Afnán and the believers for his own purposes."

`Abdu'l-Bahá then opened another envelope that contained only a blank piece of paper. The beloved Master smiled and said, "The servants want to test us. Woe betide them of the day when God decides to test His servants!" Immediately, He picked up the pen and revealed a Tablet on that very same paper and sent it back by the post. This piece of paper was sent by Áqá Siyyid Muhammad-Sadiq, the husband of Fa'izih Khánum. As a result of many teaching discussions, he had decided to formulate a number of questions in his own heart and to send a blank piece of paper before `Abdu'l-Bahá. He had resolved that, if the Master answered his heart's questions on that very same paper, then he would recognize the truth of the Faith and accept it. Finally, when this Tablet arrived, his questions were answered and he attained the shore of certitude.

### **Return to Port Said**

I am at a loss to know what else to write about our time [in the Holy Land] until the beloved Master sent us to Iran. To this day, whenever I think of that time, I am stirred with profound emotions and reduced to bittersweet tears.

Eventually, for yet a second time, `Abdu'l-Bahá bestowed His immeasurable favors upon us and admonished us in this way, "Prepare yourselves for the services and mighty tasks that lie ahead of you. God willing, they will be accomplished through your perseverance." This promise of the Master was the consolation of our heart. That is, if we were to be outwardly deprived of the unfathomable grace of beholding His blessed countenance and could no longer visit the sacred places of the Holy Land, praise be unto God, we were propelled forward, instead, with His life-regenerating promise!

After bidding farewell to our friends in Haifa, we went directly to Port Said. We completed the remainder of our commercial activities and left for Shiraz soon after.

### **Restoration of the House of the Báb**

It was now over ten years since we had last seen Iran. Clad in Arab clothes, we may even have been more fluent in the Arabic language than in Persian. We arrived in Bushihr first, then traveled to Shiraz with a caravan led by one of my late father's assistants. When we arrived, we went directly to the House of the Báb. After visiting that Holy Threshold, my late father designated his ancestral home - situated next to the Masjid-i-Jami` and blessed by the footsteps of the Exalted One - as the place for meeting the

friends. A steady stream of believers gathered to hear the good news of the Holy Land. My late father spoke of the progress and victories of the Cause of God in America, which brought great joy and delight to the friends.

During the first two years we were in Shiraz, two important incidents happened that affected my late father. The first was that a rock was deliberately hurled at his head from a rooftop, which injured him badly and forced him to stay in bed for a long period of time. The second incident was that he was badly stabbed in the foot one night as he was passing through Shamshirgarha Street<sup>229</sup>. The injury never healed during the remainder of his life. However, the confirmations of Abdu'l-Baha poured out like spring showers and he remained thoroughly fearless - nay, thankful - before all adversaries and under all conditions and was completely resigned to His good pleasure.

My brother and I resumed our trading business in Iranian carpets. In the month of Rabí'u'th-Thání, 1321 A.H. [July 1903], my late father was honored with a Tablet from `Abdu'l-Bahá. In it, he was asked to begin rebuilding the House of the Báb in its original style. Therefore, it may be helpful to document here a short history of the Blessed House of the Báb. This will explain the reasons for the changes made to it previously, and the efforts made during the Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá to convert it back to its original state, so that there will be no room for unwarranted speculation in the future.

### History of the Blessed House

The House of the Báb was an ancestral inheritance of Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Rida,<sup>230</sup> the father of the illustrious Exalted One. The title for this property was stolen, along with other goods and articles, from the house of the late Áqá Mírzá Zaynu'l-`Abidin, a brother-in-law of the Báb and my paternal grandfather. The Báb grew up in this House until the passing of His father, then He moved to the house of the martyred-uncle [Hájí Mírzá Siyyid `Alí]. After His sojourn in Bushihr and pilgrimage to the `Atabat, the Báb returned to Shiraz. He took up residence in this House and married His mother's paternal cousin, Khadíjih Bagum. From this union, a child was born by the name of Ahmad, who died in infancy.

The declaration of the Báb took place on 5 Jamadiu'l-Avval 1260 A.H. [22 May 1844] in the upper chamber of this Blessed House. There the Báb announced His mission for the first time, to Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrú'í.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>229</sup> The House of the Báb was located on this street.

<sup>230</sup> Taherzadeh, Adib. *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 4, *Mazra'ih & Bahjí 1877-92*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, 429 and *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, p. 204, state that the Báb's father bought the House. However, the family records show that it was an inheritance (Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, private communications, September 1995).

<sup>231</sup> At this point in the narrative, Mírzá Habib notes: "Even though this might not be relevant, I would like to relate a dream that the wife of the Báb had after she was married for only a short time." He then relates a



After His declaration, the Báb left for Mecca. He performed the hajj ceremony and proclaimed the divine Cause to the entire Islamic world, the Sheriff of Mecca and others, and returned to Shiraz. The account of the journey to His native town and His stay there is extensive. As instructed by the beloved Guardian, this has been recorded in detail and is available elsewhere.<sup>232</sup>

After arriving in Shiraz, the Báb at first took up residence in the house of the illustrious uncle [Hájí Mírzá Siyyid `Alí]. Previously, the Letters of the Living would gather there. Later, however, He moved to the Blessed House, where He lived until the time of His departure for Isfahan.

The Governor-General of Shiraz had been told that a group of believers regularly gathered in the House of the Báb. Therefore, one night, he sent to the House `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán, the Darughih, and Mir Mu`min-i-Iyzad-khasti, with a few guardsmen and night prowlers. Mir Mu`min-i-Iyzad-khasti was influential in government affairs and particularly antagonistic and spiteful [towards the Cause].

Unannounced, this group entered the House from the rooftop at a time when the Báb and His wife were resting inside and the mother of the Báb was sleep in the courtyard.<sup>233</sup> When these men entered, the Báb sent His wife to His mother and both women went into the adjacent room where His declaration had taken place. He asked `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán, "Why have you intruded into My House without prior notice?" The Darughih responded, "The Governor has received reports that a group of men have assembled in Your residence. Therefore, we were sent to investigate the matter." The Báb said, "Now that you are satisfied that no men are here, you may leave and inform your superior." The Darughih insisted on receiving a bribe, but the Báb refused to give him one. The officer took the Báb's cashmere shawl, cut it in half and took a half. Without allowing the Báb to dress properly, he arrested Him and took Him to the residence of the Governor-General. At dawn, however, the Báb was released from custody. That night, His blessed Person spoke vehemently against the Governor, the Darughih and the `ulamas, and with great power addressed the Governor and his men as ignorant and apostates.

Here I will include a small section of a letter from Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim-i-Afnán, a brother-in-law of the Báb, to the Khal-i-Akbar<sup>234</sup>, which gives an

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dream that indicated Khadíjih Bagum would be with the Báb for only two-and-a-half years. Since this dream appears in *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 2, and Rabbani, "The Báb in Shiraz", it is not included here.

<sup>232</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, chapters 1-4, and Rabbani, "The Báb in Shiraz".

<sup>233</sup> To enjoy the night breeze of the summer months, many Iranian families sleep outdoors under mosquito nets.

<sup>234</sup> Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad, the oldest maternal uncle of the Báb, who was in Bushihr at the time. For a biography, see Rabbani, Ahang. "Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb." *World Order* (Wilmette, Ill.) vol. 30, no. 3, (Spring 1999), pp 19-38.

outline of that eventful night [11 September 1846]. The letter is dated 20 Ramadan 1262 A.H. [11 September 1846]:

... These days, they have incited enmity against Hájí Mírzá `Alí-Muhammad [the Báb] and Hájí Mírzá Siyyid `Alí. In every gathering, they say what they will and accuse them of the worst offences. Out of consideration for that Sahib [the Báb], one is unable to confront the accusers and must bear all the allegations, show patience and tolerance, and disregard their calumnies. We used to hear these [accusations] from the city folk. More recently, [we hear them] from our closer associates [too]. In the past, while they never supported us, at least they refrained from insulting us. But now, they readily scorn us as well.

Mir Mu`min-i-Iyzad-khasti is now securely established over all affairs and is the lord and master of all the inhabitants. He too has generated animosity towards Hájí Mírzá `Alí-Muhammad [the Báb]. Moreover, in this effort he is an accomplice of the Sahib-Ikhtiyar [the Governor]. ... It is evident that the people of the world have dealt [most unjustly] with the Holy Figures, upon Them be peace ...

It was the night of 20 Ramadan [11 September 1846] when Áqá Mir visited the Sahib-Ikhtiyar ... to confer and seek his good pleasure... It was six hours into that night<sup>235</sup> when Áqá Mir went to their [the Báb's] House while they [the Household] were sleep.<sup>236</sup> They woke up and noticed the men intruding from the rooftop. As you recall, there is not much distance between the courtyard and the roof. I find myself thoroughly incapable of describing their shocked state, particularly the condition of the ladies of the household. Certainly, it evoked the opening scenes of Karbila. Indeed `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán himself had said, "How have my deeds differed from Shimr's<sup>237</sup>!" The scene was such that, even had an infidel witnessed the last evening's events, he would have grieved over them. The entire neighborhood was awakened and the town was filled with the sigh of anguish and sadness. They hardly gave the Hájí [the Báb] time to dress and conducted Him away forthwith. They treated the Hájí most discourteously. He therefore set aside all caution and spoke to them as sternly and angrily as He willed. They confiscated from His House whatever written materials were in the Hájí's possession.

At last, two hours before sunrise, `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán brought Him back and procured a bond from me that He would no longer invite

<sup>235</sup> This letter makes it clear that the Báb was arrested on the night before this letter was written; namely, on the evening of 10 September 1846. On the authority of Tarikh-i-Jadid, *The Dawn-breakers*, p. 195 n.1, incorrectly placed this event on 23 September 1845.

<sup>236</sup> *The Dawn-breakers*, p. 195, states the house of the Báb's uncle was targeted for this attack. However, this document shows that the Báb was at His own residence when He was arrested.

<sup>237</sup> It is believed that the Imam Husayn was slain by Shimr ibn Dhu'l-Jawshan on the plain of Karbala.

others to His House or converse with the mullas who are His followers. God only knows what will happen now.

The mother of your illustrious self was at our house and I have concealed the events from her. Your sister [the Báb's mother] and my sister [Khadjijh Bagum] are profoundly distraught and in a wretched state. God will protect all.

The whole town is well aware of what happened and almost everyone has learned that the ladies of the Household have been overwhelmed with grief, which has rendered them paralyzed. However, not one soul, neither family nor friend, has come to inquire about our condition and what we have had to endure. In short, life in this town has proved exceedingly difficult. To be sure, you will arrive shortly and perhaps, out of respect for you, some may prove embarrassed about their deeds. Events may take a different turn though, and we may need to take our family and quit this town for another region. Not even the land of the infidels manifests such tyranny.

I have no inclination to write anything further.

[Dated] 20 Ramadán 1262 A.H.

Because of the great transgressions committed by `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán, the Báb cursed him and eventually he was killed, [dying] from a cut in the stomach. It was the same `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán who, on instruction from the Governor, Husayn Khán-i-Ajudan-Bashi, imprisoned the Báb in his house. When the cholera epidemic was spreading in the city and his two sons fell ill, `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán's wife was convinced that her sons' illness was caused by her husband's cruel and unjust treatment of the Báb. She forced him to release his illustrious Prisoner. Upon freeing Him, the Darughih pleaded for the life of his sons. The Báb prayed for them and gave [him] a sweet pomegranate that he had with Him, with this instruction, "Give this to them and I will pray for their recovery." At last, the Báb returned home from the house of `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán and subsequently left for Isfahan.

After the Báb left Shiraz, His wife, mother, and maternal grandmother, a black servant named Mubarak, and a black maidservant named Fiddih were living in the Sacred House.<sup>238</sup> When the news of the martyrdom of the Báb reached Shiraz, Fatimah Bagum, the mother of the Báb, having previously consulted with her Son about the journey to the `Atabat, decided to leave Shiraz. She wanted to put behind her the constant barrage of insults aimed at her family by the city's divines. Before she left, it was decided that Khadjijh

<sup>238</sup> On the life of the black servants in the Household of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, see Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, *The Black Pearls*.

Bagum would live with her half-sister in the house of the martyred-uncle of the Báb and the Blessed House be entrusted to Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn-i-Bazzaz, son of Mírzá Asadu'llah. He was not a believer in the Báb but a native of Shiraz and a close acquaintance of the family. This [decision] ushered in a period where the House was in the hands of non-believers.<sup>239</sup> Gradually, two brothers, Samad and Ibrahim, took over all the affairs of the House and claimed sole ownership.

At the time when my late father reached the age of maturity, he was deeply saddened over this matter and appealed to Khal-i-Akbar, "You are the closest relative of His Holiness the Báb and, therefore, have responsibilities towards this House. You must try to extricate the House from the grasp of non-believers, who currently occupy it."<sup>240</sup> "I can't do it now," the illustrious Khal-i-Akbar replied, "since all my sons are engaged in commerce elsewhere. However, you have my permission to take all the necessary steps to resolve this situation as you see fit."

My father took advantage of his influence and prestige<sup>241</sup> and, during his conversations with the tenants, said, "As you know, this House has belonged to the infidels and non-believers and, as such, your prayer offerings will not be accepted from such a place. In addition, because of the recent earthquakes, some parts of the House have been structurally damaged, making it unsuitable to live in. Indeed, it is life threatening. Should you agree, we are willing to purchase or lease another house in your name and you can stay there while we renovate this one. When we have completed the repairs, if you still prefer to live here, we will abide by your decision." The tenants saw the opportunity to become homeowners and agreed immediately

<sup>239</sup> Abú'l-Qásim Afnán notes the following in "Baytu'llahu'l-Akram", p. 19: A year after Fatimih Bagum left, a severe earthquake destroyed many homes and buildings in Shiraz, killing a third of the population and forcing a vast multitude to live in the fields and wilderness and dwell in tents or makeshift camps. [*Farsnamih-i-Nasiri*, vol. 1, reports that this massive destruction took place on the night of 25 Rajab 1269 A.H./4 May 1853. It destroyed many homes and killed several thousand citizens. It also demolished the majority of the schools and mosques, including the one next to the House of the Báb. Translator. Fasa'i, Hasan ibn Hasan. *Tarikh-i-Farsnamih-i-Nasiri*. Tehran: Intisharat-i Kitabkhanah-i Nisa'i, 1312-1314 [1895-1897]). Two volumes.] During this incident, the House of the Báb was severely damaged and the mosque next to it was completely demolished. Khal-i-Akbar came to Shiraz from Bushihr to look after the family's interests and business. One action he took was to secure a written lease from Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn, who was occupying the House with no written documentation. This lease is dated Rabí'u'l-Thání 1270 A.H./January 1854 and reads: In the presence of the esteemed Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn, son of the late Mírzá Asadu'llah-i-Shirazi, it is known and rightly recorded that the house located in the Kuchih-i-Shamshirgarha belongs in its totality to Siyyidih Fatimih Bagum, daughter of the late Háji Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn. This residence was entrusted to the aforementioned Mírzá to dwell there upon her [Fatimih Bagum's] departure from Shiraz. Since an earthquake has caused considerable damage and the tenant wishes to make certain repairs, he is permitted to do so at his own expense. This will not be reimbursed by the owner, who may claim possession of the residence at any time with due notice. This legal document was signed and witnessed by the appropriate jurists and Shaykh Abu-Turab, the Imam-Jum'ih of Shiraz. After this document was signed, Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn realized the cost of the repairs was prohibitive. Consequently, he leased the House to two brothers, Samad and Ibrahim, who were bakers. They took up residence with no formal documentation. Afnán, Abú'l-Qásim; "Baytu'llah-i-Akram", *Andalib*, pp 16-27.

<sup>240</sup> Abú'l-Qásim Afnán suggests that Núri'd-Dín's interest in the security and renovation of the Blessed House stemmed from his reading in the Persian Bayan about the supreme station of this Dwelling; see "Baytu'llahu'l-Akram", p. 20.

<sup>241</sup> At that time, Núri'd-Dín's father, Mírzá Zaynu'l-'Abidin, was alive. He was closely related to two prominent clerics, Mírzáy-i-Shirazi and Áqá Siyyid Javad-i-Shirazi, the Imam-Jum'ih of Kirman, and enjoyed great influence with the divines of the city.

to the arrangement. Quickly, a house was leased for 100 tumans and the two brothers moved there.<sup>242</sup>

In this way, the House of the Báb was recovered from the hands of non-believers. After some minor repairs, a believer named `Abdu`r-Razzaq lived there for three years. After him, it was occupied by the late Hájí Abu`l-Hasan [Bazzaz], who had accompanied the Báb on His hajj journey to Mecca and was one of the first believers of Shiraz.<sup>243</sup> Afterwards, the House was leased to Mulla Áqá Buzurg-i-Zarqani, who was a Bábí but not known as one.<sup>244</sup>

During this period, Shiraz sustained a number of severe earthquakes, which destroyed many homes and public buildings that had not been damaged previously. Many people were forced to take refuge in the city's outskirts and live in tents.

### **The First Renovation of the House of the Báb – 1289 A.H. [1871]**

During Dhi`l-Qa`dih 1288 A.H. [January 1872], Munirih Khánum, who was travelling to the Holy Land to marry `Abdu`l-Bahá, arrived in Shiraz from Isfahan. During her 15-day sojourn, she stayed in the house of the martyred-uncle, where the wife of the Báb was living [with her maternal sister, Hájíyyih Bibi Jan-jan]. During her stay, Munirih Khánum was a constant companion of Khadíjih Bagum and the two were always in each other's company.

One day, during their conversation, the wife of the Báb asked her guest to supplicate on her behalf at the Threshold of Bahá`u`lláh for permission to renovate the Blessed House so that she could transfer her residence to that sacred location. This request found ready approval in the presence of the Blessed Perfection. He asked my father to restore the House in whatever manner that Khadíjih Bagum saw fit.

After Bahá`u`lláh gave permission to renovate the House of the Báb in accordance with Khadíjih Bagum's wishes, she instructed her nephew (my father), "If the House is renovated in its original style, the memories of the days of His Holiness and my profound sadness over His loss will prevent

<sup>242</sup> According to A.Q. Afnán, this house was located on Zanburak-Khánih Street; see "Baytu`llahu`l-Akram", p. 20.

<sup>243</sup> Although Hájí Abu`l-Hasan had accompanied the Báb on His pilgrimage journey and observed all the events of that voyage, it was the proclamation of the Báb at Masjid-i-Vakil that finally convinced him of the truth of the new Dispensation. Hájí Abu`l-Hasan lived in the House of the Báb with his wife and two sons, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir, who later adopted the surname Dihqan. His wife was a relative of the Imam-Jum`ih Abu-Turab and, consequently, the family enjoyed some measure of protection. After five years of living in the Blessed House, his wife passed away and the protection of the `ulama was withdrawn. Because he was known as a Bábí, Hájí Abu`l-Hasan was forced to leave the city in the middle of the night, taking his two young sons with him. See "Baytu`llahu`l-Akram", p. 20.

<sup>244</sup> With Zarqani's departure, in January 1872 a mother and daughter of Nayriz, who were brought as captives to Shiraz after the battles of 1853, occupied the House in order to preserve it. They remained there until 1289 A.H./1872. See "Baytu`llahu`l-Akram", p. 20.

me from ever living there. Certain changes must be made to the House.” Therefore, substantial changes were made to the structure of the House. These included making two of the rooms part of the expanded courtyard and moving the small pool. {The initial cost of this reconstruction was met by Bahá’u’lláh.

To protect the House further, a small house next to it on the eastern wall was bought. It belonged to a certain Hájí Muhammad-Ja`far-i-H.adíd. The elders of the Afnán family asked Hájí Mírzá `Abdu’l-Hamid to live there. He was one of the early believers in the Báb and married to the daughter of Hujjat-i-Zanjani. From the first day Hujjat’s daughter arrived in Shiraz, she was a close companion of Khadíjih Bagum, who had a particular affinity for the families of the Bábí martyrs. An underground passageway was constructed connecting the two homes. It was used as the main entrance for the House of the Báb so that the neighborhood would not take notice of the occupants. }<sup>245</sup>

After these changes [were made], the esteemed Khadíjih Bagum took up residence in the Blessed House. She lived there for the next nine years, until her noble soul took her flight to the immortal abode in the month of Dhi’l-Hajjih, 1299 A.H. [October 1882].

After her ascension, as instructed by Bahá’u’lláh, her sister, Zahra Bagum, moved her residence to the Sanctified House. She lived there until her passing in 1308 A.H [1891].

### **The Custodianship of the House of the Báb**

In the year 1302 A.H. [1884], the following instructions were issued for the custodianship of the House of the Báb from the heaven of Divine Will, exalted be His utterance, in honor of the wife of the Báb, her sister and her descendants. In this way, solely by divine grace, this honor was placed upon them:

This honor and benevolence hath been bestowed upon the ukht<sup>246</sup> and her descendants, from her Lord, the Merciful. He is the Munificent and the Compassionate, and He is the Generous and the Bounteous.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>245</sup> The bracketed section was a supplement from Abú’l-Qásim Afnán, based on his “Baytu’llahu’l-Akram” article.

<sup>246</sup> Lit. sister. It refers to Zahra Bagum, the sister of Khadíjih Bagum.

<sup>247</sup> A Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh revealed in 1292 A.H./1875, which bears His seal reads: “The custodianship of the Blessed House has been granted to the exalted leaf, the wife of the Primal Point, and her sister, upon both be My Glory of God, My Bounty and My Favor. Before God, we have conferred this custodianship on the House and thus have We adorned it with Our Benevolence, and arrayed Our command with the evidence of His Might and Compassion. Solely on the ukht [Zahrá Bagum] and her issue has this honor and favor been bestowed from the heaven of the Lord, the Giver, the Compassionate, the Bestower, the Forgiver, the Merciful.”

Years passed and the House of the Báb was left as described above. When Zahra Bagum passed away, my mother [Maryam Sultan Bagum], two brothers, sister and I left for pilgrimage to the Holy Land and reunion with my father in Port Said. We had not seen him since 1296 A.H. [1879]. The details of this visit have been recorded earlier.

During my father's stay in Port Said, he was honored to receive several Tablets from the beloved Master that spoke about the importance of the friends visiting the Blessed House of the Báb under all conditions and the harm [that would result] if this was neglected. One such Tablet addressed to him said in part:

Port Said. The illustrious Afnán of the Sacred Lote-Tree, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, upon him rest the Glory of God, the Most Glorious.

... You wrote about the Eminent House and the Point of Adoration of the world, may my life be a sacrifice unto its dust. This issue is most important; nay, it stands as the most momentous of all matters. According to your letter, it is currently impossible for people to visit the House. This is surely a source of great sorrow for the faithful friends and those who long to circumambulate the Blessed House.

Certainly, in whatever way possible, a way must be found for some of the friends to occasionally gain access [to the House] and at least be able to visit that Spot. Otherwise, neglecting to visit will become a norm and the sacredness of this act will be diminished. The friends who live in Shiraz must consider it absolutely obligatory and binding to visit the House at least once a month. If this servant lived in the province of Fars, assuredly he would circumambulate that Sanctified House once a week, even if the enemies rained blows of stones upon him.<sup>248</sup>

You are the protector and custodian of this House and must make every effort in this important matter.

Upon thee be the Glory of God.  
`Abdu'l-Bahá, `Abbas.<sup>249</sup>

Eventually, in 1319 A.H. [1901], as asked by `Abdu'l-Bahá, my parents, brothers and sister and I left for Shiraz. At the time we left the Holy Land, His blessed Person said to us, "You have been sent to Shiraz for the most important of all duties. I pray that you will be effective in carrying out this responsibility." However, the Master did not divulge the nature of the entrusted task and our sole wish was that, whatever the duty, we would be

<sup>248</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:300 no. 344), the Master instructs Núri'd-Dín to make a complete and befitting visit to the House of the Báb once a year on `Abdu'l-Bahá's behalf.

<sup>249</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:318-9 no. 356 and *Khándan-i-Afnán*, p. 208.

able to carry out His wish and win His good pleasure. Things passed in this way until 1321 A.H. [1903].

### **The Second Renovation of the House of the Báb – 1321 A.H. [1903]**

Iran was in disarray and immersed in turmoil. In the face of sustained persecution and unrelenting oppression, the Bahá'ís of Isfahan had taken refuge in the Russian Consulate. In Yazd and its environs, the believers were martyred and those who survived were forced to flee to far away lands.<sup>250</sup> Shiraz was also in disorder and the friends were despondent and distressed over the fate of their brethren and the gloomy news reaching them from other sectors.

At this time, a Tablet was revealed by `Abdul-Baha in honor of my late father. In it, he gave instructions to rebuild the House of the Báb according to its original structure and design, without a moment's delay. The following week, a second Tablet on this matter was received from the pen of the Center of the Covenant and, the following week, yet another Tablet was received that further admonished: "Not a moment of lassitude must be allowed, since a delay will cause a colossal catastrophe." In this Tablet, `Abdu'l-Bahá sternly ordered:

The Blessed House of the Exalted One must be restored without a hair's breadth change from its original form, and this must be carried out with absolute cleanliness, elegance, delicacy and firmness.<sup>251</sup>

In one of these Tablets, the Master gave explicit instructions concerning the speedy renovation of the Blessed House of the Báb:

Although at present the horizon of the world of humanity is darkened with turmoil, its foundation shaken to its core, the portals of hardship and trials are flung wide open, and the tempests of trials and difficulties are everywhere, it is in such a state of tumult that the reconstruction of the renowned House must be carried out, as it will bring joy and comfort to every desolate heart.<sup>252</sup>

Having received these sacred Tablets, my father asked me to gather some prominent friends on his behalf. I invited a number to the House of the Báb, including such people as Prince Mu'ayyadu's-Saltanih, the late Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir Khán-i-Dihqan, the Bashiru's-Sultan, Áqá Siyyid Husayn-i-Afnán, `Andalib, Mírzá Aqay-i-Mi`mar-Bashi and Mírzá Aqay-i-Afnán. However, when they heard the

<sup>250</sup> For a glimpse of this massive persecution, see Hájí Haydar-`Alí, Hájí Mírzá. *Bahai Martyrdoms in Persia in the Year 1903 A. D.* Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1904.; and Rabbani, Ahang and Naghmeah Astani. "The Martyrs of Manshad." *World Order* (Wilmette, Ill.) vol. 28, no. 1 (Fall 1996), pp 21-36.

<sup>251</sup> The full text is in *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, p. 211.

<sup>252</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:323 no. 361 and *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, p. 213.



Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá, each of the assembled notables voiced his concern that the reconstruction of the House was an untimely endeavor, particularly during such a turbulent period. After considering their views, my father responded, "The Head of the Faith has issued a command to rebuild the House of the Báb without a moment's delay. Surely, there is wisdom hidden in this instruction that is not currently clear to us and we don't understand its insight. I have not invited you to consult on the matter, as the Master's wish is clear and no one can speak contrary to His will or even question its advisability. We are subjects and He is our lord. I have invited you to hear the sacred Tablets that have recently been received and to tell you that I plan to start construction immediately. I only wanted you to know about the situation." When everyone heard him speak in this way, they readily agreed with his views.

With `Abdu'l-Bahá's confirmations, on Saturday<sup>253</sup>, 5 Jamadu'l-Avval 1321 A.H. [20 July 1903]<sup>254</sup>, the late Mi`mar-Bashi began the renovation project. He was one of the most devoted believers and the love of the Faith burned brightly in his bosom. My late father supervised every step.

At first, they demolished the whole structure. My father was present during the first reconstruction and had supervised the work. Therefore, he knew the original architecture of the House. He instructed that the ground under the building be excavated until the original foundation of the House was uncovered. The workers began to raise the walls and rebuild the House on the same foundation and following the original design. Each day, in this small area, over 30 construction crew labored devotedly. Within two months, as `Abdu'l-Bahá had commanded, the structural walls were completed in exactly the same design as that of the time of the Báb. Soon the rooms were finished and the doors and windows added, much as it was in the old days.

At the beginning of Sha`ban [23 October 1903], my father fell ill and, day by day, his condition grew worse. However, until a week before his passing, he would come each day to the site of the construction and, although suffering from illness, spend the day supervising all the work. He passed away on 24 Sha`ban 1321 A.H. [15 November 1903] after completing the task entrusted to him by `Abdu'l-Bahá. It was then that the wisdom of the Master's statement "*delay will cause a colossal catastrophe*" became clear, as my father was the only one of all the kindred who knew the original design of the House. After his passing, the rest of the work, consisting of painting and decoration, was completed.

<sup>253</sup> According to the calendars available to the translator, 5 Jamadi 1321 A.H. fell on a Thursday.

<sup>254</sup> This day corresponded with the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb.

### Renovation of the Adjacent Mosque

A mosque is located next to the House of the Báb. Originally, it was a Jewish synagogue. Later, it was converted to a mosque named Khizr, and now it is known as Masjid-i-Shamshirgarha. After the Muslims took possession of the property and converted it into a mosque, the Báb would, before His Declaration, frequently visit this Masjid and perform His obligatory prayers. However, because of severe earthquakes, the building sustained serious damage. By this time, it had become a site where the neighborhood deposited its waste and where thieves, after having robbed people's homes, would hide and rest most evenings. During my late father's time, he blocked the entrance to the mosque and the neighborhood protested, "It is not appropriate to block the entrance to a mosque." To that my father replied, "My home and possessions are otherwise at the mercy of thieves roaming this ruined building."

During that time, a Tablet<sup>255</sup> was revealed in honor of my late father. It contained important directions about this mosque. A section of this exalted Tablet reads:

...You wrote that the renovation of the House [of the Báb] might produce a great tumult. Indeed, the illustrious Áqá Mírzá Aqay-i-Afnán, upon him be the Glory of God, the Most Glorious, pointed out that the provinces of Fars and Yazd have sustained multiple calamities. Concerning this, he has beseeched prayers at the Holy Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

The purpose of this servant was to alleviate these trials in order to further promote the Cause of God and proclaim the Word of the Almighty. Therefore, I accepted the [financial] obligations of this important task so that, once the House [of the Báb] is renovated and the Point of Adoration of the jewels of creation is rebuilt, these calamities would completely disappear. Until now, no other in any past Age has so readily and manifestly pledged such a commitment. The intention was to fulfill the divine proof and reveal the honor and excellence of that sacred and mighty House. Now that the people of rancor have incited rebellion, wisdom must be observed.

As such, a plan must be found to reduce and decrease the persecution so that, God forbid, these difficulties do not continue. Indeed, that design is this: it must be said that a holy person who is knowledgeable in the science of Jifr-i-Jámi<sup>256</sup> has calculated that, when the ruined mosque is renovated, these persistent calamities will

<sup>255</sup> While Mírzá Habíb was in Egypt, `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to his father in Shiraz about the importance of rebuilding the adjacent mosque and how this would alleviate the trials and tribulations besetting the inhabitants of Fars; see INBMC 52:288 no. 339.

<sup>256</sup> The science of numerology and letters.

be reduced and these dark clouds lifted. Oil must be poured over troubled waters. This mosque is honored to be next to the House and, because of this nearness, is endowed with an influence. It is not part of the sacred House, but stands as the landing and portal to this Threshold.

It does not seem likely that further unrest would result from this proposal. However, should you note that it is indeed leading to criticism and hostility and would raise a commotion among the people and the cry of the inhabitants, then one must be resigned. Certainly, wisdom is one of the divine teachings. Great care is vital and protection essential.

Today, the most important of all things is firmness and constancy of all in the Covenant of God. However, not such steadfastness that consists of words and nothing else, much like some Muslim's testimony of faith. ...<sup>257</sup>

My late father never had the opportunity to renovate this mosque. It was not until after the hallowed House of the Báb was completely restored and its true majesty and exquisite beauty laid bare that the Muslim neighbors thought to themselves, "Though there is only a few of them, the Bahá'ís have built their Temple<sup>258</sup>; and yet, we are so wanting in commitment to our Faith that we have allowed our mosque to become ruins!" Consequently, they assembled and sought the advice and involvement of Mírzá Ibrahim-i-Mahallati, a very influential cleric and a prominent mujtahid. They said to him, "This mosque is surrounded on three sides by the homes of these people [the Afnáns] and, on another side, it shares a wall with the Jewish homes. After sometime, the Bahá'ís have built their Temple and a steady stream [of believers] comes for pilgrimage to this Site. However, in its present condition, this mosque is a disgrace to the Muslim community." "You must go and discuss this matter with these people," the Ayatu'llah responded. "If they agree, I expect that rebuilding this mosque will be an easy job; otherwise, it would be very difficult."

One night, a neighbor of ours, Hájí Ahmad-i-Mahut-chi [the crinoline merchant], sent word that he wanted to meet with us and I named a time for this meeting. We met at the house next to the House of the Báb. After the customary exchange of pleasantries and sharing of refreshments, he ventured to say, "You have raised a beautiful and most delightful House. Nevertheless, it seems wanting in one respect. Once that is also taken care of, it will be the essence of perfection." Imagining that he was about to be presumptuous towards the House of the Báb, I sternly said, "What is the defect that has come to your notice?" "There is a ruin next to your House,"

<sup>257</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:294-5 no. 341.

<sup>258</sup> In a Zoroastrian or Jewish context, 'Ma'bad' is a place of worship.

he replied, and I said, "It is a mosque and must be rebuilt." Taken by surprise, he reiterated, "So, you agree with rebuilding the mosque?" I answered, "I agree only to rebuilding the mosque and not to any other use for the building." With great satisfaction, he exclaimed, "The mosque will be built!"

Later, he went to Mahallati and reported that the Bahá'ís had agreed, and would help with the reconstruction. The Shaykh rejoiced, "In that case, there is no problem." To this day, I am puzzled as to why Mírzá Ibrahim-i-Mujtahid was apprehensive of us at that time and wanted our consent. In short, he prepared a written petition for all who stood identified with the sacred religion of Islam, requesting financial contributions toward the cost of renovating the mosque. He instructed his agents to take this petition to all the Muslim homes in the neighborhood, and each was to mark his pledge on it. Then, he added, "You are to take the petition to these gentlemen [the Afnáns], but should they decline to make a contribution, do not constrain them."

The Muslim neighbors were each content to make a small contribution. After all the donations were collected, they came to us. After reviewing the sheet, this servant said to Hájí Ahamd, "Perhaps the esteemed supporters don't know the true cost of such a construction, as this small amount is certainly not enough." "Everyone has pledged according to his own ability," Hájí Ahmad replied. "Whatever you give is in the path of service to your illustrious Ancestor and will show your lofty purpose." Since it was my desire to help realize `Abdu'l-Bahá's wish to have the mosque rebuilt, I pledged a sum of 300 tumans on behalf of my brothers and myself, to be paid in three installments. When they brought this promise to the attention of Shaykh Mírzá Ibrahim, he raised his voice and cried, "O ye the faithful! You claim that these people have no religion, don't believe in the Prophets and Imams, and don't obey divine laws and ordinances, [but] they have, for no reason other than the love of God, given 300 tumans! But consider, the Sadru'l-Islam, with all his wealth and affluence, has contributed a trifling three tumans! Theirs is the true demonstration of faith! If these people are indeed Bábís, I only wish that you were all Bábís!" One of the confidants of Mírzá Ibrahim, who was a Bahá'í, reported all their discussions to us.

Soon the construction work began and a certain Nur-Muhammad was appointed to supervise the task. He was one of the residents of Shimshirgarha Street and had recently converted to Islam. From the beginning, he defrauded and embezzled the funds and was soon discovered by one of his co-workers – a righteous and religious man and a faithful friend of ours. He reported the matter to Mírzá Ibrahim. After it was determined that Nur-Muhammad had indeed committed theft, Mírzá Ibrahim reproached him, "O infidel garbed in Muslim's clothing! How ironic that the Bábís should pay for the construction of the mosque and you, who claim allegiance to Islam, would steal from the endowment fund!"

Should the Bábís find this out, I will never be able to look them in the eyes because of this shame!”

In short, Hájí Muhammad-Rahim, another new convert to Islam, was appointed to the task this time and he invited me to the mosque and consulted about the repairs. Frequently, I would go and help with the planning and discussions. When the work had progressed to the point where a well and an underground cistern were to be built, Hájí Muhammad-Rahim said to me, “You have earned every right to this mosque. The existing well and tank are situated behind the wall of your House and the repairs would cause damage to your Dwelling. Therefore, we think it is best for the well, cistern and sewage lines to be moved to the south-eastern quarters. In its place, we will raise the pulpit and prayer-court.” I thanked him very cordially. The promise of `Abdu’l-Bahá that “This mosque will be the landing and portal of the blessed House” was now fulfilled. As the construction continued, they needed straw and wood to complete the work and I contributed the required sum. Later, when they tried to reimburse me, I refused, saying, “What I gave was in the path of God and my reckoning is with Him.”

When the mosque was completed, we also donated a pulpit that was ornamented with silver domes and calico figures, which we had inherited from the time of Hájí Mírzá Abú’l-Qásim. This donation was reported to Mírzá Ibrahim and he expressed great eagerness to meet us.

On the day the mosque was inaugurated, I attended with my two brothers, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and Hájí Mírzá Diya’. Mírzá Ibrahim had extended a special invitation to us. He presided over the ceremony. Beforehand, he had particularly admonished the people and the clergy present to ensure that no one acted in a presumptuous or insulting manner towards us. When we entered, the crowd welcomed us with cheers and praise. They had arranged for our seat to be next to Mírzá Ibrahim himself – the seat of honor – and we were led to the designated spot by Hájí `Abdu’l-Rahim. When Mírzá Ibrahim saw us, he stood full figure as a sign of utmost respect and greeted us very affectionately. Refreshments and water-pipes were served and then the Mírzá ascended the pulpit. For well over an hour, he sang our praises and complimented us. He even pointed to us and noted, “Had it not been for the efforts of these gentlemen, this mosque would have never been raised. They contributed in every way, from offering money to wood to consultation, until this house of God was erected in such a wonderful manner. Indeed, this very pulpit on which I stand today, and from which the remembrance of God and the sufferings of the Five Immaculate Ones<sup>259</sup> will be recounted from now on, is just one of their generous donations. They, surely, are the true Muslims. One can only wish that a few more Muslims like them were found in this town!”

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<sup>259</sup> A reference to the principal Shi`ah figures, Muhammad, `Alí, Fatimih, Hasan and Husayn.

In short, his expressions of acclamation knew no bounds. At the end, he offered a prayer for us, supplicating that, in the future, we would attain even greater success in the service of God. When he descended the pulpit, another eulogist ascended the altar and spoke at length and in the same vein about us.

A period passed and, because of the above-mentioned events, we were not disturbed. Eventually, conflict among different political factions started and the democrats, constitutionalists and royalists began to dispute.<sup>260</sup> In no time, this mosque became a beehive for all the worthless elements. It ushered in an era of injury and torment for us and witnessed a great surge in our persecution, which continues unabated to this day. This is particularly bad during the commemorations of `Ashura, the month of Ramadan, or any other significant occasion, such as the marking of a martyrdom or a festivity. [We are even persecuted] simply to raise a political clamor, as the sole target remains the House of the Báb. However, God is the All-Powerful, the Almighty and the Self-Sufficient. In Him we trust.

[As an example of God's all-preserving protection,] about a year-and-a-half ago, one of the caretakers of the mosque negligently allowed the heater to explode. It sat behind the wall of the House of the Báb. Soon the roof of the mosque's sleeping quarters was in flames and it seemed imminent that the fire would spread to the Blessed House as well. However, the friends who lived in Shamshirgarha Street and pilgrims visiting at the time helped and extinguished the fire.

Later that day, however, the Muslims claimed that the Bahá'ís had intentionally set fire to the mosque. {Since we were friends, I immediately called the chief of police, the Brigadier General Qavami, the Furughu'l-Mulk. He instructed Captain Iyzadi to come at once and to bring several officers, as well as the district attorney and Muhammad Nimruzi, the inspector general of the city.}<sup>261</sup> After a thorough investigation and examination of all the evidence, they prepared a written report concluding that the fire had started due to the negligence of someone in the mosque. Fortunately, their report prevented the incident from erupting into an attack on the Faith.

On that day, Siyyid Muhammad-i-Razavi, one of the influential clerics of the city, came to the mosque to inspect the situation for himself. The city's officials were, however, able to convince him that the fire was accidental and that the Bahá'ís had no hand in it. It so happened that Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir-i-Khalili arrived as well. He was a friend to the Siyyid and me, and he spoke with the Muslims to ensure that no disturbance

<sup>260</sup> For the political turmoil during the constitutional revolution of Iran and its effect on the Bahá'ís of Shiraz, see *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 15.

<sup>261</sup> The bracketed section was inserted by Abú'l-Qásim Afnán (private communication May 1992).

resulted from the accident. Khalili was a deeply devoted Bahá'í, though he never registered as one. On that day, without being asked, he volunteered to pay for all the repairs, which drew the admiration of the Siyyid and other Muslims. God works in wonderfully mysterious ways.