

## In Memoriam

**Dr. Muhammad Afnan**

**1930 - 2017**



Dr Muhammad Afnan was an ardent supporter, active collaborator and much-appreciated adviser for the Irfan Colloquium and its publications. After a very fruitful life spent in the various fields of service, he took his flight to the Abha Kingdom in August 2017 and Irfan Colloquium missed a most valuable collaborator. He and his wife, Dr Mehry Kiani-Afnan, were regularly participating in the annual sessions of the Irfan Colloquium held in Louhelen Bahá'í School in Michigan and both of them making presentations on scholarly studies in the Bahá'í Writings, particularly Writings of the

Báb. Dr Afnan was deeply loved and highly respected by the participants in the Irfan Colloquium gatherings as a gentle, wise, loving and richly informed of the Bábí and Bahá'í literature. He was a direct descendant, fifth generation, from Khál-i-Akbar, the oldest maternal uncle of the Báb, who was honoured to be the recipient of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh. Dr Afnan was born in Yazd, Iran, in 1930 and lived there until he moved to Tehran as a young man to receive his university education, getting a doctorate degree in veterinary medicine and bacteriology.

Dr Afnan served as a professor at the Department of Veterinary Medicine in the Tehran University. He also served on the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tehran for some 15 years, serving as its secretary for 10 years. In 1978, he and his family moved to Norway to settle there as Bahá'í pioneers. Shortly after the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in January 1979, they were denied residency permit in Norway. At the same time, he was advised not to return to Iran because of his prominence in the Bahá'í administration. In the ensuing persecutions, seven of the eight other members of the Assembly on which he had served were arrested and executed. Afnan family moved to Canada, settling in the town of Dundas, where they helped form the Local Spiritual Assembly and became active and much-loved members of the community. Dr Afnan worked as a researcher at the cancer clinic at McMaster University for 8 years, gaining the respect of his colleagues through his unique combination of great knowledge and great humility.

Dr Afnan through extensive personal study and research, which he started in his youth, became a distinguished scholar of the Bahá'í writings and one of the handful of experts in the area of the Writings of the Báb. He authored numerous articles and essays on a wide range of Bahá'í subjects over the years that were recently published in two volumes

Dr Afnan was one of the main faculty members of the Institute of Advanced Baha'i Studies in Iran. Since Bahá'í institutions were banned by the order of Islamic government authorities in Iran, Dr Afnan, assisted by his dear wife, established the Institute for Baha'i Studies in the Persian language in Dundas. This Institute, over the years, published a large volume of books and booklets on various Bahá'í subjects and encouraged and assisted Persian Baha'i scholars.

In 1989, Dr Muhammad and Dr Mehry Afnan were invited to move to Haifa, Israel, where they both served in the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre for the next thirteen years.

Upon returning to Canada in 2002, they settled in Mississauga and once again became enthusiastically involved in Bahá' activities. They had the opportunity to serve at the World Centre once more when they were invited to work on a special project for three months in 2013.

Dr Afnan made a number of valuable presentations at the annual sessions of Irfan Colloquium based on his vast knowledge and studies. His research-based articles and commentaries are published in various volumes of *Safini-yi Irfan*.

The Universal House of Justice expressed recognition and appreciation for lifelong services of Dr Afnan in the following message e-mailed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada:

We were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of dearly loved Muhammad Afnan, devoted servant of the Ancient Beauty and an esteemed scion of the noble family of the Blessed Báb. His exemplary services to the Cause over many decades—in the administration of the Faith in Iran, in the enrichment of Bahá'í scholarship, and, in particular, in the study of the Writings of the Báb—were distinguished by diligence, wisdom, and surpassing humility. Serving at the Bahá'í World Centre, he made invaluable and lasting contributions to the work of the Research Department.

We offer our loving sympathy to his dear wife, Mehri, their children, and other family members and assure them of our ardent supplications at the Sacred Threshold for the progress of his illumined soul in all the worlds of God and for the consolation of their hearts.

— The Universal House of Justice