

An Homage to *Memorials of the Faithful* and to Eleven of Its Heroes

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Abstract

Memorials of the Faithful is described as an inspiring “book of prototypes,” that not only portrays “all of the archetypes that the various personality theorists have given us in this century” and “all the human dichotomies” that we may find in our lives, but also addresses “us in our time... [and] on our own travels... [in our] tacit dimension, the silent root of human life.” These features of the book have led the author to compose nine poems on eleven of the personages of the book: Shaykh Salmán, Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvish-i-Şidq-‘Alí, Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí, Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín Yazdí, Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání, Hájí Ja‘far and his brothers, ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí and Jináb-i-Muníb. They have not been chosen because they were considered in any way superior to or better than all the others. They were chosen because some of their personal qualities and of the events in their lives raised louder echoes in the author’s heart and mind. The nine poems are presented, with short explanations of the details that have moved the author to write them.

Memorials of the Faithful, first published in Persian in 1924 in Haifa by the publisher Maṭba‘ah al-‘Abbásíyah, under the title of *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá*, is “the first Bahá’í book to be printed in Haifa under the Guardianship” [Gail xi]. The word *Tadhkirat* is a Persian-Arabic word. It derives from the Arabic root *dhakara*, translated into English as “he preserved it in his memory, he remembered it... he sought, or endeavoured, to remember” [Lane 3:134]. The word *Tadhkirat*, usually translated “memory, remembrance... biographical memory, biography” [Steingass 290], is used in Arabic, Persian and Turkish literature to denote literary works “concerned with the lives of poets... calligraphers... or other categories of memorable persons” [Heinrichs et al.]. One of the most famous of these works is a book written by the well-known Persian poet Faríd ad-Dín ‘Aṭṭár (c.1142–c.1220), *Tadhkirat al-Awliyá*, a collection of hagiographies published in English under the title *Memorial of the Saints* (see *Muslim Saints and Mystics*). Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988) writes that this book “is similar... to our middle age *Little Flowers*” [502]. Western literature is rich in similar books, such as the *Golden Legend* (Latin: *Legenda Aurea*) by Jacobus de Voragine (Italian: Jacopo da Varagine), a collection of lives of the saints in Latin, probably compiled around 1260; *Acts of the Saints* (Latin: *Acta Sanctorum*), an encyclopedic text in 68 volumes examining the lives of Christian saints, organized according to each saint’s feast day, published between 1643 and 1940; and Alban Butler’s (1710–1773) *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints*, first published in 1756–1759, a popular compendium of the *Acts of the Saints* in English.

‘Aṭṭár’s work, like the hagiographic literature of the Western world, relates stories of miracles and portents ascribed to the personages whose lives and utterances the author wishes to share with his readers. And as a matter of fact he calls them *Awliyá*, that literally means “Friends (of God),” but is commonly used to denote the “saints” [Steingass 122]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s work is completely different. He celebrates His personages for their

vafá', that is “good faith, fidelity, loyalty, sincerity” [Steingass 1475], a word which Shoghi Effendi has often translated “faithfulness,” as for example in the following sentence from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament:

In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. This wronged servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness (vafá'), this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Bahá! [WT 10]

Marzieh Gail (1908–1993), an eminent Bahá’í author and translator, who translated the book into English in 1969 under the title *Memorials of the Faithful*, because she had received this task from the Guardian himself, when she was “on a pilgrimage to the Bahá’í world center in Haifa” [xi], writes that this work “is more than the brief annals of early Bahá’í disciples... it is a kind of testament of values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá’í Exemplar” [ibid.]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s descriptions do not point out the charismatic or thaumaturgical powers of His personages. There are only three exceptions, three episodes of persons healed through the intervention of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Shaykh Ṣádiq-i-Yazdí recovers from an intestinal disorder after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has done what Bahá’u’lláh has enjoined Him to do: “Go... Place your hand on the distended area and speak the words: ‘O Thou the Healer! [Yá Sháfi]’”¹ [MF 43]. Muḥammad-Hádíy-i-Ṣaḥḥáf heals from a long-standing chronic fever after having eaten a special food specifically prescribed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and two years later he dies after having eaten the same food in different circumstances [see MF 68]. Mírzá Ja‘far-i-

Yazdí returns to life right after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has chanted at his bedside by the command of Bahá’u’lláh “*the prayer of Yá Sháfí—O Thou, the Healer*” [MF 157], while his “*family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears*” [ibid.]. These three episodes are narrated as common episodes of everyday life, without any emphasis on what appears to us as exceptional events. A few years earlier ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had clearly explained the meaning of miracles to the eminent American Bahá’í Laura Clifford Barney (1979–1974). First: “*The Manifestations of God are sources of miraculous deeds and marvelous signs. Any difficult or impossible matter is to Them possible and permitted*” [SAQ 113]. Second: “*in the sight of the Manifestations of God these marvels and miracles are of no importance... they would constitute a clear evidence only for those who were present when they took place, not for those who were absent*” [ibid.]. Third: “*These outward miracles are of no importance to the followers of truth... if a dead body be revived, what is gained thereby, since it must die again? What is important is to bestow true insight and everlasting life—that is, a spiritual and divine life*” [ibid. 115]. Faithful to this position, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá prefers to speak of the spiritual portents performed by His personages: their faithfulness in applying the divine Law to the actions of their daily lives, as difficult as their circumstances may have been. It is their high moral standard that makes of each of the personages of His book an example of life to be recorded for posterity.

In *Memorials of the Faithful* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presents 69 biographies, but in reality He speaks of 79 personages, because in two cases He speaks of two believers together and in four cases he speaks about groups of brothers. The believers that He describes in the same biography are: Áqá Mírzá Mahmúd and Áqá Ridá, “*close and trusted companions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*” [MF 41], who, together, “*devoted their days to all that is best in human life: they had seeing eyes; they were mindful and aware; they had hearing ears, and were fair of speech. Their sole desire was to please Bahá’u’lláh. To them, nothing was a bounty at all,*

except service at *His Holy Threshold*” [MF 40-1]; and Mashhadí Ḥusayn e Mashhadí Muḥammad-i-Adhirbáyjání who, “both from the province of Adhirbáyján” [MF 62], worked as farmers in Bágh-i-Firdaws and died together because of the hot climate of the region, to which “they were not accustomed” [MF 63]. The groups of brothers are: Ustád Báqir and Ustád Ahmad, two carpenters, who “from the time when both became believers each held the other in His embrace” [MF 72]; Áqá Ibráhím-i-Isfáhání and his three brothers, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes together although they lived apart from one another, perhaps not only for their common love for Bahá’u’lláh, but also as a homage to the early days of their earthly lives when “they all lived in the same house, and remained together day and night. Bird-like, they shared the one nest; and they were always fresh and full of grace, like flowers in a bed” [MF 77]; Ḥájí Ja’far-i-Tabrizí and his two brothers, “souls at rest... well-pleased with their Lord and well-pleasing unto Him” [MF 125]; and finally Áqá Muḥammad-Báqir and Áqá Muḥammad-Ismá’íl, who “died on the same night, wrapped in each other’s arms” [MF 169] and their brother Pahlaván Riḍá, who passed away far from them in Káshán. Among these 79 personages there are also three women: the consort of the King of Martyrs [MF 13-5], a Bahá’í beheaded in Işfáhán in 1879, *Shamsu’ḍ-Ḍuhá* [MF 175-90] and *Táhirih* [MF 190-203].

Gail describes *Memorials of the Faithful* as “a book of prototypes” [xi]. She advises her readers that they will meet “mystic, feminist, cleric, artisan, merchant and prince... even modern Western youth... for example, in the chapter on Dervishes” [ibid.]. Ronald Frederick Price, a Bahá’í Canadian writer and poet, guides us throughout the book so that we may meet “all of the archetypes that the various personality theorists have given us in this century” and “all the human dichotomies” [Price 3]: “Jung’s introvert and extrovert... the artist, the suffering artist-soul within us all, Mishkín-Qalam... [who] survives in all his seriousness, as we might, with humour” [ibid.]; “the personality constitutionally weighted on the side of cheer,”

as for example Ismu'lláhu'l-Aşdaq, who “*always taught cheerfully and with gaiety, and would respond gently and with good humour*” [MF 6]; or Muḥammad-‘Alí of Işfáhán, “*a boon companion... affable... happy and content*” [MF 24], loved by everyone, who “*spent his days in utter bliss*” [MF 25] despite his straitened circumstances; and the opposite personality “the sombre, more reflective even melancholic type” [Price 3], often as a “result of the many difficulties these lovers of Bahá’u’lláh were subjected to and wore them ‘to the bone’” [ibid.; see MF 96], like Mírzá Mihdí of Káshán, who “*was ill almost all the time... an outcast, and destitute,*” but always patient and content [MF 96]; or Ḥájí Taqí who after the death of his two brothers, “*weary of this life*” [MF 115-6], threw himself down from the roof of his room, because he wanted to die; or Qulám-‘Alí-i-Najjár, a man “*abstemious and chaste... a mild man, patient quiet, mostly keeping to himself*” [MF 142-3]. “Restlessness is a dominant theme” [Price 3] in these biographies: Sháh Muḥammad-Amín, “*a flame of God’s love*” [MF 45], “*never rested for a moment. Not one night did he spend on a bed of ease, never did he lay down his head on comfort’s pillow. He was continuously in flight, soaring as the birds do, running like a deer*” [MF 46]; Nabíl of Qá’in, “*in ecstasy, burning up with love*” [MF 50], “*restless as the waves of the sea*” [MF 51], “*had no caution, no patience, no reserve; he cared nothing for reticence, nothing for dissimulation*” [MF 51]; Mírzá Muḥammad, after Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension, “*could not stay quiet, day or night... [and] wasted away, like a candle burning down*” [MF 107]. There also are quiet personages who, like Mishkín-Qalam, had no match “*for patience and inner calm*” [MF 101]; or who like Mírzá Ja‘far-i-Yazdí, “*a quiet man, sparing of speech*” were “*in all things relying entirely upon God*” [MF 157]. Finally, we meet sociable believers, like Ḥájí ‘Abdu’lláh Najaf-Abádí who “*spent his days in friendly association with the other believers*” [MF 66-7]; and Nabíl of Qá’in, whose society was “*attractive*” [MF 53]. But we also meet people who prefer solitude, like the two brothers Ustád Báqir and Ustád Aḥmad who lived “*keeping to themselves, away from friend and stranger alike*” [MF 72-3]; or

Qulám-‘Alíy-i-Najjár, who “*inclined to solitude, apt to stay apart from friend and stranger alike... much of the time lived by himself*” [MF 144].

Both Gail and Price suggest that “the reader will probably find himself in these pages” [Gail xi], because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

... is describing not only the lives of these men and women in the nineteenth century, He is describing us in our time. He is addressing us on our own travels. He addresses the restlessness in us all. He speaks to us in our victory and our loss. He speaks about what Michael Polanyi [1891-1976] calls the tacit dimension, the silent root of human life, which is difficult to tap in biographies, the inner person. This private, this inner person, is the person he writes about for the most part. [Price 3]

These are the features of this “series of spiritual portraits” [Kazemzadeh] that have enabled me to write nine poems on eleven personages whose life is described in it. I did not chose them because I considered them in any way superior or better than all the others. I chose them because some of their personal qualities or events in their lives raised louder echoes in my heart and mind.

Shaykh Salmán

Shaykh Salmán [see MF 13-6; see his photo in Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 1:206, Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís* 231] is well known by the Bahá’ís because for almost 40 years, “*from the year 69² until the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh*” in 1892 [MF 15], and even later until 1898-1899 when he died in Shíráz, he went back and forth, travelling thousands of miles, mostly on foot, to bring Tablets and letters from the residences of Bahá’u’lláh and later of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Their lovers in Iran and ‘Iráq and vice versa. For this reason the Blessed Beauty honored him with the title of “*Messenger of the Merciful (Payk-i-Raḥmán)*” [Revelation 1:109,

Nafahát 124]. He was admired for “his simple and unsophisticated nature, his clear insight, his wisdom and tact when confronted with dangerous or difficult situations, above all his faith in Bahá’u’lláh,” as well as his “great physical stamina” [*Revelation* 1:110, 111]. Adib Taherzadeh (1921–2000), the author of a four volume study of the life and Writings of the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, writes about him: “Salmán was pure-hearted and very simple. The believers always enjoyed his company but there were some friends in high positions who were embarrassed and sometimes afraid to meet him because of his simplicity and frankness” [*Revelation* 2:283]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes his services:

He traveled on foot, as a rule eating nothing but onions and bread; and in all that time, he moved about in such a way that he was never once held up and never once lost a letter or a Tablet. Every letter was safely delivered; every Tablet reached its intended recipient. Over and over again, in Işfahán, he was subjected to severe trials, but he remained patient and thankful under all conditions, and earned from non-Bahá’ís the title of “the Bábís’ Angel Gabriel.” [MF 15]

These words by the Master resonate in the following poem [see Savi, *Remoteness* 270]:

SHAYKH SALMÁN

Bologna, 1 February 1999

Shaykh Salmán,
 Gabriel of the Bahá’ís,
 how many lands
 did you cross,
 how many cold
 nights, or sunned
 days on dusty
 roads did you spend.

A precious knapsack
 on your cane,
 a load of love
 within your breast.
 Smell of onions
 on your lips,
 musky perfume
 in your heart.
 Departures
 and arrivals
 but one joy:
 from the human Temple
 of the Beloved One,
 to the human hearts
 of His beloved ones.

Nabíl-i-A‘zam

Muḥammad-i-Zarandí (1831-1892), known as Nabíl-i-A‘zam [see MF 32-6; see his photo in *Revelation* 1:238], has been defined by Shoghi Effendi Bahá’u’lláh’s “Poet-Laureate, His chronicler and His indefatigable disciple” [GPB 130]. His life is so well-known among the Bahá’ís that it is not worth dwelling on it. The episode that inspired my poem [see *Remoteness* 260-1] is described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as follows: “*And at the end, when the Daystar of the world had set, he could endure no more, and flung himself into the sea. The waters of sacrifice closed over him; he was drowned, and he came, at last, to the Most High*” [MF 35]. His own words about his early days also resonated in my heart and mind:

I was a shepherd by profession, and was given in my early days a most rudimentary education. I longed to devote more time to my studies, but was unable to do so, owing to the exigencies of my situation. I read the Qur’án with eagerness, committed several of its passages

to memory, and chanted them whilst I followed my flock over the fields. I loved solitude, and watched the stars at night with delight and wonder. In the quiet of the wilderness, I recited certain prayers attributed to the Imám 'Alí, the Commander of the Faithful, and, as I turned my face towards the Qiblih, supplicated the Almighty to guide my steps and enable me to find the Truth. [DB 433]

DROWNED

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Toward the meadows
of His nearness, heaven
of ecstasy, toward the sea
of nothingness, the ocean

of His love, the poet
laureate of Bahá'u'lláh
advanced that morning
when he was drowned.

From the meadows
of Zarand to the ocean
of the abiding reunion
with the Friend, he went his way.

His feet on the ground,
sometimes pierced,
his heart, by bitter
stings of remoteness,
always alive, his spirit,
to the signs of beauty
lavished near and far
by his Best-Beloved.

He is drowned now
 at last in that surging
 unbounded Ocean.
 From there he offers
 now his hand and says,
 “Drown yourself,
 you too, in the Ocean
 of His Love.”

Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī

Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī [see MF 36-8] is one of the nine individuals described in *Memorials of the Faithful* as “*belonging to the mystic element (‘urafá)*” [TV 63, MF 36]. ‘*Urafá* is the plural of ‘*árif*, ‘the highest grade to which a mystic can attain’ [Steingass 829]. They are: Nabíl-i Akbar, Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar, Muḥammad-‘Alí from Iṣfáhán, Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alí, Ḥájí Muḥammad Khán, Mishkín-Qalam, Ḥájí Áqáy-i Tabrizí, Mírzá Muṣṭafá and Shams-i Duḥá.

Nabíl-i Akbar excelled in “*the teachings of the mystics (‘urafá) and of the Shaykhí School*” [TV 5, MF 1]; Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar “*frequented the gatherings of... mystics (‘urafá)... thoughtfully traversing those areas of knowledge (‘ilm),³ intuitive wisdom (‘irfán),⁴ and illumination (ishráq)*”⁵ (TV 19, MF 9); Muḥammad-‘Alí from Iṣfáhán “*was one of the mystics (‘urafá); his house was a gathering place for them, and the philosophers*” [TV 43, MF 23-4]; Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alí “*belonged to the mystic element (‘urafá)*” [TV 63, MF 36]; Ḥájí Muḥammad Khán “*became a mystic (‘urafá)*” when he was very young [TV 142, MF 91]; Mishkín-Qalam “*was among the most noted of mystics (‘urafá)... [and] a spiritual wayfarer (sálik)*”⁶ [TV 152, MF 98]; Ḥájí Áqáy-i Tabrizí was “*a spiritual man (mard-i-rabbání)*” and “*had sensed the mystic knowledge (‘irfán)*” [TV 218, MF 142]; Mírzá Muṣṭafá “*was concerned with the anemones of mystic meanings*” [TV 227, MF 148]; and Shams-i Duḥá, the only woman

among the nine, was “*strongly attracted to the mystical teachings (‘irfán) of... Siyyid Kázim-i Rashtí... [and] became thoroughly informed on subjects relating to Divinity, on the Scriptures and on their inner meanings*” [TV 268; MF 176]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not praise these believers for possible charismas [see Savi, “The Bahá’í Faith and the Perennial Mystical Quest”], but for having escaped the snares of an obsolete form of mysticism, with its emphasis on visionary and illogical elements, and for having become lovers of the Truth as manifested by Bahá’u’lláh and the champions of his Covenant. While speaking of Darvish Şidq-‘Alí He explains that Bahá’u’lláh wrote that the word *darvish*, often used in Persian to mean “mystic,” “*designates those who are completely severed from all but God, who cleave to His laws, are firm in His Faith, loyal to His Covenant, and constant in worship*” [MF 38].

Darvish Şidq-‘Alí recognized very early the Blessed Beauty, perhaps during His residence in Kurdistan. He was the attendant of the Shrine of Pír-Dávar, on mount Balábanú, “the mountain of Sulaymáníyyih, to which Bahá’u’lláh went” [*Eminent Bahá’ís* 316] during His residence in Kurdistan in 1854–1856. There Darvish Şidq-‘Alí met Bahá’u’lláh and “on meeting Him came to see in Him all the signs by which the Promised One was to be recognized” [*Eminent Bahá’ís* 316]. Şidq-‘Alí was one of the believers who were allowed to join the party travelling to Constantinople. He served as groom on the journey. Taherzadeh writes that he “used to walk all day beside the convoy, singing poems which brought joy to the friends, and at night he attended to the horses. From Constantinople he accompanied Bahá’u’lláh on His exile to Adrianople, and then to ‘Akká” [*Revelation* 1:289]. He died in 1880–81 and is buried in ‘Akká [see Balyuzi, *Bahá’u’lláh* 482].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá informs us that:

While in the barracks, Bahá’u’lláh set apart a special night and He dedicated it to Darvish Şidq-‘Alí. He wrote that every year on that night the dervishes should bedeck

a meeting place, which should be in a flower garden, and gather there to make mention of God. [MF 38]

It has been speculated that Lawḥ-i Laylatu'l-Quds I (Tablet of the Sacred Night I), which may have been revealed in Adrianople and is addressed to Darvīsh Šidq-‘Alī, may be related to this “special night.” And the Iranian Bahá’í scholar ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd Ishráq Khávarí (1902-1972) suggested that the Sacred Night of this Tablet is the night of the Báb’s Declaration, 23 or 24 May [see *Raḥíq-i Makhtúm* 2:296]. In 1996 an inquirer asked the Universal House of Justice about the above mentioned words by the Master. On that occasion the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice explained:

there is no further information in *Memorials* about this event, and there is no clear evidence in historical documents so far reviewed as to how and by whom this celebration might have been observed. It also remains a question when it was discontinued. However, in his book *Ganj-i-Shaygan* [*Ganj-i-Sháyigán*], pages 209-210, the well known scholar, Ishraq Khavari states that the ceremonial practices of Bahá’ís from dervish backgrounds were subsequently discouraged by Bahá’u’lláh... with the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in 1873, the laws and ordinances concerning days to be commemorated were given. Thereafter, other celebrations which had developed to that point were discontinued. [20 August 1996]

That being said, I am aware that this special celebration has been discontinued. However, the fact that the Blessed Beauty had “*set apart a special night*” and that “*He dedicated it to Darvīsh Šidq-‘Alī*” [MF 38] is captivating. And I was thus moved to make it the central theme of the following poem [see *Remoteness* 262], together with the concept that He has encouraged a totally new kind of mysticism:

THE NIGHT OF ŞİDQ-'ALÍ

Bologna, 25 December 1998

O cool night of scents and roses,
 which Thou, the truest Friend
 of human hearts, hast dedicated
 to Thy lover Şidq-'Alí and to all
 them who tread with him
 the ways of mystery and beauty,
 and never stray from the straight
 path of Thy laws! How will
 the nightingales of their hearts
 fail to sing, when face to face
 with the beauty Thou Thyself
 hast willed to bestow
 upon their night! In its scented
 dark the gates of mysteries
 are opened. Each sign of Thine
 is relieved of all weight of sense
 and intellect and glows
 with boundless beauty. Thou thus
 allayest the anguish of their hearts,
 harassed by Thy veiling signs,
 by any other beauty that yet
 defaces Thee. Let others scorn
 their unappeased pain of love.
 Thou alone well knowest
 whence it cometh and where
 it leadeth. They can only
 ask Thee: "Make Thou this pain
 of ours to lead us but to Thee."

Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí

Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí [see MF 43-4] was subjected to a very special test, a kind of torment of Tantalus. When Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad to go to Constantinople, in May 1863, he was among the lucky believers who were allowed to follow Him. But when the caravan was about to leave Judaydah ('Iráq), on the river Tigris, where they had arrived on the seventh day of their march and had stopped for three days, Bahá'u'lláh instructed him and three other friends to return to Baghdad. Balyuzi writes that Shaykh Şádiq "an old man greatly devoted to the person of Bahá'u'lláh... felt so acutely the pangs of separation from Him that he could not rest, and not long after, started, a solitary figure, to walk to Istanbul. But he never finished the journey and died on the way, at Ma'dan-i-Nuqrih [(Silver Mine)]" [*Bahá'u'lláh* 178]. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains more specifically: "... after the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh at Mosul, he could endure the separation no more. Shoeless, hatless, he ran out alongside the courier going to Mosul; ran and ran until, on that barren plain, with mercy all about him, he fell to his rest" [MF 44]. This specific episode is at the heart of the following unpublished poem:

SHAYKH ŞÁDIQ-I-YAZDÍ

Bologna, 1 February 1999

Shaykh Şádiq
 your Beloved
 did not want
 you to die on
 an easy bed.
 He wanted you
 to follow Him
 to Mosul. And
 then, shoeless,
 hatless, alone, on

that barren plain,
 He came toward
 you, His cup filled
 with crystal water,
 tempered at the
 Camphor fountain.
 And you quaffed
 it with joy.

Zaynu'l-‘Ábidín Yazdí

Zaynu'l-‘Ábidín Yazdí [see MF 83-4] is one of those passionate lovers who did their utmost to reach Bahá'u'lláh while He was confined in ‘Akká, with the prohibition of meeting anyone. Shoghi Effendi describes them as follows:

The few pilgrims who, despite the ban that had been so rigidly imposed, managed to reach the gates of the Prison—some of whom had journeyed the entire distance from Persia on foot—had to content themselves with a fleeting glimpse of the face of the Prisoner, as they stood, beyond the second moat, facing the window of His Prison. The very few who succeeded in penetrating into the city had, to their great distress, to retrace their steps without even beholding His countenance. [GPB 187]

When he began his journey to go and meet his Beloved, he was so sick that he passed away before attaining his destination, an episode which is the leitmotiv of the following poem [see *Remoteness* 271]:

ZAYNU'L-‘ÁBIDÍN

Bologna, 1 February 1999

You did not reach
 your journey's goal

on earth. You did not reach
 that sea which roars
 beneath the walls
 of the *crimson City*.
 Your body did not endure
 that journey's toils.
 But when you closed
 your eyes for ever
 to this life, your Best-
 Beloved came toward you
 from behind His veils
 and the light of reunion
 dawned upon
 your loving heart.
 You never came away
 from that shining
 Presence. There,
 you live now in joy,
 devoted and true,
 stainless and faithful.

Shaykh 'Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání

Shaykh 'Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání [see MF 104-5] "*by disposition and because of the intense love in his heart,... yearned to write poetry, to fashion odes and ghazals, but he lacked both meter and rhyme*" [MF 105]. 'Abdu'l-Bahá numbers in his book other seven believers who wrote poetry. Unlike Shaykh 'Alí Akbar, they were talented poets. These poets are Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvish Šidq-'Alí, Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím, Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání, Ustád 'Alí-Akbar-i-Najjár, Jináb-i-Muníb and Ṭáhirih. Nabíl-i-Zarandí

... was a gifted poet, and his tongue most eloquent; a man of mettle, and on fire with passionate love... Day and night he sang the praises of the one Beloved of both

*worlds and of those about His threshold, writing verses in the pentameter and hexameter forms, lyrics and long odes... His native genius was pure inspiration, his poetic gift like a crystal stream. In particular his ode 'Bahá, Bahá!' was written in sheer ecstasy. [MF 33, 34-35]*⁷

Darvish Šidq-‘Alí, also mentioned above as a mystic,

had a fine poetic gift and wrote odes to sing the praises of Him Whom the world has wronged and rejected. Among them is a poem written while he was a prisoner in the barracks at ‘Akká, the chief couplet of which reads:

*A hundred hearts Thy curling locks ensnare,
And it rains hearts when Thou dost toss Thy hair.*

[MF 36]

Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím “*had a fine poetic gift, and he would create verses like stringed pearls*” [MF 81]. Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání “*in early youth, under his father’s tutelage,... had studied sciences and arts, and had become skilled in composing both prose and verse*” [TF 95]. Also Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Najjár was “*a gifted poet, writing odes in eulogy of Bahá’u’lláh*” [MF 102]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also cites Jináb-i-Muníb, who “*was a calligrapher second to none, a poet, and... had as well a remarkable singing voice*” [MF 145]. This man will be mentioned again later on. As to Táhiriḥ, a well-known Iranian poetess,⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá only hints at her “*remarkable ability in literary pursuits*” [MF 191]. The auspice that although Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar had no poetic talent in this world, perhaps in the Great Beyond his Beloved may have granted him to become the inspirer of aspiring poet in this nether world is the leitmotiv of the following unpublished poem:

SHAYKH ‘ALÍ AKBAR-I-MAZGÁNÍ

Bologna, 6 January 1999

Do not grieve that you lacked
 both meter and rhyme.
 Your eyes beheld the face
 of the Best-Beloved.

Other hearts were granted
 a poetical vein and denied
 attaining the presence
 of the Best-Beloved.

In centuries to come others
 like you will look after meter
 and rhyme in their praise
 of the Best-Beloved.

From your world of love
 and light will you help them
 to give wings to their verses
 for the Best-Beloved?

Ḥájí Ja‘far and his brothers

‘Abdu’l-Bahá relates the incidents of the lives of Ḥájí Ja‘far and his two brothers in a single biography [MF 122-5], because they were related not only by their blood relationship, but also, and especially, by their deep love for Bahá’u’lláh. Ḥájí Ḥasan is so transported by this love that, because of his imprudence in teaching the new Faith in Azerbaijan, is treacherously killed in a garden and his torn body is hidden under-earth. Ḥájí Ja‘far is so bound to Bahá’u’lláh that he sacrifices everything so that he may remain beside Him. When in 1868 in Adrianople he discovers that the authorities did not permit him to follow Bahá’u’lláh in the Holy Land, he is so grieved that he cuts his throat. Bahá’u’lláh later on wrote about him, as well as about another believer who killed himself out of his love for Him:

*Such souls have been influenced by the Word of God,
 have tasted the sweetness of His remembrance, and are*

so transported by the breezes of reunion that they have detached themselves from all that dwell on earth and turned unto the Divine Countenance with faces beaming with light. And though they have committed an act which God hath forbidden, He hath nevertheless forgiven them as a token of His mercy. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate. So enraptured were these souls by Him Who is the All-Compelling that the reins of volition slipped from their grasp, until at last they ascended to the dwelling of the Unseen and entered the presence of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing. [SLH 145]

Having survived to this desperate act, Ḥájí Ja‘far finally manages to attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in the Holy Land together with his brother Ḥájí Taqí. There he dies falling from the roof of the caravanserai where he resides, while he paces absorbed in his prayers. After this event Ḥájí Taqí remains alone. He too dies in the same way: he falls from the roof of the caravanserai. This human sequel of events binding these three brothers, three “*eagles soaring... three stars of the Faith, pulsing with the light of the love of God*” [MF 122] is the leitmotiv of the following unpublished poem:

ḤÁJÍ JA‘FAR AND HIS BROTHERS

Bologna, 3 February 1999

You were three brothers of Tabríz
 young soaring eagles of the Faith
 pulsing lights of the love of God.
 Ḥájí Ḥasan, by which insanity
 of love were you distracted?
 Why did you dance and sing
shahnáz melodies in Azerbaijan?

Brought to that lonely garden,
you were tortured, killed and
your body hidden underground.
But your soul soared to Heaven
well-pleased with her Lord
and well-pleasing unto Him.
Ḥájí Ja‘far, by which insanity
of love were you distracted?
Attempting suicide
that you might follow an Exile
in His exile. Love healed your
wound, your yearning for exile
was finally fulfilled. Where was
your heart that night on
the roof of the caravanserai?
In the morning your lifeless
body was discovered lying
on the ground. Your exile was past.
Ḥájí Taqí, silence
personified, now that your
brothers, companions
of former days, left you
alone, always sitting
lonely in your room. Now,
you fled away, you too, as
your brother, from that roof
toward his embrace and the
embrace of your Beloved.

‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí

About ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí [see MF 129-31] I could not find any historical reference in the Bahá’í literature. The purport of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes about him, and as a matter of fact about all the other believers described in *Memorials of the Faithful*, is clarified by the following remarks by Price:

He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] describes many pilgrimages and you and I are left to construct our own. We all must shape and define our own life. Is it aesthetically pleasing? Intellectually provocative? Spiritually challenging? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shapes and defines these lives given the raw-data of their everydayness added up, added up over their lives as He saw them. How would He shape my life? Yours? How would we look in a contemporary anthology of existences with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the choreographer and the history of our days as the *mise en scène*? [Price 3]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes in the beginning of His biography of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí:

When he was very young, people thought of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí as a libertine, solely devoted to pleasure. He was regarded by all as the sport of inordinate desires, mired down in his physical passions. But the moment he became a believer, he was carried away by the sweet savors of God, and was changed into a new creation. He found himself in a strange rapture, completely transformed. He had been of the world, now he was of Heaven; he had lived by the flesh, now he lived by the spirit; he had walked in darkness; now he walked in light. He had been a slave to his senses, now he was a thrall of God. He had been clay and earthenware before, now he was a dear-bought pearl; a dull and lusterless stone before, now a ruby glowing. [MF 129-30]

This incipit is the leitmotiv of the following poem [see *Remoteness* 272]:

'ABDU'LLÁH BAGHDÁDÍ

Bologna, 12 February 1999

O friend of joy
your thirst for bliss
is today appeased
the wine you drink
today does not make
you lose your mind
to make you wise
it closes your eyes
to this world
and opens them
to the Veilless Beauty.
Today your feasts
are celestial agapes.
The gazelle-eyed
maids you invite
today are the virtues
of your Lord. Broken
your rusty fetters,
your heart is bound
today by the golden
chains of faithfulness.

Jináb-i-Muníb

The story of Jináb-i-Muníb [see MF 145-7] is one of the most fascinating and moving biographies of *Memorials of the Faithful*. Friendship occupies a prominent position in human life. And thus this story, revolving around the personal friendship between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Áqá, the given name of Jináb-i-Muníb, is full of inspiring details, comprising: the charming personality of this man; his intimate relation with the Master during their migration from Baghdad to Constantinople; their riding (both of them teen-agers) beside Bahá’u’lláh’s howdah and singing

To our King though we bow the knee,
We are kings of the morning star.

No changeable colors have we—

Red lions, black dragons we are! [MF 145, see Háfiz, Divan
395-6]

and especially his sickness and final death, alone, in that foreign hospital in Smyrna, and the Master’s words about that moment

Whenever I think of that moment, the tears come; my heart is heavy and I summon up the remembrance of what he was. A great man; infinitely wise, he was, steadfast, modest and grave; and there was no one like him for faith and certitude. In him the inner and outer perfections, the spiritual and physical, were joined together. That is why he could receive endless bounty and grace. [MF 146]

Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf (1846–1932), told her version of the story of his passing to Sarah Lady Blomfield (1859–1939), the first distinguished Bahá’í of the British Isles and the first Bahá’í of Ireland, adding a small and moving detail:

A dear friend of the family, Jináb-i-Muníb, was taken seriously ill. When the boat stopped at Smyrna, Sarkár-i-Áqá ('Abdu'l-Bahá) and Mírzá Músá carried him ashore, and took him to a hospital. The Master bought a melon and some grapes; returning with the refreshing fruit for him—He found that he had died. Arrangements were made with the director of the hospital for a simple funeral. The Master chanted some prayers, then, heartsore, came back to the boat. [Lady Blomfield 65]

Taherzadeh writes that Bahá'u'lláh, in a Tablet describing Jináb-i-Muníb's passing in Smyrna, "says that when Jináb-i-Muníb's spirit ascended to his abode in the eternal worlds of God, all the angelic souls and the Concourse on high rushed forward to receive him with eagerness and love" [*Revelation* 1 286]. This pregnant story has inspired the following poem [see *Remoteness* 263-4].

JINÁB-I-MUNÍB

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Winsome, charming, refined,
 delicate, sensitive, a poet
 and singer, once a lover
 of worldly pleasures, a companion
 of the young Áqá, beside Him
 an escort of the Beloved's *howdah*,
 a wise messenger of His love,
 an attendant at His Threshold.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
 your mind never lost the memory
 of the last touch of His hands
 as He laid your head on that pillow.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,

your body never lost the warmth
of the last loving embrace
of your youthful Companion.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
your heart never lost the fragrance
of His last kisses of love,
as he was forced away from you.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
when, in loneliness, your soul winged
its flight, the last glance of love
of the Beloved lifted you into Heaven.

Jináb-i-Muníb, a whole life
is not worth the love of the Beloved
and the youthful friendship
of that Companion of nocturnal rides.

Every tear of love shed
by His celestial eyes,
as He would recall
His last separation from you,
adds beauty to the radiant form
the Beloved gave you in Heaven,
even more beautiful than that
which He gave you on earth.

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NOTES

¹ The prayer *Yá Sháfi* is known among the Bahá'ís as *Lawh-i-Anta'l-Káfi* or "Long Healing Prayer" (see *Bahá'í Prayers* 91-8).

² 1269 AH, or 1853 CE, the year in which Bahá'u'lláh "received the first intimation of His sublime Mission" (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages* 99).

³ An Arabic word sometimes translated as science.

⁴ Among the Sufis this word denotes esoteric knowledge.

⁵ In the Muslim world this word denotes the oriental theosophy or philosophy of Suhrawardi (1155-1191).

⁶ An Arabic word denoting among the Sufis the initiated on the mystical path.

⁷ The first five verses of this ode have been translated into English by the British scholar Edward G. Browne (1862-1926). See *Materials* 353.

⁸ See *Táhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*.

Significance of some Sites Mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful*

Foad Seddigh

Abstract

Memorials of the Faithful is not merely a book devoted to the hagiography of some believers and to some extent a historical narrative of their lives, it is also a depository of matchless beauty in Persian writing, an exquisite text with profound meaning, and a testimonial to the devotion of believers to the Cause of God and the Covenant. The believers whose stories appear in the book comprised a diverse cross-section of the Bábí and Bahá'í communities including believers that society would consider low in rank as well as high, poor and rich, semi-literate and learned.

In the book *Memorials of the Faithful*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the course of portraying the life history of these believers, cited many countries, cities, towns, villages and sites, some of which were blessed by the foot-steps of the Twin Manifestations of God for this age, and others which were important due to their association with significant historical events of the Faith. In this paper three such places were selected from among all the sites mentioned in the book and their niche in the history and the Writings of the Faith were further elaborated. These are: (1) The Most Great House in Baghhdad, (2) The ruins of Mada'in,

located some thirty kilometers south of Baghdad, on the banks of the River Tigris, a place where the Blessed Beauty visited many times, and which once graced the palaces of great kings of the Sassanid dynasty, and (3) the city of Mosul in northern Iraq on the banks of the River Tigris where a number of believers and the Holy family were kept as captives for several years, a city which Bahá'u'lláh's caravan passed through on His journey to exile in the seat of the Ottoman Empire.

The Most Great House

Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Baghdad on April 8, 1853 and stayed a few days in the old quarters of the city then moved to al-Kázimíyyah (Kázimayn),¹ a holy town in the eyes of Shí'ah, Islám [King of Glory p. 106]. Al-Kázimíyyah houses the shrines of two Shí'ah Imáms and therefore is a place of pilgrimage for Shí'ahs. At the time, this place was at a distance of 10 km from Baghdad, and now is one of the nine administrative districts within the city. Soon after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, an official from the Iranian consulate paid Him a visit and advised Him, in utmost humility, that this place was not suitable for His residence. Therefore, after staying a month in al-Kázimíyyah, He moved to a house in the Al-Karkh² district of Baghdad, referred to as the House of Hájí 'Alí Madad. Due to the inadequacy of space in this house, the holy Family was not comfortable, and lived in cramped conditions. During the absence of Bahá'u'lláh during his sojourn in the mountains of Kurdistan, the Family moved to a house known by the name of Sulaymán-i-Ghannám, belonging to Musá Javáhirí; this house was also located in the Al-Karkh district (Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad for Kurdistan on April 10, 1854 and returned on March 19, 1856 [King of Glory pp. 112-115]). The Guardian describes this residence of Bahá'u'lláh with the following words [GPB 129-130]:

Within a few years after Bahá'u'lláh's return from Sulaymáníyyih the situation had been completely reversed. The house of Sulaymán-i-Ghannám, on which

the official designation of the Bayt-i-'Aẓam (the Most Great House) was later conferred, known, at that time, as the house of Mírzá Músá, the Bábí, an extremely modest residence, situated in the Karkh quarter, in the neighborhood of the western bank of the river, to which Bahá'u'lláh's family had moved prior to His return from Kurdistán, had now become the focal center of a great number of seekers, visitors and pilgrims, including Kurds, Persians, Arabs and Turks, and derived from the Muslim, the Jewish and Christian Faiths. It had, moreover, become a veritable sanctuary to which the victims of the injustice of the official representative of the Persian government were wont to flee, in the hope of securing redress for the wrongs they had suffered.

The exact date of the family's transfer to this house is not known. The house of Sulaymán-i-Ghannám was rented at the beginning and later on became a property of Bahá'u'lláh. This transition is a fascinating story which has been narrated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of the chapters from the *Memorials of the Faithful* where the life history of Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl is narrated. A brief extract from His explanation is given below:

There was a notable in Baghdád by the name of Ḥájí Mírzá Hádí, the jeweler. He had a distinguished son, Áqá Mírzá Músá,³ who had received from Bahá'u'lláh the title "Letter of Eternity." This son had become a staunch believer. As for his father, the Ḥájí, he was a princely individual known for his lavish open-handedness not only in Persia and 'Iráq but as far away as India....

Toward the close of his life he conceived a remarkable love for Bahá'u'lláh, and most humbly, would enter His presence.... Such was the situation of that illustrious prince when he passed away, leaving as heirs a son and two daughters....

Mírzá Músá was a staunch believer; his sisters, however, were from a different mother, and they knew nothing of the Cause. One day the two sisters, accompanied by the son-in-law of the late Mírzá Siyyid Riḍá, came to the house of Bahá'u'lláh. The two sisters entered the family apartments while the son-in-law settled down in the public reception rooms. The two girls then said to Bahá'u'lláh: "The Persian envoy, the judge, and the faithless mujtahids have destroyed us. Toward the close of his life, the late Ḥájí trusted no one but Yourself. We ourselves have been remiss and we should have sought Your protection before; in any case we come now to implore Your pardon and help...." [MF 108 -109]

The Blessed Beauty refused to become involved in such matters and they insisted and begged him to the extent that they said they would not leave the house until He acceded to their requests. 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains:

Finally one day Bahá'u'lláh summoned me to His presence. "These esteemed ladies," He said, "with all their exactions, have put Us to considerable inconvenience. There is no help for it—you will have to see to this case. But you must solve this entire, complicated matter in a single day..." [MF 112]

The Blessed Beauty accepted to intervene and instructed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to spend only one day to settle the matter. 'Abdu'l-Bahá followed His instructions and resolved all the matters of dispute to the best satisfaction of all. In return, they gave one third of the inheritance to Him which at long last He accepted and donated in its entirety to Mírzá Músá Javáhirí. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains further that:

Grateful for the bounty he had received, Mírzá Músá offered Bahá'u'lláh everything he possessed: orchards, lands, estates—but it was refused. Then he appointed the 'ulamás of 'Iráq to intercede for him. They hastened to Bahá'u'lláh in a body and begged Him to accept the

proffered gifts. He categorically refused. They respectfully told Him: "Unless You accept, in a very short time Mírzá Músá will scatter it all to the winds. For his own good, he should not have access to this wealth."

Then in his own hand, Mírzá Músá penned deeds of gift, made out according to each of the five creeds, in Arabic and Persian; two copies he made, and chose the 'ulamás as his witnesses. Through certain 'ulamás of Baghdád, among them the famed scholar 'Abdu's-Salám Effendi, and the erudite and widely known Siyyid Dávúd Effendi, he presented the deed of gift to Bahá'u'lláh. The Blessed Beauty told them: "We are appointing Mírzá Músá himself as Our deputy...." [MF 119]

This house was later on called the "Most Great House," by Bahá'u'lláh, which is one of the three locations designated for pilgrimage for the Bahá'ís. The Most Great House in Baghdád and the House of the Báb in Shiráz were designated in the Most Holy Book (The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*) for pilgrimage; 'Abdu'l-Bahá added to this list the third place which is Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Akká, but He did not specify any rites for this pilgrimage [KA 191]. In Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh and His family lived in this house for a longer period than they did elsewhere in Iraq. The Most Great House witnessed many events during the earlier years of Bahá'u'lláh's mission while He had not yet declared. Many Tablets were revealed in this House, many believers attained Bahá'u'lláh's presence in this House, and many dignitaries and men of status and knowledge met Him in this House.

When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Istanbul and Edirnih (Adrianople) several believers became custodians of the House among whom were: Gawhar Khánum (His wife from Káshán), Mírzá Mihdí Káshání (Gawhar Khánum's brother) and Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl. Towards the end of Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Edirnih, nearly seventy believers among whom was Jináb-i-Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín were arrested in Baghdad and sent as

prisoners to the city of Mosul. This deprived the House of lawful custodians and in the interim some individuals looked after the House. This is the earlier period that provided an opportunity for the enemies of the Cause to transgress against this House. It has been reported that a number of believers on their way to 'Akká stayed in this House. This included Badí', the pride of the martyrs.

In the first year of His stay in Edirnih (Adrianople), Bahá'u'lláh revealed two Tablets of pilgrimage (Surih-i-Hajj)⁴, one for the House of the Báb and the other one for the Most Great House and sent them to Nabíl Zarandí (Nabíl A'zam) who was travelling in Iran at the time proclaiming the news of the appearance of the promised one of the Bayán. Bahá'u'lláh instructed Nabíl to perform the pilgrimage according to the instructions given in the Tablets. Nabíl Zarandí proceeded at once and performed the pilgrimage according to the instructions contained in these two Tablets. As far as the history has recorded, Nabíl Zarandí is the only person who has performed the pilgrimage in accordance with all the instructions of the Tablet of Pilgrimage. Sheikh Muḥammad Damirtchi⁵ was another person directed by Bahá'u'lláh to visit the House and read a Tablet of Visitation at the House which had been revealed in his honor. He performed the pilgrimage according to the instructions, disregarding the mobs who were throwing stones at him.

The Nobility of the Most Great House

Bahá'u'lláh extols the station of this House in several Tablets, including the one which was revealed in the honor of the aforementioned Sheikh Muḥammad Damirtchi. Some passages from this Tablet appear below:

When thou art departed out of the court of My presence, O Muḥammad, direct thy steps towards My House (Baghdád House), and visit it on behalf of thy

Lord. When thou reachest its door, stand thou before it and say: Whither is the Ancient Beauty gone, O most great House of God, He through Whom God hath made thee the cynosure of an adoring world, and proclaimed thee to be the sign of His remembrance unto all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth? Oh! for the former days when thou, O House of God, wert made His footstool, the days when in ceaseless strains the melody of the All-Merciful poured forth from thee! What hath become of thy jewel whose glory hath irradiated all creation? Whither are gone the days in which He, the Ancient King, had made thee the throne of His glory, the days in which He had chosen thee alone to be the lamp of salvation between earth and heaven, and caused thee to diffuse, at dawn and at eventide, the sweet fragrance of the All-Glorious?

Where, O House of God, is the Sun of majesty and power Who had enveloped thee with the brightness of His presence? Where is He, the Day Spring of the tender mercies of thy Lord, the Unconstrained, Who had established His seat within thy walls? What is it, O throne of God, that hath altered thy countenance, and made thy pillars to tremble? What could have closed thy door to the face of them that eagerly seek thee? What hath made thee so desolate? Couldst thou have been told that the Beloved of the world is pursued by the swords of His enemies? The Lord bless thee, and bless thy fidelity unto Him, inasmuch as thou hast remained His companion through all His sorrows and His sufferings...

[GWB 111-112]

In relation to the names and titles of this House, The Guardian states:

Most Great House of God," His "Footstool" and the "Throne of His Glory," "the Cynosure of an adoring

world,” the “Lamp of Salvation between earth and heaven,” the “Sign of His remembrance to all who are in heaven and on earth,” enshrining the “Jewel whose glory hath irradiated all creation,” the “Standard” of His Kingdom, the “Shrine round which will circle the concourse of the faithful” was irrevocably founded and permanently consecrated. Upon it, by virtue of its sanctity as Bahá’u’lláh’s “Most Holy Habitation” and “Seat of His transcendent glory,” was conferred the honor of being regarded as a center of pilgrimage second to none except the city of ‘Akká, His “Most Great Prison...” [GPB 110]

It is evident that the high station given to a House is due to its association with the Manifestation of God and not because of the materials, stones, bricks and concrete used to construct the house.

Prophecy of the Desecration of the House

Bahá’u’lláh in some of His Tablets clearly predicted that the House of God (The Most Great House) will be dishonored:

Grieve not, O House of God, if the veil of thy sanctity be rent asunder by the infidels. God hath, in the world of creation, adorned thee with the jewel of His remembrance. Such an ornament no man can, at any time, profane. Towards thee the eyes of thy Lord shall, under all conditions, remain directed. He, verily, will incline His ear to the prayer of every one that visiteth thee, who will circle around thee, and calleth upon Him in thy name. He, in truth, is the Forgiving, the All-Merciful. [GWB 114]

Also the Sublime Pen writes in the following terms concerning the future humiliation awaiting the House:

Call thou to mind that which hath been revealed unto Mihdí, Our servant, in the first year of Our banishment to the Land of Mystery (Adrianople). Unto him have We predicted that which must befall Our House (Baghdád House), in the days to come, lest he grieve over the acts of robbery and violence already perpetrated against it. Verily, the Lord, thy God, knoweth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth.

To him We have written: This is not the first humiliation inflicted upon My House. In days gone by the hand of the oppressor hath heaped indignities upon it. Verily, it shall be so abased in the days to come as to cause tears to flow from every discerning eye. Thus have We unfolded to thee things hidden beyond the veil, inscrutable to all save God, the Almighty, the All-Praised.... [GWB 114-115]

Although several attempts were made by the Shí‘ah clergy, the ever vigilant enemy of the Cause of God in Baghdad, who tried to wrestle away this House from the hands of its lawful owner, but all their efforts in this regard failed miserably. Towards the end of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Ministry, the condition of the House deteriorated to such an extent that it was in a sorry state. One of the new adherents of the Faith in Baghdad, Ḥájí Maḥmúd-i-Qassábchí,⁶ with the permission from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and with his own resources, undertook to repair the House. This period of time coincided with the termination of World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Iraq came under the administration of the League of Nations, a new constitution was adopted and the freedom of religion and belief was announced. The reconstruction of the House and its development produced a steadily widening measure of publicity. This emboldened the Shí‘ah clerics to seize possession of the House through the favourable judgement of an obscure Shari‘ah Court which made several obvious and possibly deliberate mistakes. This crisis which originated about a year prior to

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension eventually precipitated in its seizure by Shí’ah clerics in the summer of 1922. Since this time the House has not been returned to the Bahá’ís. This House had continued to be in the unbroken and undisputed possession of Bahá’u’lláh’s followers ever since His departure from Baghdád, a period of more than six decades. As an example of an obvious mistake committed by the court was that it disregarded the rule that fifteen years of lawful possession and occupation of a house disqualifies any dispute attempted at the seizure of the house.

This unjust ruling became the object of the consideration of successive tribunals. First by the local Shí’ah Ja’fariyyih court in Baghdád, second by the Peace court, then the court of First Instance, then by the court of Appeal in Iraq, and finally by the League of Nations, the greatest international body in existence at that time. The League of Nations had been empowered to exercise supervision and control over all Mandated Territories. Though repossession of the House was not resolved due to a combination of causes, religious as well as political, it has already remarkably fulfilled Bahá’u’lláh’s own prediction concerning the humiliation it will suffer in the hands of the enemies of the Cause of God.

The appeal of the local Bahá’í community in Iraq, and those of the International Bahá’í community from around the world, as well as the letters of the Guardian written as the Head of the Bahá’í Faith to the highest authorities and to King Faisal⁷ produced no results; and the Government of Iraq under the leadership of King Faisal remained adamant in acting in a manner which was just—as he was much afraid of the religious passion of the Shí’ahs. Details regarding these communications are comprehensively documented in the volumes of the *Bahá’í World*: *Bahá’í World* II pp. 33-34, *Bahá’í World* III pp. 198-210, *Bahá’í World* IV pp. 237-248, *Bahá’í World* V pp. 351-359, and *Bahá’í World* VI p. 437.⁸ In these volumes, we find the resolutions of various courts, minutes of the council of the League of Nations, as well as some important letters. Among

the various accounts, Arnold Toynbee, the well-respected British historian provides an informed accounting of the situation concerning the House [Survey of International Affairs pp. 116-122]. The American Lawyer, Mountfort Mills, exerted tremendous efforts and dedication towards securing possession of the House for the Faith. In paying tributes to his effort, the Guardian referred to him as “Mr. Mountfort Mills, whose services to the Cause only future generations can estimate” [BA 127]. Other efforts included the audience of Miss Martha Root with King Faisal I⁹ in Baghhdad and her request for the intervention by the King. Finally, the Government of Iraq gained complete independence in 1932 and joined the League of Nations in 1933 and all those who were involved with this matter either died or were replaced and the case has remained unresolved until this time despite several fundamental changes of Government in Iraq. The final act was the news released by the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 17 July, 2013,¹⁰ of razing the House almost to the ground by unknown elements, without any legal permit from the Government, between 24-26 June, 2013, in order to prepare the ground for building a mosque on the spot where the Most Great House was originally standing.

Promise of the Rise of the House of God

Bahá'u'lláh also prophesied that the House will suffer such humiliation which will cause tears of the faithful to flow; after that it will rise again and will find its high station which has been destined for it. The Supreme Pen provides this assurance with these words:

In the fullness of time, the Lord shall, by the power of truth, exalt it in the eyes of all men. He shall cause it to become the Standard of His Kingdom, the Shrine round which will circle the concourse of the faithful. Thus hath spoken the Lord, thy God... [GWB 115]

Al-Mada'in Becomes the Seat of Glory

One of the chapters of *Memorials of the Faithful* is devoted to the life of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, the Afnán who was eventually buried in the vicinity of the ancient city of Mada'in. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, the Afnán, was a cousin of the Báb and the eldest child of the eldest uncle of the Báb for whom the Kitáb-i-Íqán was revealed. About a year prior to the departure of Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdád for Istanbul, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí who was a resident of Shanghai in China, along with his younger brother, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and became aware of His high station. For the second time he gained admittance to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in ‘Akká—this is the visit that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá describes in these terms:

One day I was up on the roof of the caravanserai. Some of the friends were with me and I was walking up and down. It was sunset. At that moment, glancing at the distant seashore, I observed that a carriage was approaching. "Gentlemen," I said, "I feel that a holy being is in that carriage." It was still far away, hardly within sight." Let us go to the gate," I told them. "Although they will not allow us to pass through, we can stand there till he comes." I took one or two people with me and we left... The gatekeeper stayed outside, the carriage drew up, the gentleman had arrived. What a radiant face he had! He was nothing but light from head to foot. Just to look at that face made one happy; he was so confident, so assured, so rooted in his faith, and his expression so joyous. He was truly a blessed being....

[MF 17]

During one of his trips from China, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí Afnán arrived in Bombay and took his flight to the Abhá Kingdom due to an illness. However, the burial of his remains became problematic and one of the believers by the name Áqá Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí according to the instructions of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the body to Iraq with the intention of finding a burial place in one of the holy cemeteries of Islám. Eventually, according to the instructions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he buried the body of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí in the Salmán Cemetery near Mada’in. Mada’in was once the seat of the Government of the Sassanid dynasty which ruled over Iran for five centuries, and eventually was defeated by the army of the Arab Muslim invaders who plundered the riches of this kingdom. Bahá’u’lláh is a descendant from this line of kings. The city of Mada’in consisted of several smaller fortified cities on both sides of the river Tigris. The city of Ctesiphon was one of the cities and the seat of the government, and it housed sprawling palaces which were the envy of the rulers of the world at that time—as for its location, Mada’in is located nearly thirty kilometers south of Baghdad. Salmán was the first Muslim ruler for the newly opened territories, stationed in Mada’in and after his death he was buried there in a place where it has become a cemetery bearing his name; in this place Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí Afnán was buried. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that this place is a holy place because the Blessed Beauty walked there and revealed Tablets; moreover He states that in this place a house of worship (Mashriqu’l-Adhkár) should be built. The following is His statement in the Memorials of the Faithful:

Thus did God’s grace and favor encompass the Persians of an age long gone, in order that their ruined capital should be rebuilt and flourish once again. To this end, with the help of God, events were brought about which led to the Afnán’s being buried here; and there is no doubt that a proud city will rise up on this site.....

At last, praised be God, it was laid down in the very spot to which time and again the Blessed Beauty had repaired; in that place honored by His footsteps, where He had revealed Tablets, where the believers of Baghdád had been in His company; that very place where the Most Great Name was wont to stroll. How did this come

about? It was due to the Afnán's purity of heart. Lacking this, all those ways and means could never have been brought to bear. Verily, God is the Mover of heaven and earth.

*I loved the Afnán very much. Because of him, I rejoiced. I wrote a long Visitation Tablet for him and sent it with other papers to Persia. **His burial site is one of the holy places where a magnificent Mashriqu'l-Adhkár must be raised up.** If possible, the actual arch of the royal palace should be restored and become the House of Worship. The auxiliary buildings of the House of Worship should likewise be erected there: the hospital, the schools and university, the elementary school, the refuge for the poor and indigent; also the haven for orphans and the helpless, and the travelers' hospice.... [MF 19-20]*

The Guardian made the transfer of the remains of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí Afnán one of the goals of the Ten-Year Crusade; the Bahá’ís of Iraq identified his grave, and transferred his remains to the Bahá’í cemetery in Baghdad. The Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land informed the Bahá’í world community of the achievement of this goal of the plan on June 14, 1959.¹¹

Mosul

Mosul is another place which appears in the stories from *Memorials of the Faithful*. In fact, the city of Mosul has been mentioned twenty eight times in the book—this could be due to a number of reasons, some of which are enumerated as follows:

- Mosul is one of the places where the caravan of Bahá’u’lláh on His way to Istanbul chose to stop and rest for a few days.

- About four to five years after Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad, some believers of Persian descent were rounded up and were sent to Mosul in captivity including the family of Bahá'u'lláh.
- For some believers who traveled to Edirnih or 'Akká via land, Mosul was one of the cities through which they passed on their way from Baghdad to Syria.
- Mosul is an old city near the ruins of the city of Nineveh and was built on it.
- Mosul and Nineveh is the city of Jonas the prophet which is mentioned in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, and in the Qur'án.

Now we will offer brief explanation regarding the above topics.

Mosul: Bahá'u'lláh's Caravan Passed Through

Mosul is located some 350 km north of Baghdad and built on the eastern banks of the river Tigris. Bahá'u'lláh's caravan stopped briefly in Mosul on its way to Istanbul. H.M. Balyuzi gives a detailed accounts of this phase of the land travel of Bahá'u'lláh to Istanbul [King of Glory 182]. In addition, the Guardian writes: "In Mosul, where He tarried three days..." [GPB 156]

Mosul: Place of Captivity of Believers

Mosul is also the place of captivity for some Persian believers. Approximately five years after Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdád, through the mischief of the Consul General of Iran in Baghdád, nearly seventy believers were arrested and sent in captivity to Mosul for nearly twenty years. Included in this group was the third wife of Bahá'u'lláh known as Gawhar Khánum. Her marriage took place sometime in Baghdád before the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's mission. While Navváb and Mahd-i-'Ulya travelled with Him in all His exiles, Gawhar

Khánum remained in Baghdad with her brother, Mírzá Mihdiy-i-Káshání. Bahá'u'lláh writes in the Tablet to the King of Persia: “*O King! The lamps of equity have been extinguished, and the fire of tyranny hath so blazed on every side that My people have been led as captives from Zawra' [Baghdád] to Mosul, known as Hadba.*” In here, by “My people” He means his third wife, Gawhar Khánum.

In this captivity, a believer who rendered unique and valued services to the community was Mulla Zaynu'l-'Abidin, named by Bahá'u'lláh Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín (The Ornament of Those Who are Nigh). He acted as a father in relation to this small band of believers. Under his supervision a ‘charity fund’ was established. His knowledge and learning, his understanding of the Faith, his intelligent and well-balanced personality, together with a delightful sense of humour, endeared him to the believers and made him the focal point of the community. Bahá'u'lláh had also instructed him in His Tablets to gather the friends together, exhort them to unity and love, encourage them to deepen in the Faith, and help them to attain heavenly qualities. He spent most of his time transcribing the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and making them available to the friends. In particular he had to make several copies of those Tablets which were addressed to some or all of the believers in Mosul, and give each one a copy [*Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* II, p. 335].

The Bahá'ís in Mosul, under the leadership and guidance of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, soon became a model Bahá'í community reflecting something of the spirit of the 'Akká community. While in Mosul, it became Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín's task to transcribe the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh that arrived from 'Akká on their way to Iran. Thus these Tablets could be distributed more widely and each of those to whom a Tablet was addressed could have a copy.

In the course of one of his journeys, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Ali, the Angel of Carmel, visited Mosul. He has written his impression about the community in his popular book “Bahjat-us

Sudur”, *Delight of Hearts*. Mr. Taherzadeh has translated and quoted this report:

I attained the presence of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín and other loved ones of God in Mosul including Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakil. The latter, owing to destitution, had to work as a cobbler in spite of old age... The friends in Mosul, together with the person of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, made one remember the days spent in Bahá'u'lláh's holy presence in the holy city of 'Akká. These believers were living in the utmost unity and harmony. They vied with each other in their efforts and their services. They had no desire except first, to gain the good pleasure of the Blessed Beauty, and secondly, to attain His presence... [Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh II, p. 335]

In October 1885 Bahá'u'lláh gave permission for Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín to go to 'Akká where he took up residence in the Khán-i-'Avamíd, continuing to transcribe Tablets and frequently having the honor of being in Bahá'u'lláh's company.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

Three locations from among many places mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful* were selected and their significance elaborated on the basis of events related to the Faith which occurred in these locations. These are The Most Great House, Madai'n, and the city of Mosul.

The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Nabíl Seddigh in preparation of this paper.

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NOTES

- ¹ Al-Kázimíyyah (Kázimayn), literally “the Two Kázim” or “the Two who swallow their anger”, is regarded a holy city by Shí’ah Islám. It received its name from the two Shí’ah Imáms buried there: Imám Músá, son of Ja’far and his grandson, Imám Muḥammad at-Taquí. A shrine was first built over their tombs, and subsequently the al-Kázimíyyah Mosque. The area that now constitutes al-Kázimíyyah was originally the location of a graveyard reserved for members of the Quraysh tribe (prophet Muḥammad’s tribe). This land was set aside for this purpose by the Abbasid caliph, Harun ar-Rashíd.
- ² Al-Karkh is a district of Baghdad in western banks of the river Tigris.
- ³ Mírzá Músá Javahirí who received the title of “Letter of Eternity” from Bahá’u’lláh was the recipient of several Tablets from Bahá’u’lláh one of which is known by its Arabic title “Subhána-Rabbíya’l-A’lá” which means “My Exalted Lord is free from Imperfections.” He was very much devoted to Bahá’u’lláh and was one of the firm believers. His father, Ḥájí Mírzá Hádí, formerly a Persian vizier, was highly esteemed by the inhabitants of that city. Towards the end of his life, Ḥájí Mírzá Hádí became attracted to Bahá’u’lláh and was devoted to Him, but not as believer. He would often enter His presence and sit at His feet in humility and self-effacement.
- ⁴ In Adrianople (Edirnih), Bahá’u’lláh revealed two tablets concerning pilgrimage (hajj) to Bahá’í holy places. Surat al hajj II (Lawh-i-Hajj II, or Surat al-Hajj), addressed to Mírzá Muḥammad Nabíl-i Zarandí, describes the rites of the hajj to The Most Great House. These Tablets are published in: *Amr va Khalq* 4: pp. 109-117 and *Tasbíḥ va Tahlíl* pp. 77-90, 93-113.
- ⁵ Muḥammad Damirtchi was a staunch believer in Baghdád whose father deprived him of his inheritance due to his faith and belief in Bahá’u’lláh. He set out on foot from Baghdád to ‘Akká. Finally he reached ‘Akká enduring great hardships on the way. Bahá’u’lláh called him to His

presence and he passed through the rows of soldiers and nobody stopped him as though they had not seen him. For the story of his life, see (Muḥaḍirát 1 & 2: p. 120). Also his picture appears in (*Bahá'í World* III: p. 214).

- ⁶ Hájí Maḥmúd-i-Qassábchí was a newly declared Bahá'í during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He served the cause in Baghḍad during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. He was the chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Baghḍad; his picture could be found in the (*Bahá'í World* II: p 68).
- ⁷ King Faisal of Iraq or Faisal Ibn Husayn Ibn Alí al-Hashimi was the King of Iraq from 23 August 1921 to 1933. He was a member of the Hashemite dynasty. While in power, Faisal tried to diversify his administration by including different ethnic and religious groups in offices. However, Faisal's attempt at pan-Arab nationalism may have contributed to the isolation of certain religious groups. King Faisal supported the forces of the British army and revolted against the ruling Turks towards the end of World War I. In 1921, Britain decided to step back from direct administration and create a monarchy to head Iraq while they maintained the mandate. Faisal agreed to become king. In August 1921 he was made king of Iraq. In 1932, the British mandate ended and Faisal was instrumental in making his country nominally independent. On 3 October, the Kingdom of Iraq joined the League of Nations. King Faisal died on 8 September 1933, at the age of 48. He was succeeded on the throne by his oldest son Ghazi. Soon King Ghazi was killed in a car accident and his son Faisal II who was 3 years old became the successor of his father, but he had to wait for several years until he reached adulthood. Finally he and the royal family and his prime minister were assassinated in a military coup d'état.
- ⁸ Many of these League of Nations documents can be found online at bahai-library.com/author/Permanent+Mandates+Commission
- ⁹ Details of the meeting of Miss Martha Root with King Faisal-I and the question of the Most Great House may be examined in *Bahá'í World* III pp. 198-210.
- ¹⁰ Complete letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 17 July 2013. Refer to the web-site: www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/
- ¹¹ Cable of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, dated June 14, 1959:

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 BAHÁ'U'LLAH VOUCHSAFED HIS FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS STOP
 SHARE JOYFUL NEWS HANDS NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES.