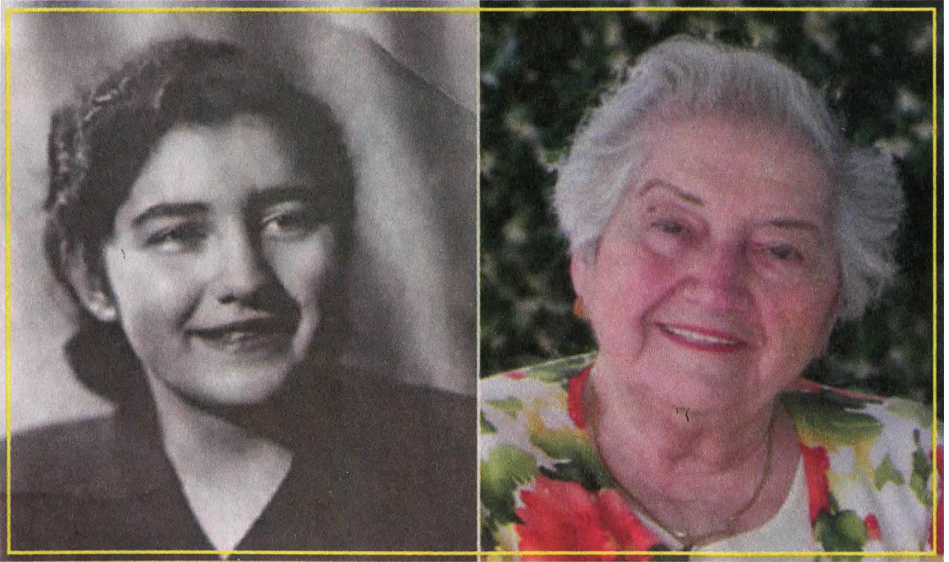


Lily Ayman (Áhy)

(1929-2018)



Lily Ayman was a co-founder and staunch supporter of the Irfan Colloquium project, participating at all its sessions and warmly associating with participants. She was a distinguished educator, author, translator, and world citizen whose life and activities took her to many corners of the world. Lily was born on May 17, 1929 in Tehran. She was the fourth-generation great granddaughter of Mírzá Majíd Áhy, a brother-in-law of Bahá'u'lláh, memorialized by Nabil Zarandi in "The Dawn Breakers" for securing sanctuary for Bahá'u'lláh during the upheavals of 1852. Her father, Majíd Áhy, the scion of a prominent family was a high-ranking government official who was graduated in law and political science from Moscow State University. Her Russian mother, Raeisa Duvinskaya grew up in Moscow and was trained in piano and opera singing at the famous conservatory of Moscow prior to moving to Tehran to marry.

Though born in Tehran, friends from her early childhood still remember her from pre-school classes in Shiraz where she lived while her father was governor of the province of Fars. She then completed her elementary and middle school education in Tehran, where her father was Minister of Justice. Upon her father's appointment as Iranian ambassador to the Soviet Union, she accompanied her parents to Moscow where she completed high school and enrolled at Moscow State University to study French and Russian languages and literature. When her father, fell ill, she and the rest of the family members accompanied him back home to Tehran, where he soon passed away. Lily completed university degrees in philosophy and education at the University of Tehran and the National Teachers College. During this period, she also served as assistant to Professor M.B. Hushyar in developing a new and simplified method for teaching reading and writing Persian. While still an undergraduate student, Lily translated "*Enfants Difficiles*" (Difficult Children) from French to Persian and it was published in 1949. After graduation, she started to serve as a teacher at the Anoushiravan Dadgar secondary school for girls.

Lily married Iraj Ayman in London in 1951 and pursued post graduate studies at London University and the University of Edinburg in Scotland when she gave birth to her first child Roya. Upon their return from Scotland to Iran in 1954, she was appointed as Co-Director of Educational and Vocational Guidance Center at the Department of Research and Curriculum Development, and instructor of the In-Service Teacher Training Program at the Ministry of Education. In the same year, she organized, for the first time in Iran, a summer school for children. The following year, the young family moved to Los Angeles, California, where Iraj completed his Ph.D. at the University of Southern California. Lily worked at the Salvation Army Nursery as teacher and school psychologist and gave birth to their second child, Saba.

In 1957, she and her family returned to Tehran where she embarked on a distinguished academic, literary and professional career. While serving as a member of International Committee for the Evaluation of Reading Comprehension of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (I. E. A.), Lily was teaching child education and children's literature at the

University of Tehran where she continued her interest in developing a modern research-based approach to teaching children and new literates. Three years later, this passion earned her a fellowship for further post graduate study at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City.

The desire to instill a love of reading into future generations was a dominating passion underlying her work. To this end, she found time to write numerous stories and books for children and co-founded *Shorá-ye Ketáb-e Kudak* (Children's Book Council), a non-governmental institution, which she served as Board member and Executive Secretary General for two decades. She was also an enthusiastic supporter of the International Board of Books for Young People (IBBY) – a Switzerland based NGO that brought her in contact with colleagues around the world, serving many years on its Executive Board and an additional two years as IBBY Vice-President.

Lily's leadership in education was officially recognized when she was the first and only woman appointed to the High Council of Education of Iran, the country's highest authority in educational administration. She put all of her skills to practical use as the lead author of textbooks officially adopted throughout Iran for teaching reading and writing in primary schools. During this period, she gave birth to their third child, Rama.

The wide horizon of her interest in pedagogy also extended to adults in a country where adult literacy was hovering around 30 percent. Lily was appointed as Head of the Department of Life-long Education and Training, National Center for Adult Education and Training as well as Educational Consultant to the Secretary-General of the National Committee for World Literacy Program and she was in charge of the preparation of textbooks, reading materials and training programs. She also served as Director of a research project on Basic Vocabulary of the Persian Language. This project gathered a sample of ten million words from oral and written language in actual use by adults and children in both urban and rural communities in different geographical regions of the country, having elementary education or less. One fruit of this research was the identification of a basic vocabulary of one thousand most used Persian words which served as a reference in preparing reading materials for new literates.

She was the recipient of numerous medals and awards including:

- Educational Medal (First Class), Ministry of Education
- Best Book of the Year Prize (Award of Distinction)
- Scientific Medal (First Class) of Ministry of Education
- UNESCO National Commission (Iran) International Book of the Year
- Award for development of reading materials for new-literates
- Gold Medal (Highest award for services rendered) by the National
- Committee for World Literacy Program in Iran

Lily was a lover of poetry and literary classics. Her elegant command of language extended that love beyond Persian to Russian, French and English literature. Ever desirous of enriching the literary environment of her country, she was a supporter of *Bongáh-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketáb* (Institute of Book Translation and Publication) managed by Dr. Ehsan Yarshater where she established and managed a section for the translation and publication of children's literature. Throughout her career, she was a regular contributor to multiple educational journals and Bahá'í periodicals. In addition, she was the author or translator of more than 40 published books and stories.

Although, for many years, Lily had a close association with many friends in the Bahá'í communities in Iran, the UK and the USA, and participated in various Bahá'í activities and services, according to her own testimony, she only began to realize the significance and universality of the Faith while travelling in the Andean countries of South American in connection with her work to raise literacy rates. It was there that she was deeply impressed by the spiritual and social effects of the Faith in those regions. On a visit to the Bahá'í World Center in 1974, she formally embraced the Baha'i Faith, declaring her allegiance to the Bahá'í Cause in the presence of Hands of the Cause of God and members of the Universal House of Justice at the celebration of the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb in Shiraz in May 1844. Upon her return to Iran, she was appointed to the

National Committees for the Advancement of Women and Teacher Training for Bahá'í Education.

Just as it was for so many others, life for Lily and her family was completely upended by the Islamic revolution. In January 1979, with schools closed and the nation in turmoil, Lily and Iraj sent their young son Rama to live with his sister in Chicago so he could temporarily continue his high school education. A few months later, her husband Iraj facing arrest and possible execution, made what he hoped would be a short-term visit to the United States to attend an international conference in an executive capacity and to visit their daughter and son in Chicago. Amidst the turmoil and suspicion of that time, Lily was denied permission to leave the country for several months. In late summer, she too embarked on what she hoped would be a short visit to the United States while waiting for conditions in Iran to settle down. However, after her arrival she was warned by friends and colleagues of multiple calls for her execution due to her progressive outlook, and her embrace of the Bahá'í Faith earlier in the decade. It was not long before news arrived that all their property and assets in Iran were being confiscated and the hopes of an early return began to fade. Months became years, then decades and she was never again to return to her beloved homeland.

Soon after taking up residence in Chicago, she observed a dire need for materials to teach reading and writing in Persian to children of the rapidly growing Iranian diaspora. To meet this need, she authored two books: "*Farsi Beyamuzim*" (Teaching Persian) and "*Iran ra Beshenasim*" (To Know Iran) together with teacher guides which are still widely used globally. She followed up with "*Shadmaneh Kudakaneh*" (A Collection of Parables for Children) and "*Yek Hezar Vajeh PáyeH Zaban-e Farsi*" (One Thousand Basic Persian Words). Despite her family's straightened circumstances, she allowed them to be published with no royalties to facilitate their dissemination at a lower cost to expatriate Iranian families around the world.

After leaving Iran, Lily's services to the Bahá'í community grew exponentially. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States appointed her to its National Education Committee and the Bahá'ís of Chicago elected her to serve on the Spiritual Assembly of that city. In March 1983 Iraj received an appointment from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok. Thus, began a

six-year sojourn in Bangkok and Paris. She was elected to serve on the Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies of both cities, supported a school and library in the northern mountains of Thailand and picked up a respectable grasp of the Thai language along the way, adding to her already enviable list of linguistic accomplishments in Persian, Russian, French and English. While living in Bangkok, Lily Ayman served as President of the United Nations Women Association of Thailand and was a member of the Literacy Education Panel at UNESCO Regional Headquarters for the Asia and Pacific Region.

1988 was another landmark year. Iraj retired from UNESCO in Paris and together they moved to St. Gallen, Switzerland where Iraj, with her able assistance assumed leadership of founding and managing the Landegg Academy at Wienacht near Lake Constance, developing it into a vibrant Bahá'í Learning Center and an International Institute for Educational Development and Administration. Over the next six years, Lily was coordinator of programs on Education and Family Life and organized and managed the Academy's Program of Education for Peace. She also served on the Spiritual Assembly of St. Gallen.

Soon upon her arrival in Switzerland, Lily Ayman was appointed by the Universal House of Justice to serve on a special Task Force on Education with a mandate to stimulate educational initiatives in Baha'i communities worldwide. As part of her contribution to this effort, she authored "*LITERACY: Some Practical Suggestions*" which was published under the imprimatur of the Task Force in 1992.

Lily was deeply in love with her home country, its language, and culture. Following her return to Chicago in 1994, she was invited to teach Persian as a visiting assistant professor at the University of Chicago. Together with her husband Iraj Ayman, she helped to strengthen and further develop the annual conferences of the Association of the Friends of Persian Culture, an activity which they had originally initiated and developed at Landegg Academy. For the remainder of her life, she devoted her energies to the Bahá'í Community of Chicago, serving as Secretary of its Spiritual Assembly, Managing Editor of its newsletter and as a member of various other administrative committees. Meanwhile, she continued assisting those who were engaged in teaching Persian and were contacting her from various parts of the world. An active participant

in myriad community activities, she will especially be remembered for her dedication to teaching the Faith, hosting monthly “fireside” discussion gatherings for over two decades. She was a stalwart supporter of the Irfan Colloquium, assisting with the organization of colloquia in California, Michigan, the United Kingdom and Italy, helping to recruit participants and insisting on the importance of maintaining the regularity of its activities. In addition to all the above, Lily Ayman will be remembered for her commitment to creating a vibrant and close-knit multi-racial Bahá’í community across the segregated neighborhoods that mark the south side of Chicago. She visited the homes of Bahá’ís, rich and poor, intellectuals and the unlettered, black, brown, no matter where they lived and they, likewise, were drawn to hers, creating lasting close relationships that embraced the diversity of the community.

Lily Ayman passed away in Chicago on September 6, 2018. In accordance with her wish, she is buried in the Oakwood Cemetery, a few blocks from the home of her dear friend and illustrious Bahá’í teacher, Gwili Posey. Lily’s resting place is nestled near the graves of the family of Hand of the Cause of God Corinne True, a site marked with an obelisk commemorating the spot visited by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in May 1912. Lily is survived by her husband, Iraj Ayman, her three children Roya, Saba and Rama and her five grandchildren, Omíd, Majíd, Jahán, Yasmine and Kian.