

In Memoriam

The passing of three staunch and dear supporters of `Irfán Colloquium, Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, Dr. Amin Banani, and Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand, in 2013, is greatly regrettable and a great loss to the organizers, participants and friends of the `Irfán Colloquium. May the radiant souls of these three valued friends be richly rewarded in the Abhá Kingdom.

Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, from the start of the `Irfán Colloquium and its publications, was a constant encourager, inspirer and patron of the services rendered through this project. We greatly benefited from his guidance and collaboration. Whenever it was feasible for him, Mr. Fatheazam and his dear wife Shafigheh Fatheazam were participating at the `Irfán Colloquium sessions. Mr. Fatheazam's presentations immensely enriched our programs and we greatly enjoyed their presence. Our publications contain the texts of some of his presentations.

Dr. Amin Banani was one of the founders and patrons of the `Irfán Colloquium program in Northern California, at Bosch Bahá'í School. As long as his health condition allowed it, he, together with his dear wife Sheila Banani, was regularly participating at the `Irfán Colloquium sessions, where he made scholarly presentations, while Sheila coordinated the program of the sessions conducted in English. He is especially missed at our sessions convened at Bosch Bahá'í School.

Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand, who passed away in San Diego, was one of the supporters of the `Irfán Colloquium and was regularly making contributions to Haj Mehdi Arjmand

Memorial Fund that sponsors `Irfán Colloquium services. Ms. Arjmand passed away in San Diego. She was fondly remembered as a devoted participant at various Bahá'í youth activities in Iran.

Iraj Ayman

`Irfán Publications

Hushmand Fatheazam¹

(1924-2013)



We begin by borrowing these stellar words from one of Mr. Fatheazam's closest friends and contemporaries who declared, soon after his passing, that he was "...a majestic figure with a legacy of spirituality, of humility, of scholarship, and of steadfastness that will endure the tests of time and will inspire generations to come."² Such an illustrious portrayal is not ungentle nor an ideal distant from the realm of possibility. It is an eager accolade justified in a life indissoluble from the religious faith which nourished it.

The opening scene is literally the dawning of the Day of God, the earliest years of the new-born Revelation and the date is 1845. "One day, crowds of people gathered in the streets of

Shiraz to watch a procession. The cruel and impious Husayn Khán, the Nizámu'd-Dawlih, ruler of the town had reviled and cursed three men, stripped them of their clothes, burned their beards, scourged one of them with one thousand lashes, and pierced their noses and through the incisions cords were passed with which the three men were led through the town. These three heroes were: Quddus, Mulla Sadiq Muqaddas and Mulla Ali Akbar Ardestani.”³ The first three Bábís known to have suffered persecution for their faith on Persian soil. Hushmand Fatheazam, born on January 8th, 1924, in Teheran, Iran, was the great grandson of Mulla ‘Ali Akbar Ardestani, and his wife Shafiqih Farzar, the great granddaughter of his fellow sufferer, Mulla Sadiq Muqaddas (or Ismu’lláhu’l-Asdaq). As destiny would have it, these two graceful sweethearts, married in 1948, were already conjoined by their forebears some hundred years earlier...

Such may be the auspicious beginning but these lives do not go unchallenged, nor are they spared pain. Hushmand Fatheazam was only 28, and alone in India (his wife and newly born son, Shahab, to join him later in their pioneering post) when he received news of the cruel murder of his father, Nureddin Fatheazam, then Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. Irresponsible farmers of a certain village near Tihran attacked him most ferociously and tore him into pieces. No voice was raised against these atrocities and no signs of justice were ever manifested in the whole country. Only one honor emerged from this horrific episode of martyrdom and that was when Shoghi Effendi instructed that a tomb, in honor of Nureddin Fatheazam, was to be erected on his behalf. Another painful, unexpected loss would occur several years later in the life of Hushmand Fatheazam with the passing away of his youngest son, Shafiq, in Canada, in 1994. Historical reporting of these particularly disconsolate events in more than a century of suffering to one family is not to create pathos but to show that even religiously dedicated and passionate men and women, on the deepest personal level, are not spared ‘sorrow

and anxiety, regret and tribulation...the lot of every loyal servant of God'. (BK 7)

Such unqualified allegiance to the Cause of God began when Hushmand Fatheazam, at only 18 years of age, requested permission from his father, Nureddin, to pioneer to Iraq. His father responded that at such an age, under 21 years of age (the age which makes Bahá'ís eligible for administrative posts), not even his physical presence would assist in the formation of any Local Spiritual Assembly. Hushmand, in his defense, mentioned the story of a young pioneer whom Shoghi Effendi had praised some years earlier for having formed Local Assemblies even himself being unable to serve for similar age restrictions. Hushmand, the eldest of four children, was granted his father's permission to leave Iran on this noble quest.

After a brief home-front pioneering later in Shiraz as a married man (1950), Hushmand Fatheazam lived his first memorable and glorious episode, as a pioneer in that land of constellations we know as India at the onset of the Ten Year Crusade of the beloved Guardian in 1953.

After completing the requirements of a doctoral degree program in Persian Literature at Tehran University, Hushmand Fatheazam won a special scholarship offered by the Indian government for graduate studies at Tagore's Visva Bharati University, in Shantiniketan, West Bengal, today known as Peace University. Mr. Fatheazam then earned an M.A degree in Sanskrit Language and Literature from that University. He was the only known Persian scholar in this particular field of study. Although he was fully qualified to seek a faculty position back in his home country, Iran, the young couple decided to remain in India as pioneers of the Ten Year Plan. Dorothy Baker, the Hand of the Cause of God visiting India in the early '50s, after having given a series of lectures at the same University, encouraged the Fatheazams to move to New Delhi, the capital, to better serve the Faith. In 1955 Mr. Fatheazam was elected as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

India and served as its Executive Secretary until 1963. He performed that duty on a voluntary basis and had to support his family with income earned from three part-time jobs. Among these, was serving as program developer for the Persian section of All India Radio. In addition to his expertise in Persian language and literature he also did translation work for the Iranian Embassy. Shafiqih, while taking care of their three very young children, also engaged in dress-making to supplement their limited income. Mr. Fatheazam would work all day at the National Bahá'í Center and would conduct his work in the evening at All India Radio from 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. with translation work being completed at the weekends. This is how Hushmand Fatheazam managed to offer his services as full-time Secretary of the National Assembly without burdening the National Fund.

In early 1960 following the Rampur conference a year before, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Mohajer met with the National Assembly of India and advised them to focus their teaching activities on the rural areas sensing that the time was propitious to begin mass teaching. A small team of volunteers, led by Shirin Boman Meherabani, was recruited and contact was made with the Bhilala tribal village, some fifty miles from Indore, in the State of Madhya Pradesh. Thus began an activity that spread as a fire that *'blazeth and rageth in the world...'*⁴ The National Office, however, did not have the manpower nor the financial resources to produce Bahá'í literature in various languages fast enough to accompany the rate with which multitudes were embracing the Faith. There was the imminent need to recruit, train and send travelling teachers to the newly opened localities and deepen the new believers and consolidate newly developed Bahá'í communities. Managing the national affairs of the Bahá'í community of India was so overwhelming and so demanding that its execution seemed quite an impossible job.

Under the pressure of so many heavy responsibilities, Mr. Fatheazam introduced some very original, not to mention

innovative, measures. He would publish small postcards with pictures of a fruit or a flower accompanied by a selected quotation from the Writings in different Indian languages. Bahá'í teachers would then give such cards to every family who would embrace the Faith. Mr. Fatheazam later used the notes of the courses he had given at Bahá'í summer schools to author a book called *The New Garden*, first published in 1963, which introduced the main verities of the Bahá'í Faith in a simple and sweet language, and which acted as a kind of standard textbook for new believers. This book is unique and has become an international best seller, today translated into one hundred and nine languages and continually being reprinted and published in new editions worldwide.

These achievements were undertaken by Mr. Fatheazam in the true spirit of voluntary service to the Cause, that is, without remuneration. He never did receive, or wish to receive, any royalty from the many books he published in his life. He did make sure, however, that the monies drawn from these books were donated to one of the many Bahá'í projects. Both Mr. Fatheazam and his wife, Shafiqih, were content to lead a very simple life, but their simple home was always open to entertain both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í visitors alike.

Destiny articulates itself unbidden and the ensuing chapter in the life of Hushmand Fatheazam can only be labeled as dramatic. The daughter of no less a person than Mulla 'Ali Akbar Ardestani was amongst the 6,000 Bahá'ís who were attending the World Congress in London in 1963 where the first historic Universal House of Justice was formally presented to the Bahá'í world. Hushmand, her grandson, was standing, with eight others, with his hands clasped and head bowed, before a cheering multitude gathered in the Royal Albert Hall. Protagonists of a fascinating period of Bahá'í history, these very first '*passion-wingèd Ministers of thought*'⁵ faced an immense challenge representing not only an institution with no precedent or history but a world-wide community struggling to be born. Their summons was larger in that these nine men had to

ensure the welfare not just of the community it was created to protect but “...to foster that which is conducive to the... advancement and betterment of the world.”⁶ A momentous era in human history was fused with a life-shaking personal transition of nine individuals. Surely this cannot be confined to a singular expression. The moment speaks more than its own historical situation.

However, it was not his membership on the Universal House of Justice, which was to last 40 years – a value in itself – which providentially earns Hushmand his place among God’s heirs. This is not enough to endear him. Sires of an immortal strain, what makes him and his fellow-members exceptional in these early years of the birth and functioning of the House of Justice, was the inestimable and privileged seating from which to witness historic undertakings and deliberations associated with that august body, be they legislative, as enshrined in the Constitution signed on the Day of the Covenant 1972, be they significant enunciations (for example, *The Promise of World Peace*, distributed to many politicians and prominent individuals since its writing in 1985, is the first, and still only, official public statement made by the Universal House of Justice since its inception), be they Holy Sites developments and ever-extending gardens along the perennial designs laid down by the beloved Guardian, be they the completion of almost all of the buildings of the Arc (there only remains the International Bahá’í Library yet to be constructed), the formation of institutions anticipated by Shoghi Effendi, such as the International Teaching Centre established in 1973, a paradigm shift in modes of thinking by raising collective consciousness that led to “...a change in the culture of the community,”⁷ and so many other stupendous developments and triumphs in any of the many spheres of the supreme institution’s responsibility. It would not be wrong to say that these men lay their heads on stone, and sleep waking, fixing their gaze by day and by night unable to flee the business of the world or the heavy burden of work. Self-sacrifice is their proper

end – a sacrifice particularly hard felt by an adamant Hushmand in his shouldering “almost single-handedly the day-to-day tasks and anguish and sheer exhaustion of being the link of communication between the House of Justice and the friends in Iran”⁸ during the fierce and continuing onslaught of the modern persecution of this Bahá’í community since 1980.

In May 2003, Hushmand and Shafiqih left Haifa, never to return. One curious fact was that Hushmand never went on pilgrimage. Such a glaring omission living in such proximity to the Holy Sites was as much imposed by his tenure as by the circumstances prior to his election to the House of Justice. He always wanted to visit Shoghi Effendi but was deprived. He made his pilgrimage, though, through life – a life with more of the qualities of a folktale in its humor and witty, realistic observations about the world than a soberly biblical prose.

Hushmand Fatheazam’s departure from Haifa and its solemn obligations was never seen as emancipation. His final ten years spent in Vancouver, Canada, plunged him into feverish, creative activity, such as being a regular radio broadcaster in *Payam-e-Doost* where more than 400 weekly talks have been recorded in the Persian language, reaching his fellow citizens in Iran and where many declared themselves as Bahá’ís. Listeners are numbered in the hundreds of thousands. These talks are now being assembled in several volumes to be re-published with the heading *Afkar-i-Naw, Goftar-i-Naw*. He translated the books of Shoghi Effendi into Persian from the original English, namely, *The Advent of Divine Justice* and *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*. He also translated into Persian voluminous biographical works, such as *Mr. Faizi* and the *Maxwells of Montreal* (the first volume). He published his book *Introduction to the Bahá’í Faith* in Persian which to date has sold 35 thousand copies mostly distributed in Iran. His book of poems was published in 2005 and a new edition is being planned as the entire stock has long since been sold. He recently began his book on the Persian writings of Shoghi Effendi, entitled *Bahr-i-Por Gohar*, but managed to complete only three chapters,

having begun writing the fourth when the die cast of scholarship was interrupted from the spirit which was molding it. Hushmand Fatheazam's capacity for work was undeniably extraordinary and his literary output of the rarest quality. Mojtaba Minavi (1903–1976), the well-known Iranian historian, literary scholar and professor of Tehran University, praised Hushmand, then only 21 years of age, for his outstanding translation of Tolstoy's "*A Confession*" offering it as an absolute model for its writing style and interpretative potential as well as linguistic patterns. His distinct style of writing is worthy of study and emulation. If we were to identify a constant in Hushmand Fatheazam's literary output it would be this: his writings, his poems, his public talks, the ethical structure of his life pinned on the sovereign idea of transience not to demean the world or to mock it – he never wished for anyone to crave for finality – but to impel us to step into eternity while still on excursion here on earth. Hushmand's prodigious literary production rested on the firm belief that to survive the vicissitudes of fortune one must make 'the leap of faith', a personal commitment to the kind of life not dependent on the contingencies of success or human love which always make life unsatisfactory but on a life which rests upon a relationship with God. Hushmand Fatheazam's intellectual and literary endowment, despite his call to onerous, uninterrupted Bahá'í service, will give the world another heart and other pulses.

His very last service to the Faith was his participation in the Youth Conference in Vancouver, on Sunday morning, August 4th, 2013. "His stirring talk at that event called by the Universal House of Justice was truly a gift of encouragement to those gathered there. His spiritual life, which began as a youth in Teheran all those years ago, bore its final sweet fruit among these youth in Canada. How lucky they were to hear him and how blessed he was to die with his boots on..."⁹ That afternoon, he suffered a heart attack and was taken to hospital never to

fully regain consciousness. He passed away just before midday, August 13th.

This final act really depicts Mr. Fatheazam's life as a serpentine verse. It began with the word faithfulness and ended with it. His life was accomplished because it was harmoniously unified. He consistently obeyed his inner self open to the world and its objects but molded, paradoxically, by institutions, traditions, and all the social regulators shunned by modern man. Therein lay his self-sufficiency and self-reliance because these were spiritually guided not by an inner law but by a law which was the province of established religion. He showed us that to respect authority is not servility but stability and more, love. Indeed, he materialized in its essence 'Abdu'l-Bahá's injunction: "*Obedience is the rod by which I measure the love of the friends.*"¹⁰ His was the tenderest 'radiant heart that exuded an all-embracing love',¹¹ making no difference between feeling for someone (sympathy) and feeling as them (empathy), all the time recognizing that while qualities common to the human species went into the making of it, ego is born only because humanity is suppressed and unloved.

In any context within this delightful or alarming, disheveled world, Hushmand Fatheazam was unchangeable, consistent and never self-divided because he lived in an attitude of prayer, an attitude which enacted a personal history in which coherent evolution was shown to be possible and why it inevitably leads to felicity. His particular greatness was his humility. "He combined humility and nobility to perfection."¹² Once, on being asked as a member of the Universal House of Justice, how he assessed his role in the worldwide development of the Bahá'í Faith, Hushmand replied: "Individual's role always gets amalgamated in any institution of the Bahá'í Faith. I firmly believe that each Bahá'í reflects the will of God in all his undertakings, though he plays his role relative to his level of consciousness, no matter where he is placed."¹³ Hushmand was really saying that individuals on the House disappear in membership, a similar disposition shared by his contemporary

and colleague since the earliest days Mr. Ian Semple, himself the longest serving member of the House and who passed away in 2011. On those early years, he wrote:

There was, from the very first, an extraordinary feeling of unity and love among the members, and also of absolute dependence on the strength and guidance of Bahá'u'lláh. The image which came to my mind at that time was that we were a handful of pebbles in the palm of God.¹⁴

We end this brief outline as we began, with another written remembrance, but this tribute is more poignant, marching, distinctly relevant, and infinite:

We have learned, with profound sadness, of the passing of our dearly cherished, greatly esteemed former colleague Hushmand Fatheazam. Tenderness of spirit, profound knowledge, noble humility, and tireless endeavour characterized his highly valued services rendered over the course of many decades, whether as a member of the Universal House of Justice for forty years beginning in 1963, as Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of India, or as an enkindled pioneer, avid proponent of teaching among the masses, and inspired author. His wholehearted and resolute defence of the community of the Greatest Name was unwavering, and his determination in the face of adversity unyielding. Gifted with a unique eloquence in Persian prose and verse, he leaves a remarkable legacy of deploying the power of that language in service to the Cause. Beyond a distinguished record of consecrated exertion in the path of the Blessed Beauty, he will also be remembered for his manifold outstanding personal qualities, for his delightful humour, and for his kindly and radiant heart that exuded an all-embracing love.

We extend our deep condolences to his dear wife, Shafiqih, and to his bereaved sons and other family members and assure them of our ardent supplications at the Sacred Threshold that his illumined soul may reap a rich reward in the Abhá Kingdom. The friends throughout the world are called upon to hold memorial meetings in his honour, including befitting commemorative gatherings in all Houses of Worship.

The Universal House of Justice

14th August 2013

NOTES

- ¹ This article is authored, at the request of *Irfán Publications*, by Shahbaz Fatheazam
- ² Soheil Bushrui, letter of condolence to the family, dated August 14, 2013
- ³ A.Q. Faizi, *Bahá'í Journal* (UK), June 1963
- ⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975, page 29.
- ⁵ Percy B. Shelley, from his poem "Adonais"
- ⁶ The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Declaration of Trust
- ⁷ Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message 2000, Bahá'í Era 157
- ⁸ Ian Semple, deceased member of the Universal House of Justice, in a letter to the family dated April 16th, 2003
- ⁹ Alí Nakhjavání, retired member of the Universal House of Justice, in his delivered eulogy on Hushmand Fatheazam.
- ¹⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in J. Thompson's *Diary*, pp. 369-72.
- ¹¹ The Universal House of Justice, in its message to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated August 14th, 2013
- ¹² Nakhjavání, *ibid.*
- ¹³ Hushmand Fatheazam, in a published interview in *Bahá'í North*, a publication by the Bahá'í community of Punjab, India, 1987.
- ¹⁴ Ian Semple, *ibid.*, page 21.