

ISHQABAD

(Ashkabad)

CITY OF LOVE

**A STUDY INTO THE
STORY OF THOSE
WHO BECAME THE
FOREMOST IN THE
BAHA'I FAITH**

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ISHQABAD – CITY OF LOVE

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FOREWORDS

The Ashkabad Baha'is were the only Baha'i Community to have reached such an advanced Stage of development under the guidance of Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. Therefore, the Statements of instructions and guidance from These two leaders resolving the problems that Arose in the course of evolution of the Ashkabad Baha'i community to its high degree Of social and institutional development will Remain for all time as part of the pattern upon Which all future Baha'i communities will grow And develop.

M. Momen

When a friend asked the reason for the above quotation, I thought maybe it is time for the Baha'i communities to come to realize that the Divine Will have in fact left behind a sample work for other communities to see and adapt it to their benefit.

Although the sample community does not exist anymore, neither those who guided bringing it to the perfection of the time, nor those who played the active role in every detail, yet, the history remains behind to read and to follow. This is the function of history.

There are quite a few articles, long and short on the subject, yet, not a book to read and analyze and feel its effect on one self and its probable influence over a community.

There have been few attempts in this respect, but none have come to fruition. All the scattered information in different published books and unpublished sources once together, can help each and every Baha'i student and community, try to visualize the effect of the Divine guidance that can be his and theirs.

It is hoped that the quotation above can trigger curiosity in at least one individual in each community and try to see how their community can be the second best after Ishqabad community, thus, helping to build the envisioned Kingdom of Baha'u'llah on earth where the unity of mankind could be soon realized.

INTRODUCTION

By looking into the Holy Writings it becomes
Clear and evident that once more the Ishqabad
Community will become alive again,
a thriving and flourishing Baha'i society.

Dr Aminullah Bakhshandegi

The present history is far from being a scientific study or scholarly researched work, but is a translation of some gathered information written out of love recounting the stories of those who built an exemplary community.

As the sources used are basically in Persian of old style, not many references are given to clarify the years and in some instances, the places, yet all are related to the City of Love, Ishqabad. The reader might want to overlook this handicapped issue.

It is intriguing to see how the Divine Hand made up a community out of a handful of tents to a full fledged thriving city and gathered His people from many different parts, put them together and guided them to such a degree that it became to magnet of attraction for thousands who took refuge in for one purpose only, to show how it is possible, if once there is liberty, there is freedom and there is will of action. This is the story of Ishqabad, a Baha'i community, which started with only two people and multiplied in a period of less than half a century, to become the icon Baha'i community in the world. And also to see, once the liberty and freedom is taken away, the thriving society comes to naught and even the decree

of the Divine Will, takes its sign away, and turns it to a mere lifeless society for now! Although, in a prayer by the beloved Guardian, pleads to God not to disappoint the trustees of His Cause and guide the cruel party (Soviets) into the Straight Path, balm on the injured hearts of the wronged ones, give the City of God a new thriving life and save all those regions from the hands of the people of cruelty...

Years ago, Dr. Aminullah Bakhshandegi, the grandson of the last caretakers of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of Ishqabad, Hasan Bakhshandegi and Ruha khanum, kindly gave the writer a copy of his manuscript on the history of Ishqabad that he had gathered together during many years of pioneering in Northwest Africa, the country of Mauritania and finalizing it in South Africa in 1986. Reading through this valuable book, lead to more information to be gathered, mostly articles written by those who could do much better this writer with the exception of not being able to read Persian, where the majority of information is stored. Much of the information of the present work is being taken from Dr. Amin's manuscript. Dr Amin'u'llah Bakhshandegi presently a frail old man in the city of Karaj in Iran being taken care of by one of the Baha'i houses for elderly. *(He passed away in 2016)

A manuscript of the early settlers of Ishqabad by Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna Yazdi, the architect of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was online and my brother Faruq lead me to it. It has so many valuable information from which much of it is transferred to the present work. In fact this work is dedicated to these two wonderful souls who out of pure love for the City of Love, have spent much of their time, knowing the importance of their information for the future. Ustad Ali-Akbar was prized with the gift of martyrdom in Yazd in 1903.

Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions in his manuscript of another of his literary work by the name of 'Mighnatis' where he has written in detail the story of his many pilgrimages into the presence of the Blessed Beauty, Baha'u'llah and the beloved, Master Abdu'l-Baha. Unfortunately this unique work is being lost for now. All the attempts to find this work, which remained behind when he left Ishqabad for the last time to welcome his martyrdom in Yazd, has paid no result. It is hoped that one day, if this work has not been destroyed by the Soviet agents after the confiscation of the Haziratu'l-Quds of Ishqabad in mid 1930s, could be found and its content be brought to become a valuable part of the Baha'i history.

BRIEF HISTORY

Ishq-abad (City of Love), Ashgabat, Ashkabad (City of Tears) or Eshghabad, is the capital of Turkmenistan, which is situated between the Kara Kum desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range. It occupies an area of 440km² and has a population of approximately one million people, mostly Russians, Armenians and Azeris.

Soviet rule was established formally in Ishq-abad and the name of the City was changed by the Soviet Union in 1919 to Poltoratsk and remained as such until 1927, which was changed again to its original name once the Communist party was established in Turkmenistan.

Ishq-abad is 250kms at the north of the city of Mashhad in Iran.

There are some proposed origin of names for the city of Ishq-abad which literary means 'The City of Love' in Persian. Some settlements belonging to the Silk Road has been found in the city, dating back to the 1st Millenneum BC. Later on in the 19th century, some Turkmen tribes settled in this area and called it Ishq-abad.

When the Turkmenian Republic came to existence under the Soviets, Ishq-abad became its capital in 1924. *

*(It is interesting to know that the Turkmen and Persian tribes of Greater Khurasan - which was Medieval Turkistan - continued their struggle against the Russian occupation of their countries, in spite of the signed agreement in 1869 for the Atrak River to be their borderline. These movements resulted in the division of the Great Turkistan into five Republics under the Soviet rule. The first two Republics were Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, 5 years later Tajikistan became a Republic in 1929, and in 1936 both Kazakistan and Kyrgyzstan joined the groups and became Soviet satellite Republics being all of the Turan territory which was under the Persian protection. Iran signed many treaties with the Russians such as 1893 and 1921, yet each and every time, the Russian found a pretext and dissolved the treaty by force and captured more land belonging to the Greater Iran).

ISHQ-ABAD, A LOVE STORY?

An internet source indicates that in legend a love story between the two governors of territories of Nisa, whose governor was called Nur-Ahmad and Anau, whose governor was called Pir-Ahmad. There was no good relationship between these two governors but, somehow, the son of the former and the daughter of the latter fell in love, knowing of the animosity between their fathers, they eloped to a desert, where water was scarce. As if the Angel of Death following them and they were certainly to die, eventually they were guided to an oasis of crystalline water where they decided to make their home next to it. As the people heard of this love story, some moved to the nearby lands and eventually they called the place the City of Love after the lovers, who initiated the community out of their love for each other.

ISHQ-ABAD OR ASHKABAT?

A certain Professor Ovez Gundogdiev, of the State Institute of Turkmenistan, argues that the city of Ishqabad has a history of 2000 years, yet, as another internet source claims, the city was founded in the year of 1881 to replace the village of the same name. Accordingly, Ishq-abad was a part of Iran until 1881, following the battle of Geok Tepe, it was ceded to the Tsarist Russia.

Professor Gundogdiev quotes the Philologist A. Potseluyevski that 'Ashk' was the name of one of the Parthian Kings of the Middle Ages of Ashkanis and the founder Arshak or Ashk, who dominated the whole area and founded the city of Ashkabad –abad meaning a developed area – an urban town and not a village. According to this source, the actual capital of Turkmenistan Ashgabad, is located only 10 kilometers from the great city of Nisa, the residence of the Parthian kings. The Arshakids, are from the same group generally known as 'Turs' of which the Turanians are the ancestors of the Turkmen people.

According to the same source information, the Turkmen History Museum contains over 30,000 archeological and ethnographic items dating back to the region's Parthian days.

In most recent times, Fereydun Mirza (probably a Qajar Prince), in 1853 had entered the Turkmen territory and fought with the Turkmen troops conquering the land, who ordered the destruction of Ashgabad and the 36 of its fortifications.

The city of Ishqabad, in 1871, has had a population of 16000 inhabitants according to the Russian sources, and mostly living in tents as nomads.

THE 1948 EARTHQUAKE!

In 1908 the first Baha'i House of Worship was built in that city and 40 years later, in 1948, a strong earthquake hit the city of Ishq-abad, which razed the city to ground. The magnitude of the quake was 7.3 Mw of today's Richter's scale. The number of dead was estimated to 110,000 souls or more. Although in the same year, there have been similar earthquakes in other parts of the world but interestingly, Admiral Ellis M. Zacharias, former Deputy Chief of The Office of Naval Intelligence, on his radio show – Secret Missions – on December 12, 1948

and again on September 26, 1949 purported that the cause of the earthquake was the first Soviet atomic bomb test. (Source: Wikipedia). The source indicates that “The earthquake struck at 2:17 in the morning on 6 October 1948. The epicenter of the earthquake was located near the small village of Gara-Gaudan, 25 kilometers southwest of Ashgabad.

The earthquake greatly damaged the Baha’i House of Worship, which after its demolition in 1963, in its place a statue of Makhtumquli, the Turkmen thinker and poet was erected.

A message from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Baha’i world was sent on the 25th of August 1963, confirming the destruction of the Temple:

“Dear Baha’i friends,

The whole Baha’i World will be grief-stricken at the news of the sad fate which has overtaken the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar in ‘Ishqabad, the first Temple raised to the glory of Baha’u’llah. Due to its unsafe condition, resulting from earthquakes, the building has been entirely demolished and the site cleared.

The building of this edifice, the only structure of its kind to be raised and completed in the lifetime of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, was described by the beloved Guardian a “a lasting witness to the fervour and the self-sacrifice of the Oriental believers.” This “enterprise,” the Guardian further wrote, “must rank not only as the first major undertaking launched through the concerted efforts of His followers in the Heroic Age of His Faith, but as one of the most brilliant and enduring achievements in the history of the first Baha’i century.

The Baha’i Centre in Ishqabad was founded in the days of Baha’u’llah. Already during His lifetime preliminary steps had been adopted by the friends of that community to build, in accordance with provisions of the Most Holy Book, a Mashriqu’l-Adhkar.

However, the project had to be postponed until 1902, at the end of the first decade of the Ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, when He initiated its construction, called on the friends and the East to offer their contributions towards the fulfillment of this goal, and personally encouraged and directed its development at every stage. The Bab’s

cousin, the venerable Haji Mirza Muhammad-Taqi, the Vakilu;d-Daqlih, offered his total wealth towards this meritorious enterprise, established his residence in that city, and personally supervised its construction.

The laying of the cornerstone of this edifice at a ceremony attended by the delegates of the Czar –the Governor-general of Turkistan – and the initial steps taken to raise this first House of Worship of the Baha'i World, inspired by the friends in America, who, in 1903, eager to demonstrate the quality of their faith, petitioned 'Abdu'l-Baha for permission to erect the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of the West.

In addition to the Temple itself, two schools, one for boys and one for girls, and a pilgrim house were built. The local community, and the activities of the friends throughout the provinces of Turkistan expanded and developed in stature until 1928, when the law of expropriating religious edifices was applied to this Temple. However, under the terms of two five-year leases, the Baha'i community was permitted to continue to use the building as a house of worship. In 1939 the Temple was completely expropriated and converted into an art gallery.

In 1948 violent earthquakes shook the whole town causing devastation and ruin. The building was seriously damaged. The only section which remained relatively secure was the central rotunda. Heavy yearly rains further weakened the structure to such a degree as to endanger the safety of houses in the vicinity. It was at this point that the authorities decided to demolish the remaining edifice and clear the site.

A reliable report, recently received, indicates that had the Temple been restored to us at this point, we should have had no option but to raze the building ourselves.

Please share this news with the friends but we do not wish National Assemblies, Local Assemblies or individual believers to take any action.

With loving greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

August 25, 1963"

ASHKABAD, THE WHITE CITY

Today, the city is being totally renewed with white marble to an extravagant beauty, under anti-seismic condition and quite imposing of totalitarian concept architecture. Ishq-abad, accordingly, is a major industrial Centre, having more than 50 factories, including an oil equipment plant, glasswork factories, spinning mills, silk factories and more. It has opera, ballet and drama theatres, also Russian drama and children theatres.

BAHA'I FAITH IN TURKMENISTAN*

The Baha'i Faith in Turkmenistan begins before Russian advances into the region, when the area was under the influence of Persia. By 1887 a community of Baha'i refugees from religious violence in Persia had made a religious center in Ashgabat. Shortly afterwards – by 1894 – Russia made Turkmenistan part of the Russian Empire. While the Baha'i Faith spread across the Russian Empire and attracted the attention of scholars and artists, the Baha'i community in Ashgabat built the first Baha'i House of Worship, elected one of the first Baha'i local administrative institutions and was a center of scholarship. During the Soviet period religious persecution made the Baha'i community almost disappear – however, Baha'is who moved into the regions in the 1950s did identify individuals still adhering to the religion. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in late 1991, Baha'i communities and their administrative bodies started to develop across the nations of the former Soviet Union. In 1994 Turkmenistan elected its own National Spiritual Assembly however, laws passed in 1995 in Turkmenistan required 500 adult religious adherents in each locality for registration and no Baha'i community in Turkmenistan could meet this requirement. As of 2007 the religion had still failed to reach the minimum number of adherents to register and individuals have had their homes raided for Baha'i literature.

The Baha'i community of Ashgabat was founded in about 1884**, mostly from religious refugees from Persia. One of the most prominent members of the community was Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani, and Apostle of Baha'u'llah, who lived in Ashgabat off and on from 1889 to 1894. A short time after moving there, the assassination of one of the Baha'is there, Haji Muhammad Rida Isfahani occurred and Gulpaygani helped the Baha'i community to respond to this event and later he was the spokesman for the Baha'is at the trial of the assassins. This event established the independence of the Baha'i Faith from Islam, both for the

Russian government and for the people of Ashgabat. Under the protection and freedom given by the Russian authorities, the number of Baha'is in the community rose to 4000.*** By 1918 for the first time anywhere in the world, a true Baha'i community was established, with its own hospitals, schools, workshops, newspapers, cemetery and House of Worship. The City population was between 44 thousand and 50 thousand at this time.

This first Baha'i House of Worship was constructed inside the city of Ashgabat. The foundation of the building was started in 1902, and the construction was completed in 1908; it was supervised by Vakilu'd-Dawlih, another Apostle of Baha'u'llah. The House of Worship in Ashgabat has been the only Baha'i House of Worship thus far to have the humanitarian subsidiaries associated with the institution built at its alongside.

*(An internet article under the same title)

** (also spelled 'Ishqabad, Ashkabad)

*** (1000 children)

COMMUNITY OF MERV

The city of Merv* had a Baha'i community, while it was far smaller and less developed. The Baha'i community received permission from Abdu'l-Baha to build a House of Worship, which they did on a smaller scale.

*(also spelled Marv, Mary and is some 400kms from Ishqabad)

SOVIET PERIOD

Russia was the only nation at that time
To officially recognize the Baha'i Faith.
The Dawning Place, B. Whitmore, p.248

By the time the effects of the October 1917 Revolution began to spread across the Russian Empire transforming it into the Soviet Union, Baha'is had spread east through Central Asia and Caucasus, and also north into Moscow, Leningrad, Tblisi and Kazan with the community of Ashgabat alone numbering about 3000 adults. After the October Revolution the Ashgabat Baha'i community was progressively severed from the rest of the worldwide Baha'i community. In 1924 Baha'is in Merv had schools and a special committee for the advancement of women. Initially the religion still grew in organization when the election of the regional National Assembly of the Baha'is of the Caucasus and Turkistan in 1925 took place.

However, the Baha'i House of Worship was expropriated by the Soviet authorities in 1928, the Baha'i schools were closed in 1930, and the House of Worship was leased back to the Baha'is until 1938 when it was fully secularized by the communist government and turned into an art gallery. The records of events show an increasing hostility to the Baha'is between 1928 and 1938. From 1928 free rent was set for five years, and the Baha'is were asked to make certain repairs, which they did. But in 1933, before the five-year rent agreement expired the government suddenly decided expensive renovations would be required. These unexpected demands were met yet again in 1934 the authorities renewed the complaints over the condition of the building. Inquires from abroad silenced the complaints. In 1936 escalated demands were made beyond the resources of the local community. The Baha'is of Turkistan and Caucasus rallied and were able to sustain the requested repairs. Then the government made moves to confiscate the main gardens of the property to provide for the playground of a school* which would fall off the grounds of the Baha'i property – leaving only an entrance to the temple through a side entrance rather than the main entrance facing the front of the property. Protests lead to the abandonment of this plan. In 1938 all pretexts came to an end and the building fell in disrepair and neglected. In 1948 the strong earthquake seriously damaged the building and soon it became unsafe; the heavy rains of the following years weakened the structure. It was demolished in 1963 and the site converted into a public park. With the Soviet ban on religion, the Baha'is, strictly adhering to their principle of obedience to government, abandoned it and its administration. All the properties were nationalized.

In 1938, with the NKVD** and the policy of religious oppression, most Baha'is were either imprisoned or exiled. The 38 Baha'i communities of different cities ceased to exist. In the case of Ashgabat, a Baha'i source indicates that on the 5th of February the members of the Local Assembly, leaders of the community and some prominent members totaling 500 people were arrested, homes were raided and searched, all records and literature were confiscated, under the pretext that these were for the advantage of foreigners. At times the believers were forced to dig their own graves as part of the interrogation. It was reported that a Baha'i woman set fire to herself and died shortly after at the hospital. The women and children were largely exiled to Iran.

In 1953, at the initiation of the Ten Years Crusade by Shoghi Effendi, some Baha'is ventured to move to other Soviet Republics in Asia. Those who moved to Turkmenistan could find some individual Baha'is living there though the religious administration remained unorganized.

During the 1978-9 civil war in Afghanistan, some Baha'is fled to Turkmenistan.

The first Baha'i Local Spiritual Assembly in the Soviet Union was elected in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, when conditions permitted, it was in 1989; 61 Baha'is were listed eligible for election. The Local Spiritual Assembly was officially registered by the City Council of Ashgabat on 31 January 1990. Through the rest of 1990 several Local Spiritual Assemblies were formed across the Soviet Union including Moscow, Ulan-Ude, Kazan, Yuzhno-Sahkhalinsk, Leningrad and Murmansk. In September 1990, 26 Baha'is gathered together for the election of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Merv. In September 1991, there were some 800 already known Baha'is and 23 Local Spiritual Assemblies across the dissolved Soviet Union. In Turkmenistan there were about 125 Baha'is with two Local Assemblies and two groups (in Balakhanin and Baramaly). When the National Spiritual Assembly of the Central Asia*** was formed, Ashgabat became its seat. In a later stage, as the communities flourished, they too elected their own National Spiritual Assembly.

*(The itself school being confiscated from the Baha'is already)

** (Soviet secret police)

*** (Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kirkizia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)

THE BANNED COMMUNITY

“...in 1922, the official gazette of the Soviet Government published an article in which it said That the Baha'is were turning the thoughts of the Russian youth from Bolshevism to their own Religion and belief, consequently their efforts Should be stopped.”

“The Dawning Place, Bruce Withmore, p. 249”

Since its inception, the religion has had involvement in socio-economic development –beginning by giving greater freedom to women, promulgating the promotion of female education as a priority concern. That involvement was given practical expression by creating schools, agriculture co-ops, and clinics. The religion entered a new phase of activity when a message of the Universal House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 was released. Baha'is were urged to seek out ways, compatible with the Baha'i teachings, in which they could become involved in the social and economic development of the communities where they lived. Worldwide in 1979, there were 129 officially recognized Baha'i socio-economic development projects. By 1987, the number of officially recognized development projects had increased to 1482. As the environment of Prestroika took hold across the Soviet Block, the Baha'i community of Ashgabat was the first to re-form its Local Spiritual Assembly following the oppressive decades of

Soviet rule, had doubled its numbers from 1989 to 1991, and had successfully registered with city government of Ashgabat.

However, the nation of Turkmenistan revised its religious registration laws such that, in 1995, 500 adult religious adherent citizens were required in each locality for a religious community to be registered. Thus by 1997 the Baha'is were unregistered by the government along with several other religious communities. More than just being unable to form administrative institutions, own properties like temples, and publish literature, perform scholarly work and community service projects – their membership in a religion is simply unrecognized: The religion is considered banned, and homes are raided for Baha'i literature. As of 2007, under these harsh conditions, the Baha'i community in Turkmenistan was unable to reach the required number of adult believers to be recognized by the government as a religion. The Association of Religion Data Archives* estimated some 1000 Baha'is across Turkmenistan in 2005.

*Relying on World Christian Encyclopedia

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF USTAD ALI-AKBAR BANNA YAZDI (The Architect)

O Lord, make these holy souls who have arisen to build this temple, the Dawning points of light and the manifestors of Thy signs. Make each a leading Cornerstone in this great edifice, a pillar of its pillars, for Thou art the Helper The Supporter, the Rewarder.

These souls have arisen to serve Thee well, and have began their servitude. Confirm, aid and encourage each by the promise of Thy divine favors and Them of the elect. Verily, Thou art the Mighty, the Powerful, the Able, the Giver, the Shining, and the Hearer and the Seer.

O God, o God, I implore Thee with throbbing heart and streaming tears, to aid Each one who endeavors for the erection of the House of the Lord, the building Wherein Thy name is mentioned every morn and eve.

Send down Thy benediction on whomsoever endeavors for the uprising of this Edifice among the sects and religions, and confirm him in every good deed of Mankind. Open the doors of riches and wealth unto him and make him an Inheritor of the treasures of the Kingdom, which perishes not. Make him the Sign of giving among the peoples and reinforce him by the sea of Thy Generosity and bounty, which is surging with the waves of grace and favor. Verily, Thou art the Merciful and the Bountiful

Abdu'l-Baha

(Star of the West, vol. 5, issue 5, p. 68)

He was specifically called by Abdu'l-Baha to go to Haifa to meet Him and obtain the design idea of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*

Sometimes before he goes to Yazd at the request of the beloved Master and becoming a martyr, Ustad Ali-Akbar was asked by the friends to compile the history of the early friends of Ishqabad, and the reason for this was that he was either the first Baha'i to Ishqabad or one of the very early ones, therefore he knew all the early pioneers to the City very well. As prominent person, all other friends would go and recount their stories to him. Such a storytelling episode starts from the year of his arrival in 1884. On May 10, 1894 he starts writing the history of all those whom he knew and they were already passed on, as well as those contemporaneous friends at his time. Jinab-i Ustad** had already written his life story in another book by the name of Mighnatis.*** recounting in detail his encounters with Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. He has also written a third book called Tarikh-i-Vaghaye-i-Amriyyih.

Ustad Ali-Akbar-i Yazdi, son of late Aqa Muhammad-Baqir, son of Isma'il, son of Abdu'llah, son of Muhammd-Ali, son of Abdu'llah Kermani, was born in 1845. At the early age of maturity when he mingles with all kinds of people he finds out that such a life is not for him and he is wasting his time; he starts the path of search after truth. He prays and fasts, until by the guidance of some friends with whom he was associating, finds the truth of the New Faith, thanks God that his search has come to end and it has bore fruit. After he recognizes the New Revelation, he confesses that his blind eyes became seeing, his deaf ears can hear, his tongue speaking and his heart, perceptive and understanding. He found the Straight Path, which lead him ultimately to the presence of its Author, the Blessed Beauty, where he was honored to see and hear the Tongue of Grandeur's Revelation language with no veil, thus, drinking from the Divine wine, directly from the Hands of the Manifestation of God.

Slowly, Ustad Ali-Akbar became known as an ardent Babi in different circles as a result, he had to come face to face with many Priests and Mullas and confronting in their arguments. They claimed that he is an ungodly and should be put to death. They could not perform this act personally, but they could delegate this task to their personal followers, people of sedition to gather a group of ruffians to attack and kill him. Knowing this fact, some of his friends counseled him not to openly teaching the Faith in order not to arouse the zeal of his enemies, but he was the pot of boiling water over the fire and he could not stop but boiling. Many of his good friends turned against him and tried to kill him, and many of those

who were affectionate to him, became his mortal foes. Finally some real and sincere friends came to him, as it is said, when the devil goes out, angles come in. He enjoyed the company of these friends day and night. He was deeply enamored with the Faith, which gave way to write a book on proving the claim of the Faith. It was styled as questions and answers, referring to the Holy Books of the Jews, Christians and Muslims. Upon finish writing it, he offered it to the Blessed Beauty for approval, and He did.

*Baha'i Institution which has some humanitarian dependencies such as an orphanage, a guesthouse, schools, old age home, library, etc. the centre of which is the Baha'i Temple. Ustad Ali-Akbar is widely recognized as the architect of the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adkar of Ishqabad.

** In this context it means the master builder.

*** Means the Magnet

Baha'u'llah referred to him as one among those who offered to buy 'Joseph'. His fame made it impossible to stay in his hometown.

In those days Aqa Muhammad Qa'ini, Nabil-i Akbar was also in Yazd and used to live in the vicinity of Ustad. The people of sedition went against him until they decided to exile him out of town. They went to the governor and complained, asking him to order Ustad to leave the town. He already was in tremendous persecution and over and above it, he got the order of leaving the town. The two friends in the company of each other, left the city of Yazd and went to Isfahan, where Nabil-i Akbar remained there for a while and Ustad Ali-Akbar continued going to Tihiran. In Isfahan, he met with the two future martyr brothers, Sultanush' Shuhada and Mahbubu'l Shuhada, as well as some other prominent believers, who enjoyed from their company. He remained in Tihiran for some months, and with the influence of his relatives, he could return to Yazd where he remained there for few more years, yet, always confronting with the enemies. Finally, together with Haji Mirza Haydar-Ali and Ustad Muhammad-Rida Banna*, left Yazd to go to Ishqabad. On their way, while in Tabas, Haji Mirza Haydar-Ali received a telegram from the beloved Master to go to Akka. The other two friends, Ustad Ali-Akbar and Ustad Muhammad-Rida, continued their trip to Ishqabad, reaching their destination on early April 1884.

In Ishqabad, they remained for almost two years and by working as builders, they earned their living. They got permission from the Blessed Beauty to go to His presence in Akka in 1886. Ustad Ali-Akbar has mentioned in detail in his book, Miqnatis, the story of his pilgrimages. It is not known for how long he remained there. After the end of his pilgrimage, he returned to Ishqabad. Ustad made another trip to Yazd for few months to visit his family, and soon returned to Ishqabad. His wife, two children and his younger brother Ali-Asghar also

joined him in Ishqabad in late May 1888. Two years after the ascension of the Blessed Beauty in 1894, Ustad Ali-Akbar got permission from the beloved Master Abdu'l-Baha in Akka. It took him seven months before he got back to Ishqabad. He stayed in Akka for three months,. On his way back he went through Egypt where he spent one month with the believers and another month in Constantinople before he returned the City of Love. Together with his companion Ustad Muhammad-Rida Banna Yazdi they made another trip to Akka in 1900. It was in this trip that Abdu'l-Baha discussed the design of the first Mashriqu'l-Adkar with the two builders. Ustad was able to draw a detailed plan of the future Temple for its approval by the Master.

Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions that he became a believer in the year of 1867 at the age of 22. He had thought the Faith to over 300 souls, which he considered them all as his spiritual children. He had received 27 Tablets from the Pen of the Most High, Baha'u'llah, of which one of them is the famous Tablet of Tajalliyat**, which he kept the original copy with him all the time. To him this unique Tablet has a special style of revelation and indeed is special to read and study it. Holy Tablets received from the Pen of the Centre of the Covenant Abdu'l-Baha to the date of writing this episode were fourteen, which most of them were in His own handwriting. He kept Baha'u'llah's hair and some other relics in his possession.

*(who is being alluded as the architect of the Mashriqu'l-Adkhar of Ishqabad only in the book of The Years of Silence, p. 49. Confirmation needed.)

**Effulgences

HAJI MUHAMMAD-RIDA ISFAHANI (The Martyr)

Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna has mentioned the story of this believer, in his book, 'The History of Ishqabad'*. Haji Muhammad-Rida, after accepting the new Revelation he rose up with fervor and enthusiasm teaching his friends and others. He could not stay only in one place. For the love of proclaiming the Faith he constantly traveled to Sabzivar and other towns of Khurasan's Province, where the people were very fanatic. Once in Sabzivar he took one of the famous Tablets of Baha'u'llah 'Basitatul-Haqiqah'* to the most famous Mujtahid of Islam, the famous Haji Mulla Hadi Sabzivari, the foremost erudite cleric and handed him the Holy Tablet, asking him to study it until the next day when he would come to take it away. The next day Haji goes to the house of Mujtahid and receives the Tablet with no comment whatsoever from the Mujtahid.

In Sabzivar life becomes difficult for him, he goes to Isfahan to visit his family. Yet even there, he starts to teach the Faith and those unfriendly and troublemakers planned for sedition to turn away those who were genuinely interested to listen to him. In those days Siyyid Hasan-i-Kashani, one of the most

notorious enemies of the Faith was in Isfahan. The devilish people go to him complaining and he promises to denounce the Faith everyday over the pulpit while giving his sermon delivering all kinds of nonsense and lies, mentioning the name of Haji Muhammad-Rida by name.

The mentioned Siyyid together with the ungodly populace not only talks but he goes further using force, denouncing him to the government. Zil'ul-Sultan orders his capture. Jinab-i Haji takes to hiding. The officials of the government have the gates of the city locked and keep on searching for him. Haji Muhammad-Rida sneaks out of the city covering himself in different attire. All the way, with much difficulty walks by the secondary paths until he gets to Yazd. For sometime he stayed with the Afnan family until he recuperated from the heavy burden and the difficulties of the road.

As much as he contemplates, he cannot find any way of escapade except living himself in the hands of God and goes to Baghdad and then takes the road to Akka, reaching to his utmost desire, which he comes to the presence of Baha'u'llah. For sometime he stays under the shadow of the Blessed Beauty and receives all kind of favor and consideration from the person of the Manifestation.

Jinab-i Haji related times and again he begged Baha'u'llah for martyrdom and He would say "We have had too many martyrs already". This time I again begged Him for martyrdom and He took silence. I took His silence a sign of acceptance, which made me very happy.

When time arrived for Haji Muhammad-Rida to leave His presence, as to where should he go. Baha'u'llah indicated that he should try Ishqabad. Haji departed from the Holy Land and went through Istanbul, where he stayed there for few months sharing the room of Muhammad-Ali Isfahani and then straight to Ishqabad. He stayed at the Karevanserai of Hesht where Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna was residing, assisting him in his construction projects. When Aqa Siyyid Ahmad Afnan went to Ishqabad, Haji became in charge of his affairs there. Yet Haji, customarily, without observing wisdom, continued to teach the Faith, even with more fervor, talking about the Cause to anybody crossing his path. He loved to become a martyr even as a moth flying around a candle, having its feathers burned away.

*This book could be found in the internet

* Tablet of 'The Simple Truth'

On the 30th of June 1889, there arrived from the Holy Land a package in the name of Ustad Ali-Akbar. It contained six Holy Tablets from Baha'u'llah. One was in the name of Ustad himself. One Tablet in the name of Haji Muhammad-Rida and four more Tablet in the name of four other believers. In the Tablet of Haji Muhammad-Rida there were matters, which reiterated to the martyrdom of

someone. The said Tablet had a commencement in Arabic, then the main part in Persian and it ended in Arabic again. In the Persian section of the Tablet, Baha'u'llah thanked God hundred thousand times that He enabled Haji to arise to serve the Cause of God, continued by saying that (paraphrasing) happy whom nothing deterred his love from the affection of the beloveds of God, and rose to serve Him with all his power. Then He swears by God that no action is hidden from His eyes, everything is clear to Him. The recompense for such an action is being mentioned and written down from His pen. Baha'u'llah's prophetic words continue that in recent days, in the city of lovers (Ishqabad), a phenomena has occurred, that He plead God, that His friends be confirmed, they need to be patient and prudent. Baha'u'llah addressing the recipient of the Tablet mentions that he (Haji) is always being remembered by Him, and pleading God to strengthen his body, filling up his heart with confidence and illumine his face. The said Tablet was handed to Haji Muhammad-Rida at the feast he had prepared for the friends of Ishqabad. This Tablet along with all other five, were read to all the present friends at the feast. Every one was puzzled of the contents of this Tablet where Baha'u'llah is inviting everyone to be patient. There was no indication that something had happened in Ishq-abad yet. Each one of the present voiced out their possible understanding of the contents. Among the friends Jinab-i Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il was also present. He assured everyone that a strange and frightful phenomena will occur, possibly, a believer will be martyred. All have to wait and see, who is being chosen by the Beloved to be martyred, as, it will certainly come to happen, that is the reason why Baha'u'llah has used the passed tense in the Tablet. We just have to be observant to see when the sign of such a revelation will appear.

There were some confirming indications relating to this matter in the other Tablets as well. In the Tablet addressed to Ustad Ali-Akbar He mentions that he should not be sad because of the flames of sedition, which arise from the hearts of the ungodly. He swears by God that such occurrences will only help to promote the Cause of God. Soon, He continues, everyone will be perished except those chosen ones, who will become known that they are Godly. He mentions that wisdom is required, therefore, He has instructs the friends not openly profess their allegiance to this Cause rather adhere to dissimulation, as it has been mentioned before.

After reading these Holy Tablets it became obvious to everyone that soon the cup of calamity and martyrdom will be offered to the chosen one. Haji expressed that without a trace of doubt the cup of martyrdom would be his, because it was in

the Tablet address to him that Baha'u'llah mentioned of the phenomena to occur. To him, this was the confirmation of Baha'u'llah's silence when he asked Him for martyrdom when once he was at His presence. Haji Muhammad-Rida did not forget not even for a moment his promise because it would lead him to his utmost desire.

On the 8th of September 1889 the hidden phenomena became evident. The time for the seditious and mischief-makers to act was at hand. Haji also prepared himself and arranged his affairs in order. On the 10th of September he announced that he is ready to drink the cup of martyrdom.

Two days later, on the 12th of September, Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il and Ustad Ali-Akbar were at the bath built by the Afnans. Two hours before noon, Jinab'i Aqa Khayrullah entered the bath and gave them the news that Haji Muhammad-Rida have been martyred in the middle of the bazaar by the fanatic Muslims. They got dressed immediately and rushed to see what has happened. They observed everywhere that the people in the street are running back and forth and mumbling to each other, one saying that the Imam-Rida of the Babis was killed, the other said he will resurrect in three days, some were cursing the Baha'is, some were congratulating each other, some others were wishing similar fate for all the believers that all of them should be eliminated. Such were the words of the mob and the fanatics of the bazaar.

THE STORY OF THE MARTYRDOM OF HAJI MUHAMMAD-RIDA ISFAHANI

The condition in which Haji Muhammad-Rida was martyred is as follow: Haji goes to the bazaar to buy two bottles of medicine to be sent to Bukhara. He buys the medicine and on his way back home, while passing by the shops where Haji Muhammad-Rida would collect the rent from them. The shops were close to a coffee shop belonging to an Iranian from Isfahan, where the rascals and ruffians used to get together. Suddenly two young men of almost thirty years of age, from Turkish origin, as bloodthirsty wolves, drew their daggers rushed towards Haji, an old man of almost seventy and attacking him by stabbing him with their full might from every direction, right, left, front and back, especially to the chest. The gathered mob with happy faces at the scene, were clapping hands merrily, observing the scene of martyrdom. Some youth were hailing the attackers and encouraging them for their strength of blows, cheering their bravery of how they overpowered a defenseless old man with dagger and knife. This was the heroism they were hailing for! In a very short instance, the lifeless body of Haji Muhammad-Rida fell flat over the ground. What Baha'u'llah had revealed in his

Tablet was fulfilled to the letter. The ungodly had attacked his strong body and his heart was assured. The quantity of the blows was 32 strokes to the fragile body of the old man, which certainly one stroke would suffice to kill him. They had cut his side to expose the liver they cut the chest all the way to the belly to expose the intestines. He truly had a strong body and an assured heart to be able to bear such cruel blows.

The matter became international news and in short time travelled from border to border. It drew some policemen to the scene where they stood over the body guarding it and refraining the people to disrespect the lifeless open body. The murderers stood next to them with the bloody daggers, directing the dripping blood from their knives to their mouth. Indeed they were drinking the blood of a martyr. Feeling apprehended, they pretended that they are leaving, but in fact, slowly they wanted to flee the scene.

Ali Big, the head constable rushed after them and arrested them both, called for a carriage and put them in, assuring their release, yet now, they should accompany him to the police station and from there they were locked in. He also sent some more extra police to the market place to stop repeating any other possible foolish act or disrespect the fallen body.

The mob was gathering in bigger number around the dead body and they were loud in cursing the Baha'is and saying improper words. As the police tried to remove the body, the mob made the circle tighter to prevent the body to be removed. One of the stalwart Baha'is of Ishqabad, Mashhadi Ali-Heydar Shirvani pushed himself in the circle and with loud voice threatened the mob and all by himself took the lifeless body of Haji Muhammad-Rida, carrying it to the Caravanserai Hesht, where late Haji use to dwell, closing its heavy gates behind him. The mob found its way on climbing the walls of the inn going over the roof and kept on with hurling their curses and threats.

While the body was being washed and shrouded a casket was brought in to place the body in. What was not clear as to how to take the casket out of the Caravanserai to the place of burial without the interference of the mob? Decision was made as to take the casket at mid-night and carry it to place outskirts of the town. The few gathered Baha'is remained silently in the Caravanserai, and kept on with their prayers. A carriage was arranged for the mid-night and Karbila'i Haji Muhammad Sabzivary and six more friends put the casket into the carriage and left the town taking the path towards the border of Iran. Getting close to the Aziz'ullah fountain, they stopped the carriage and quickly dug a proper place in

the ground, depositing the casket in filling up the grave, then removing any unnatural trace that the soil has been touched for the purpose of a tomb.

For sometimes, none except Karbila'i Haji Muhammad knew the actual place of the tomb. Later on, at the order of Baha'u'llah a befitting grave was made and strong stones were put on the top. In a short time, the stones were broken by the fanatics; they were opening the grave to bring out the casket containing the body when some Turkmen horse riders approached the scene and the perpetrators escaped. These same Turkmen people took the news of the breakage of the grave. Some friends went to the graveside and this time they rebuilt the grave well enough that the enemies could not harm it anymore. The following procedure was done; that grave was opened, the casket was brought out, the grave was further deepened for almost another three meters. Stones were put under and around where the casket was to be lowered. The rest of the hole to the top were filled with stones and lime mixed as mortar. At the ground level, the cut stones were worked in with lime mortar again and the end work became quite strong. Yet, the enemies were relentless, they tried everyday to break the stones.

The name of those friends who worked hard on that day were Karbila'i Haji Muhammad, Ustad Muhammad-Rida Banna who worked more than anyone else, Ustad Ali-Akbar and his brother Ustad Ali-Asghar, Jinab-i Aqa Ghulam-Husayn Isfahani, Haji Muhammad-Husayn Isfahani, Haji Muhammad-Talib, Aqa Rida Yazdi. Of course, there were some other friends who also helped.

The day after the martyrdom, friends got together in a certain place and consulted on what action to take for the case of Haji Muhammad-Rida's murder. Decision was not to go the authorities, as they already know of the fact and would take any necessary action, applying the law.

The leaders of the troublemakers were also consulting as to how to finish the job that was already started. Some were of the opinion that they should move as a big group and murder whoever was known as the followers of the new religion. Thus, they secretly identified fourteen believers of which three were definitely to be eliminated. They chose from among themselves three men to carry out the plan. Intention was to go to the bazaar the very next day, find the three identified Baha'is and kill them on the spot. The names of the identified believers were Aqa Mashhadi Yousef Milani, Aqa Mirza Abdu'l-Karim Ardabili and Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna Yazdi. At the bazaar, they observed that a numerous group of Baha'is were marching towards them, which frightened them to the core, preferring to abandon their conceived plan and leave the site.

Baha'is became well aware of their conceived plan. This made them to sit and consult again agreeing that they should put in writing the whole episode, also adding the further intention of the enemies and take it to the governor General Qamarov. Marching together, they went to his residence. It was two hours after sunset. When the doorkeeper announced to the Governor of required visit, he immediately rushed to the door. The letter that was signed by fifteen believers was handed to him. He very kindly and courteously received it, assuring them that he will handle the matter accordingly. Immediately he called the Mayor, Mr. Navtanov and asked him to assign special guards at the door of the homes of the Baha'is and also double the police presence in town, streets and the bazaar. For the second time he assured the believers that the matter will be handled accordingly and there will be no further problem. Friends were scattered after receiving this assurance from the Governor. Later on, Police advised the friends that for few days to be extra careful and even carry along a defending tool hiding it under their garments. After few days, finally there was calm in town and the flame of hatred of the enemies had subsided considerably due to the obvious police presence everywhere.

General Qamarov after studying the petition sent it to his superior Pierre Krur (?) who also after studying it forwarded it to the Chief Investigator. The latter immediately started to do all necessary inquiries and inspection and interrogated every believer who had signed the petition.*

*(The name of the believers who signed the petition are: 1. Aqa Mashhadi Ibrahim, 2. Jinab-i Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, 3. Aqa Mirza Abdu'l-Karim, 4. Aqa Mashhadi Yusuf Milani, 5. Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna Yazdi, 6. Aqa Husayn-Ali Arbab, 7. Aqa Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, 8. Aqa Mashhadi Ali Rashti, 9. Aqa Mirza Mihdi Rashti, 10. Aqa Mashhadi Muhammad-Quli, 11. Aqa Mashhadi Husayn Tabrizi, 12. Aqa Ali-Akbar the son-in-law of Aqa Mashhadi Yusuf, 13. Ustad Muhammad-Rida (Banna Yazdi?), 14. Aqa Muhammad-Ja'far Osku'i, 15. Mulla Yusuf-Ali Rashti, 16. Jinab'is Aqa Ali-Asghar Rashti, 17. Aqa Mihdi Milani).

The process of investigation took almost two months, to interrogate the both sides of the conflict, those who were present at the scene and/or those who had something to say on the specific occasion. During this period, police imprisoned those who were somehow culpable. In this way all who plotted the criminal act were put to jail. The Chief Investigator sent the report of his findings to his superior Pierre Krur. It was up to Krur to convict each culprit according to the degree of his involvement in the criminal act and forward it to General Qamarov. Once the report was at the General's desk, he informed his head office in Tbilisi asking to dispatch a team of judges to Ishqabad in order to study and apply the

law accordingly. The team of Judges decided that the procedure should be short and quick, therefore the trial should not exceed 24 working hours, in other words three official days would suffice to issue the verdict. The Judge's final decision was irreversible and both sides had to abide by it. Such a verdict could not even be referred to any other court and the decision was final and binding.

After a while the team of Judges arrived to Ishqabad, which made the criminal group very fearful and uneasy of the outcome. On the other hand, the believers were also quite concerned as to what would be the final outcome.

Within few days Police handed Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna the summoning paper, informing him that there were eighty similar documents relating to this episode, to be handed to all who have been present at the scene, being them Baha'is, Muslims, Jews, Armenians and Russians. They all had to be present at the court the very next day at 9:00 before the judiciary team. The believers' only concern was not to utter an unwise word at the interrogation. They had to be relying on God and nothing else. Thus, they presented themselves at the court. They were sure that the divine confirmation will be with them at all times, therefore, they had nothing to fear about.

Prior to leaving home, Ustad Ali-Akbar took the Qur'an and augured the Book of God*, and found out that at the heading of the augured page was God promise to help His Messengers and those who have believed in them, and to those who commit iniquity, He will curse them and will lead them to whatever is unseemly in this world. Therefore, with this augur, he became assured that the victory is on their side.

Whoever was in that court, could clearly see the true meaning of the Qur'an verse. All those who sworn and had to testify, being Muslims, Christians, Jews or Baha'is, were all in favor of the Baha'is. The culprits, on the other hand, were trying to convince the judges their innocence with their futile arguments and excuses, which none was accepted, and at the end, according to the Qur'anic verse the 'unseemly recompense of this world' was given to them.

*(Such a practice was and is common to many do in order to know the possible will of God in advance. Either Qur'an or the book of the poetry of Hafiz is used for this purpose)

THE COURT SCENE

In his book, *The History of Ishqabad*, Ustad Al-Akbar Banna, described in the following way the scene of the court to which he was summoned: "The Court assemblage was overwhelming and quite a solemn. The luminous chandeliers were hung on different parts of the ceiling thus, the hall was brightly illuminated. The gallery was divided in two sections, one facing the other. At one end there was a spacious table covered by red broadcloth. The Chief Inspector sat in the middle and four judges on each side. There were two stools, on one of them occupied by Piere Krur, who with all the documents had the role of defending those that have been wronged by the Muslims. In front of him there was an advocate appointed by the government to defend the perpetrators of the heinous act who was occupying the other stool. The advocate also had the copy of all the documents. There was some staff, who were standing in different corners of the hall, whose job was to check on the people that no one would talk to his neighboring person.

The judges were all dressed in red. The criminals were all in fetters and chains, sitting on the ground beneath where their appointed advocate was sitting on the stool and these were surrounded by a group of security soldiers, for any eventuality. There was also a place for the Baha'is, to sit on the benches placed in a row facing the criminal. The witnessing different background groups were sitting on their specified places. There also were security personnel to keep the order for no one to speak to his neighbor. Anytime a witness was to testify, two security officers would come and lead him to the designated place and then would return him to his place.

For giving oath, the judge would ask the Muslims priest to give the oath, an Armenian priest was brought to give the oath for the Armenian witnesses, a Russian priest was also brought in to give the oath for the case of the Russian eyewitness, there also was an elder Jew which was brought in to give the oath for the Jewish bystanders. Mirza Abu'l-Fadail Gulpaygani was designated to give the oath for the Baha'is whenever this was necessary. Each one of the religious leaders had a designated place to stand. Overall, there were three hundred seats in the middle of the hall, assigned for the spectators of good standing. If there were any vacant space, another observer would fill the seat. Interestingly, some people had even come to witness the court case from as far as Marv and Bukhara, two distant cities. It had been a very strange and interesting display for the people to witness. There were six translators, two for each language Russian, Turkish and Persian to be able to check on each other's translation in order to prevent any wrong interpretation or conversion! The witnesses of each group were given the oath according to their own customs. When Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il's turn came, he was asked to give the oath according to the Baha'i Faith. Mirza

Abu'l-Fada'il explained that in the Baha'i Faith there is no oath. If a person is truthful, without the oath he says the truth and if he is not even after the oath, he still will lie.

After the process of oath giving, the court started with the investigative process. First in the row were the Baha'is who were called one by one and the process of questions and answers was conducted, each believer would repeat what he has already said before to the Chief Investigator. The Judge turned to the offenders and asked them if there is any question as per the pronounced answers. Every now and then, one of them rose up and pronounced an irrelevant remark. Then the Judge turned to their advocate and asked the same question again, where he was silent most of the time, but occasionally he would also rise offering a comment. Then Pierre Krur stood up and like the Rod of Moses swallowed their snaky questions and answers disregarding their irrelevant responses destroying their shaky spider webs with a stroke of his hand. He did mention in front of the present men and women, their sinister actions; for example he said "I am amazed to know how hard-hearted and cruel these people are that they kill a defenseless seventy years old man in such a cruel way in front of standing observers of whom some were watching merrily, congratulating each other". During his speech, most of the Russian women present, did sob.

Finally, after Pierre Krur's speech, the Judge, with those four people on each side, plus the advocate of the criminals rose up and went to another room to consult in conjunction for issuing a ruling. They returned to the courtroom, and again continued calling the name of the person to interrogate. Thus was the way of interrogation. Ustad Ali-Akbar described how did his own interrogation took place. He wrote: When the Judge called my name, I rose up and went to the desk. There were three copies of search documents present, one with the Judge, one with Pierre Krur and the third one with the advocate. As to the following, went the interrogation:

- 'What is your name?'

- Ali-Akbar Baqirov.

- 'Where are you from?'

- I am from Yazd.

- 'Whose subject are you?'

- I am a subject of the Sultan of Iran.

- 'How old are you?'

- I am 49 years old.

-Are you married?

-Yes.

-What is your religion?

-I am a Baha'i.

-What is your book?

-Is the book of Bayan and Um-ul-Bayan (Mother of Bayan).

-Do you believe in Qur'an?

-Yes. In this instance, the advocate of the criminals rose up and said 'he is lying, in the investigating document it says that he does not believe in Qur'an.' I said, I have not said such a thing. The Interrogator has asked me a question and I have answered him. My answer is clearly stipulated in the said document, which you have a copy of in front of you, please look at my answer. This is what I have answered the Interrogator when he asked me of my religion, I answered that I am a Baha'i. Then he asked me what was the reason that you have accepted this religion? I said 'in this moment, it is not wise to answer to this question, yet briefly I answer, whatever the other people reason as for the truth of the Prophets of the era in which they live, that They are the revealers of the Names and Attributes of God and thus, they became Jews, Christians and Muslims, we too, have seen even greater of Those, which are The Bab and the Blessed Beauty and we have believed in Them. Plus, as per the Holy Books of the past Dispensations, we prove that today, He is the One who has arisen to invite all the people of the earth. In other words, there are prophecies in the Torah and the New Testament and the Holy Writings of the past regarding Hazrat-i Baha'u'llah, and even the exact timing of His coming'. He asked 'what about the Qur'an?' I answered, 'we do not prove to the Christian from the Qur'an, but only from the Torah and the New Testament. To the Muslims we prove from the Qur'an. We, the Baha'is would always like to have a gathering where the erudite of other religions would be present and each would be given the proofs of this new Revelation from his own book, thus, the truth of the Baha'i Faith would become known to everyone. The interrogator recorded all this conversation.

The interpreter had not translated correctly, causing misunderstanding our point where we said 'we do not give the proof to the Christians from the Qur'an'. The Judge took note of the wrong interpretation of the translator. I also mentioned to the Judge that today the Torah, the New Testament and the Qur'an are all being transcended by the new Revelation of Baha'u'llah and we Baha'is adhere to the new teachings and ordinances.

In brief, it was agreed that the original quantity of meetings to be limited to 3 days of eight hours each, but because of the seriousness of the matter, the court had to interrogate too many people, therefore, they added the extra fourth day dividing it into 3 hours before noon, 3 hours after noon and 2 hours for the evening interrogation periods, in order to complete the work, but fortunately, on the fourth day before noon their work was completed. After 27 hours of conversation and interrogation, finally the Judge could announce that the work has been completed. Hence, those Baha'is who came to testify and other viewers could leave if they wished to do so. The Judge and his crew plus Piere Krur left the courtroom for an adjacent room to discuss the ruling and the final verdict. The witnessing crowd also left the court hall to convey their understanding to the outside crowd who were anxiously awaiting the result, that they were convinced that all the Baha'is were condemned, and those who were kept in custody would be released soon. The gullible people outside would plainly believe in the saying of these, thus, they again continued with their slander as well as acting very unseemly against the Baha'is.

The Muslim population, with such news, took the road to the houses of three high priests, Mulla Ahmad, Mashhadi Jalil and Mashhadi Samad, to share and to update them with what they have heard from the courtroom. Therefore, before even the formal announcement, they went to prepare a big feast, slaughtering sheep and preparing sweets and drinks in order to celebrate the occasion of the arrival of criminals who were kept in jail. Two people with sheep in hand were just ready to sacrifice them as soon as the culprits arrive. But their happy moments did not take long before they heard the final verdict of the Judge. Their stupor changed into reality when they heard that the final judgment have been in favor of the Baha'is and incredulously against the offending Muslims. This changed their merry into mourning and lamentation. The happy pinkish faces changed yellow and became ash-like when they heard of such news. People started to talk about the unfair decision of the court and called the Judge as unjust. Those two with sheep in hands to the welcome the murderers were now so disappointed and bashful, that they had to hid their lamb under their aba.

The Judge's final verdict was announced that the two murderers, Ali-Akbar and Ali-Baba should be hanged in public. The other two, Asadu'llah Ardabili and his friend who had fled to Baku were sentenced to two years of imprisonment. Mulla Ahmad, Mulla Mihdi, Mashhadi Samad and Mashhadi Jalil were all sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment each. This was the rightful sentence given to the bunch of criminals who thought they could do what they would in the soil of Iran.

General Qamarov was the only person who could reduce the sentences if he was willing to do so. There were two more people of the same group, but because the Baha'is did not mention their names to the Investigators, they were released. Only God knows how joyful and happy were the Baha'is of the rightful judgment, and how fearful and filled with consternation were the enemies by this rule of law. That day in 1898 was the date of turning point in the fate of the Faith. In that date, the prophecy of Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-i Aqdas was fulfilled, as it is recorded (Kitab-i Aqdas, K94, K95): "O Land of Kha (Khurasan, which includes Ishqabad) We hear from thee the voice of heroes, raised in glorification of thy Lord, the All-Possessing, the Most Exalted. Blessed the day on which the banners of the divine Names shall be upraised in the kingdom of creation in My Name, the All-Glorious. On that day the faithful shall rejoice in the victory of God, and the disbelievers shall lament."

"None must contend with those who wield authority over the people; leave unto them that which is theirs, and direct your attention to men's hearts."

Observe, how this episode, as the rightful justice was applied in Ishqabad, which is a part of the land of Khurasan and of the Land of Kharazm. No one could challenge the verdict that Baha'u'llah mentions in His Most Holy Book "None must contend with those who wield authority over the people". Those who wield judgment with justice should not be contended. The upraising banners are the steadfast believers. The faithful did rejoice and the disbeliever did lament. Every word of this prophecy was fulfilled to the letter.

BAHA'IS INTERCESSION FOR THE MURDERERS

Two days after the decreed judgment, the families of Mulla Ahmad, Mashhadi Jalil and Mashhadi Samad approached the Baha'is and pleaded the Baha'is to go to General Qamarov and intervene the case, as he is able to reduce the sentences, and if possible, the General would even to pardon them or, at least to reduce their sentences to a lower degree.

The Baha'is gathered together to consult and came to the concession of going to the General Qamarov, taking along some close family members, such as the wives of the condemned, and plead for the reduction of the sentences. As a result several of the friends, including Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna Yazdi, went to see the General and told him that the Baha'is have come to intercede and would be much obliged if he would consider the reduce the sentences of the convicted. It was explained to the General that the main purpose of the complaint was to prove the innocence of the Baha'is and to show the cruel actions of the foes. Thanks to God

that as a result of the just Government of Russia, this matter became clear and fair judgment was decreed. It is not for the Baha'is to seek vengeance, nor they want to retaliate such a case.

General Qamarov acknowledged the comments of the Baha'is saying that whatever is being said is of outmost humanity, yet the law of the government is for the protection and safeguarding of its territory, therefore, it is of utmost importance to punish the perpetrators of such a heinous and malicious act. Such action of such people is the cause of infamy and ill repute of the government and leads to anarchy and chaos. These matter, is already being published in the Ishqabad newspapers that, the uprising of the mob based on religious strife, has caused murdering act in the middle of the day at the bazaar. If severe punishment as a result of justice is not done, it would be the proof of the weakness and disorganized government and the lightheartedness of the authorities. This is serious blow to the image and authority of the government. The Baha'is agreed with the General Qamarov's comments and left his office. The accompanying people became quite disappointed.

As a result of such a failure, the leaders of the perpetrators sent a cable to the high religious authorities in Tehran, Tabriz and Mashhad pleading for help. The religious leaders in unison asked help and assistance from the Persian government, the Nasirid-Din Shah, arguing that if such Russian judgment takes place, it will be very degrading for the Persian government as well as the Persian Muslims. How could the killing of one Babi, be the cause of such judgment! This is the sign of weakness and debility of the Iranians! In Iran, this people are being killed and burned in fives and tens and it is the cause of glory and honor for us, and now only one Babi is being killed in that ungodly territory, do Muslims become despised and abject? How the religion of Islam becomes so ridiculed? Has Islam lost its glory? How is it permitted that the Faith of God should be so worthless? How such a celebrated Muslims have become loathed?

The Government of Iran in answer to such a complaint responded that unfortunately, the foreign countries do not accept our intercession and only apply their own laws. The poor and defenseless person who was killed was also a subject of Iran and had family and children, then by whose permission he was killed? Was it done by the government permission or the priests ruled such an action? Therefore, as a result of such an action they deserve what they get.

There was a Tablet revealed by Baha'u'llah after the martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani, which was addressed to the Baha'is of Ishqabad. This

is being paraphrased here. He mentioned in that Tablet that 'there will not be any help or succor for them'. That is why not even the personal interference of Nasiri'din-Shah's could help. Baha'u'llah praises the friends of Ishqabad and calls them as 'the keys to the doors of steadfastness among the people and the banners of guidance of His creatures, which through them the Oneness of God is being established'. And then He admonishes them 'to be wise and cling to whatever would elevate their ranks'. Then He reminds them, that 'lest ye become frightened by the uprising of the people. Adhere to justice, and those who adhere to oppression and tyranny, theirs will be torment and punishment. No one would help them or succor them'. Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna writes that here there is not enough space in order to describe what the Pen of the Most High has revealed in this regard.

After leaving the court case, Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna, wrote a full report and forwarded it to Baha'u'llah as other friends also did the same. After some short time, an envelope arrived from the Blessed Beauty, containing twelve Tablets in the name of all who wrote to Him. However, at the end of His Tablet to Ustad, there was a Tablet of Visitation for Haji Muhammad-Rida, the martyr of Ishqabad.

THE DEFEAT OF THE FOES

It is the first justice and is the first support in this world that has been shown by this Great Sovereign who has Removed the atrocities of the powerful enemy from this Oppressed sect...

The Babi-Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944, Momen, p. 299

The defeated Muslim group tried every way possible to free their convicted prisoners and tried every tool in their possession for this end, but to no avail. For some times the convicted men were housed in the prison of Ishqabad. Every day they were hoping for a miracle to happen to free them, until the appointed day, when it was announced that the two convicted as murderers to be hanged the very next day and the rest would be exiled.

Close to the seat of the government, the means for hanging was erected. Qazzaq soldiers were positioned in two rows mounted on their horses and a large group of foot soldiers were also positioned to put off any disturbances; there were as well as some cannon carriers for any eventuality.

All this preparation was that some of the fanatic Muslims who believed that they have been prejudiced in this saga, had announced that if the government would

dare to hang their two convicted co-religionists, or want to kill someone from their group for the sake of a Babi, whose blood shedding was obligatory in their religion, they will rise up, one and all and announce jihad against the government; and if they are killed, they would be considered as martyrs, which would be their ultimate desire.

The government heard such claims and all the necessary measures were taken as described above.

People from every group gathered to witness the hanging. The prisoners were brought out in chains and fetters. The two murderers were brought to the hanging poles and climbed them to the catapult. Under their feet, a hole was dug so that after being hanged, they would fall in and they would be covered with the digging soil, for good. The two, were robed with a special shroud. The moment the rope was about to be placed over their necks, Pierre Krur, who was present, halted the process. He took out a document from his pocket and read it in Russian and pointed out to the interpreter to translate what he read to Turkish and Persian. The gist of the document was that the day the Baha'is who went for intercession to the presence of the General, seeking the reduction of sentences, such a petition has been cabled to the Capital for the attention of the Great Tsar. His Majesty has passed the telegram to the Consultative Assembly to decide and whatever the result, it should be cabled General Qamarov. The Assembly upon consultation had decided that the intercession of the Baha'is to be considered only to one degree reduction for diminishing the enmity of the people. He announced that the final decision of the Consultative Assembly was not to hang the two killers but to imprison them for life. Those who are being convicted to 14 years of imprisonment, their sentence was reduced to half, in other words, to only 7 years. His Majesty Tsar has approved and signed the Assembly's decision and the answer has been cabled back.

Accordingly, General Qamarov had kept this final decision only to be announced on the same day where the people of every way of life are present to witness. His Majesty Tsar's decision was announced far and wide that the change of the sentences was as a result of the intercession of the Baha'is. The highest authority has accepted such a plea, otherwise the decision was exactly what it has been announce previously.

The two convicted for hanging, announced their dissatisfaction after hearing the new decision, that they would rather be hanged than to have the Baha'is to intercede for them.

Those who were convicted to life imprisonment had their heads shaved and an upside down Russian cap was put on their heads, mounted on carriages and were sent to the railroad station. Many accompanied them, where they rode in a special wagon that was especially prepared for them and were sent off to their exile. The fate of two of them was immediate as they perished on the way. Another two were exiled to their destiny as no word was ever heard from them again. Another two after a short period of time in their sentences, runaway and headed to their own village. Mulla Mihdi escaped to Iran and about six months time his house somehow got ruined for unknown reason and his lifeless body remained under the rubbles. From that group only one person could come back Mulla Ahmad Yazdi, where everyone could see him and remembering the fate of all those who committed such a heinous crime and got their sentences.

According to Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna in his book *The History of Ishqabad*, he mentions the story of how this incident ever started. The antagonistic Muslim population gathered in a meeting with the aim of finding a way to totally cleanse the city of Ishqabad of the followers of the new religion. They argued that as the followers of Muhammad, it is incumbent upon the faithful not to allow the city to be defiled with non-Muslims. They should make the life so hard for the Baha'is that no one would be willing to stay alive in Ishqabad. As the first step to take is to kill few of the Baha'is and most probably the rest would now what to do, surely they will vacate the city. That was the consensus decision and everyone thought as the right thing to do. Two men were appointed first to kill Haji Muhammah-Rida Isfahani. They were paid 200 manat (Russian currency). Ustad mentions that these people could not even think that God also has His own plan, which would be very different from theirs. God's plan is to advance His message and shed light upon the world. Baha'u'llah had mentioned in His Tablet to Ustad Ali-Akbar that 'do not be sad from the flame of sedition and wickedness which has been inflamed from the hardness of the hearts of the people. By the lights of the countenance of God, which are shining from the horizon of the Most High, these matters have always caused the promotion of the Word of God'.

The contents of many Tablets revealed by Baha'u'llah, before and after the killing of Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani are so intense that they would by themselves make a sizeable book.

At the end of his comments, Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions of Baha'u'llah's comments in His Tablet to him, praising the Russian Government for having done justice. Such a mention will forever remain pleasing at the Divine Threshold. Addressing

the 'People of Baha' He says 'the light of justice was hidden behind the veil of thick clouds of wickedness, yet, God helped the honorable and glorious government of Russia to shine and manifest itself, saving the justice from such a thick veil of the most great clouds.' Baha'u'llah pleads God to bless and confirm its friends and confidants, those who erected the banner of victory before the eyes of the people, in spite of those who restrained justice and equity depriving it from its splendor, its light and its appearance. At continuation, Baha'u'llah admonishes the 'People of Baha' to rise up one and all, to help that glorious government and value what it has done to implement justice. He says that no veil did stop them of this act and helped to the promotion of the Faith of God. That Government did also helped releasing and saving Him from the Siyah Chal (The black pit) with the sturdy rope of equity; Baha'u'llah testifies that they indeed deserve the greatest recompense from God. He confirms that they are who helped the people of God and win back His right from the people of sedition. He prays that God willing the friends of God will be enabled throughout the future centuries to recompense such a great bounty, which has been manifested from that blessed and just government. Baha'u'llah praises the Tsar and his government saying: 'Glory, light, blessing and praise be upon his honor and those who rule on his behalf by pure justice and prevent the wicked from his seditious acts.'

The martyred Haji Muhammad-Rida had many Tablets from the Pen of Baha'u'llah; he also had received some items from His blessed hands such as an aba (robe), which was used by Him and the rest he had left in Isfahan with his brother and some other with Aqa Siyyid Ahmad Afnan. His own blood stained and torn robe at the moment of martyrdom was with Aqa Ghulam-Husayn who also had kept some other items from him. Haji had only one daughter who lived also in Isfahan.

THE STORY OF DERVISH ABDU'L-HUSAYN KHAN

Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions the name of certain Dervish Abdu'l-Husayn khan from Hamadan who went to Ishqabad in 1887. His story is somehow related to the martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida. This Dervish belonged to the Ali-Allahi sect of Islam (they believe the station of Imam Ali is next to God, even higher than the Prophet Muhammad). He became a believer prior to his travel to Ishqabad. For the first few days he stayed with Ustad Ali-Akbar and soon he started his own business of selling fruit in the market.

Once Dervish commented to Ustad that there is something important going to happen in Ishqabad and I should facilitate it to its end and this will happen during the Ashura period (the first ten days of the month of Muharram, when Imam Husyan was martyred). He said that it was a mystery of the mysteries and it is him that should perform it. Then he goes on fasting from the first day of Muharram to the tenth day, i.e. Ashura, without breaking his fast. Yet on the fifth day as a result of extreme hunger he almost and the other believers made him to break his fast. Many simple hearted people were attracted to his home where he thought them the Faith. But because he did not finish the ten consecutive days, he said the work remained unfinished and it will continue in the second year. On the month of Muharram of the second year, he again resumed his fasting and this time he did it only for seven consecutive days when the friends again made him to break his fast. Because the offering was not complete, then on the third year at the start of the month of Muharram, he started fasting again and this time he did it for only nine days. This time Haji Muhammad-Rida, soon to be martyr, made him to break his fast, and this was exactly three days before his martyrdom. He decided that the martyrdom of Haji would count for the one remaining one day to complete the ten days of his offering. It was then through that act of martyrdom, that the mystery was unfolded and a great proclamation of the Faith took place in Ishqabad and the whole Turkmanistan.

Friends in Ishqabad wrote to Baha'u'llah about this episode and He revealed a Tablet in the honor of Dervish Abdu'l-Husyan khan, in which He mentions that his deed was accepted and from now on he can eat and drink [in the month of Muharram and Ashura].

Later on Dervish went to the presence of Baha'u'llah and stayed for a while enjoyed of being close to him, abundantly receiving great portions of His mercy. The Blessed Beauty gave him the task of teaching the Faith in the Province of Fars (Shiraz and its environs). Dervish Abdu'l-Husayn khan was recipient to many Tablets from Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha.

STORY OF AQA MUHAMMAD-RAHIM

Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna also makes mention of Aqa Muhammad-Rahim in his book, the History of Ishqabad. He was the son of Haji Muhammad-Husayn Isfahani. Although he was only for a brief period in Ishaqbad because of his sudden death, he was carried to the Baha'i cemetery and buried there. Once he was asked, as the story will be mentioned later, about what Baha'u'llah has revealed in the Tablet to the Tsar of Russia and he was just inspired to speak out

of the intention of Baha'u'llah in that Tablet. Due to the uniqueness of his story, Ustad has mentioned it in his book.

Aqa Muhammad-Rahim became a believer in the period of tests and difficulties also of intense violence in Iran. He was a seeker and once he was convinced of the truth the new Revelation, he embraced it in full. He rose up to teach the Faith to his friends and others without being shy or otherwise. He was straightforward. Some people accepted the truth through his way of teaching. Some rose up against him with the intention of harming him, especially his father, to the point that he left behind all the earthly things, detached from everyone and everything, leaving his native land and went to Sabzivar (a city of the Province of Khurasan). For sometime he worked here and there until the uprising against the Baha'is was also fueled in Sabzivar then he passed the border and left for Ishqabad. On the way he became sick and shortly after he reached his destiny, he passed away.

Aqa Muhammad-Rahim was a quite knowledgeable and a prominent Baha'i teacher. He was proficient both in writing and in speaking. During the time of the Blessed Beauty Akka, he travelled twice to His presence.

Before his first trip while still in Sabzivar, one of the Russian Consuls sent a letter to one of the Armenian businessmen asking him to get in touch with one of the knowledgeable Babis of Sabzivar and send him to Astarabad where the Consul was, and to bring with him some of the Books and Writings of his Faith. The Consul offered to pay all the travelling expenses whatever it maybe. The businessman knew a Baha'i colleague by the name of, Haji Muhammad-Kazim Isfahani. He informed him of the wish and the request of the Consul. Haji in consultation with some other friends, decide that Aqa Muhammad-Rahim is the right person to go. Aqa Muhammad-Rahim taking some books and a letter of introduction from the Armenian businessman and traveled to Astarabad to meet with the Consul, who invited him to stay at his place for a while.

Consul, who was somehow familiar with the Faith would ask his questions for clarification every evening from Aqa Muhammad-Rahim when they would get together for dinner.

One night the Consul, among other things, asked the emissary the question that had puzzled him for sometimes. This he referred to the statement of Baha'u'llah in the Tablet of Tsar of Russia concerning the invocation of the Tsar while communing with his Lord in private and the acceptance of his plea by Baha'u'llah. He asked 'what was the plea and how was it accepted by Baha'u'llah'? Aqa Muhammad-Rahim was startled as to what answer should he give the Consul. He said only God knows what was the plea of the Tsar or his request answered that

is only with God, only He knows what was the Tsar's request, to which the Consul responded that of course, this is obvious, but he wanted to know what was the understanding of Aqa Muhammad Rahim of such a statement? With a quick calculation the emissary thought that the only thing the Kings desire is to triumph over their enemies and conquer their land. Therefore, as in the previous war between Russia and Ottomans, the latter won the war, so, for sure he thought, the Tsar has been pleading God to win the war over the Ottomans and conquer their land. With such conclusion in mind, he answered truthfully of what he thought the Tsar's plea has been. Daringly he asked the Consul to write to the Tsar and ask him of his plea and if it was fulfilled. A few days later, the Consul fulfilled his obligations, paying his expenses and said farewell to his guest.

Consternation took over Aqa Muhammad-Rahim for having expressed his own thoughts to the Consul. He was disquiet that what if the truth of the matter has been different from what he had spelled out. Wouldn't have it been better if he would have remained silent in this regard and wouldn't had uttered a word? How did he know of the Tsar's private intention and plea and its consequent acceptance by Baha'u'llah. How did he dare to pronounce his own opinion? He remained with this anxiety until he reached Akka and entered the Guesthouse. Soon Mirza Aqajan, the amanuensis came to visit and among other things asked what was your conversation with the Russian Consul? He preferred to remain silent because of his deep concern over the matter. After an hour Mirza Muhammad-Ali, son of Baha'u'llah entered and asked the same question, where his fear even increased more, yet he remained silent and did not answer him. The next morning when Abdu'l-Baha entered the room, Aqa Muhammad Rahim volunteered describing exactly what had happened. He acknowledged his wrongdoing and he was sorry for it. In answer to his confession, the beloved Master told him not to worry and be relaxed, in fact be happy. Whatever you have told the Consul has been correct and accepted by the Lord. Then Abdu'l-Baha elaborated on this subject saying that one day the Blessed Beauty commented that they are reading the Tablet to the Tsar, and then He mentioned that the Russian Consul has asked one of Our servants regarding the Tsar's plea in private, and whatever he answered as to the question has been correct. Baha'u'llah has mentioned the name of Aqa Muhammad-Rahim Isfahani as the person as the inspired answerer. Aqa Muhammad-Rahim was relieved from the consternation and happily thanked God for such an honor and bounty.

Aqa Muhammad-Rahim passed away shortly before the ascension of Baha'u'llah.

DHIKR-ALI, THE COLLECTOR OF FUNDS

Another person who Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions in his book, is Dhikr-Ali, son of Mashhadi Abbas Milani who was a most wonderful believer who made generous contributions to the Faith and would not hesitate performing any service he was asked to. He was given the responsibility of keeping the funds and collecting the contributions. Dhikr-Ali emigrated to Ishqabad in 1887 and established his life in that city together with his wife who was a wonderful believer. Dhikr-Ali also was in charge of organizing the celebration of the Festivals doing all kind of arrangements all by himself. He did not hesitate to take any hardship to himself regarding whatever service to the Cause. He was recipient of some Tablets from both Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha.

Unfortunately there is no mention of this great man as from which city did he emigrate to make his home in Ishqabad, as to his age, as to the number of children he left behind nor any reference to his trade or business. It is not know if he did make any pilgrimage to the Holy Land to meet the Manifestation of God.

THE GREAT AFNAN (HAJI MIRZA SIYYID HASAN SHIRAZI – AFNAN-I KABIR* & ISSUE OF THE PURCHASING LAND IN ISHQABAD

Another prominent person mentioned by Ustad Ali-Akbar briefly is the Great Afnan and his son Mirza Siyyid Afnan.

What the Afnan-e Kabir (the Great Afnan) really has gone through for the sake of the Faith no one can really recount. His highly praised attributes and perfections are beyond description of words. What the Pen of the Most High has revealed is the best witness to the greatness of this exceedingly praised Afnan.

The Afnan Kabir was one of the most erudite people and philosophers of the age he was living in. In Mathematics and Astronomy as well as the science of Geography he was the most knowledgeable. His knowledge and erudition was the strongest barrier for him at the beginning to recognize the station of his kin, the Bab. He never affirmed nor denied Him until such a day that the he had the honor of meeting Baha'u'llah where all his doubts were removed and the misconceptions gave place to fact and truth. He then was able to tear asunder the veils that prevented him from recognizing the mysteries and details of the new Revelation. He then was able to feel the light emanating directly from the Sun, Baha'u'llah Himself. He then rose up to serve the Faith in order to counterbalance his shortcomings caused by his erudition.

For sure many people, Baha'is or non-Baha'is in Yazd rushing to his presence to benefit and learn from the immense knowledge the Great Afnan as it is mentioned by Ustad, himself being one of them who met him in person many times.

When this prominent personage wanted to go the presences of Baha'u'llah in Akka, it marked the year of 1881, which was the same year of the establishment of the city of Ishqabad by the Russian government. He decided to go north through Ishqabad, taking the route of Baku, Tibilisi, Batum and from there travel to Haifa –most possibly by the sea- and then cross the land and to go to the prison city of Akka. This trip took him 40 days to reach his destiny.

While in Ishqabad, he decided to purchase some properties in that newly establishing land. For this, he asked his son Mirza Siyyid Ahmad to organize the acquisition of the land in his name. The latter delegated this task to a believer in the city of Sabzivar, Haji Muhammad-Kazim Isfahani, who through his brother Haji Abdu'l-Husayn who was living in Khabushan (a small town in the north of the Province of Khurasan, close to the border of Turkmenistan) to do the transaction. Haji Abdu'l-Husayn faithfully obeys the request and obtains the land for the Great Afnan, and also buys himself some land. Taking this example, other Afnans and some other friends also become landowners in the city of Ishqabad.

After his pilgrimage, the Great Afnan moved to Beirut as he had some commercial interest, making that city his home for few years and in a later stage, with the permission of the Blessed Beauty, he moved to Akka to in close proximity to Baha'u'llah and lived in His vicinity for many years to the end of his life.

The Great Afnan was given the unique privilege of being in the presence of Baha'u'llah every morning and every evening and later on in the presence of the beloved Master, Abdu'l-Baha. After the ascension of the Blessed Beauty, he kept residing in the house next to the actual Shrine of Baha'u'llah (today's the residence of the Custodians), which had an entrance to the Most Holy Spot. When he passed away, his body was perfumed with attar of roses, and he was buried by Abdu'l-Baha in Abu-Atabih village, in close proximity to the Most Holy Shrine.

Two years after the ascension of Baha'u'llah in 1894, his son, Haji Mirza Ahmad Afnan moved to Ishqabad both for business as well as administering all the Afnan's properties, which some belonged to Haji Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Vakil'ul-Dawlih, the builder of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Haji Siyyid Mihdi and Haji Mirza

Muhammad-Ali. Eventually, some of these lands became the endowments of the Faith in Ishqabad.

*He was one of the two brothers to the wife of the Bab, Khadijih Bigum. For more information see Baha'u'llah the King of Glory by Balyuzi,

MIRZA JA'FAR SHIRAZI THE BUILDER OF THE PILGRIM HOUSE IN HAIFA

It was sometimes in 1886 when Mirza Ja'far Shirazi together with his father Mirza Hadi travelled to Isqhabad, a newly established town, readily promising for all kinds of business. The father and the son started a line of work together. But soon Mirza Hadi, the father became ill and passed away, whose body was buried in the Baha'i cemetery of Ishqabad.

Mirza Ja'far continued with the business alone for some years. He did not prosper as he was expecting. Yet he had an ardent desire to serve the beloved Master in someway. He devised a plan and decided to go to Haifa. Asking permission from Abdu'l-Baha he embarked on his journey around 1905. He was well aware of project of the building of the Shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel by Him. He thought once that building is finished many pilgrims will go to visit that Holy Place. His plan was to offer Abdu'l-Baha to build a resting place once the pilgrims arrive there. His plan was accepted by the beloved Master and he had the plan drawn –probably by those professionals who were building the Shrine. He purchased the land in its vicinity and soon started to build the Pilgrim House on the slope of the Mount Carmel, facing Akka. His finances came to an end and he could not finish his project. He again asked permission to go back to Ishqabad for sometimes to make some more business in order to fulfill with his pledge. It took him some time before he could gather enough funds and go back to Haifa to accomplish his endeavor, shortly before the inauguration of the Shrine by Abdu'l-Baha in 1909. Yet, once the building was finished, it needed to be furnished. This time, Abdu'l-Baha wrote to him and told him that although the building is finished but he should furnish it too. He worked hard to gather more funds and finally could present his Lord with a complete project. Abdu'l-Baha wrote on a piece of paper: This is a spiritual guesthouse and its builder is Mirza Ja'far Shirazi. This same wording was carved on a piece of Stone and was placed above the entrance of the building.

To the knowledge of the writer, Mirza Ja'far had at least one son, named after his father, Hadi Rahmani, long standing dedicated pioneer in Afghanistan, going through many hardships in that country together with his family for the sake of establishing a Baha'i Community. He was appointed as a Counsellor for Asia for a period of time.

ABDU'L-KARIM ARDABILI, THE FOURTH BELIEVER IN ISHQABAD

Abdu'l-Karim, son of Asad'ullah Ardabili, became a believer possibly in the town of Ardabil, the Province of Azerbaijan in 1879. Either he went to Akka to meet Baha'u'llah, or had written to Him. Whatever the case may be, in 1882* Baha'u'llah urged him, to go to Ishqabad to help the other friends to establish a Baha'i Community. In those early days, there were only three believers in that town, Ustad Ali-Akbar, his colleague Ustad Muhammad-Rida –the martyr- and Abdu'r-Rasul. There was no name or address for these friends that Abdu'l-Karim might have used to identify the believers. He was on his own to find out who were the Baha'is in town.

*(There are some discrepancy in dates. Ustad Ali-Akbar, as mentioned previously reached Ishqabad as he recorded in April 1884.)

Ustad Ali-Akbar described how he met with the believers. One spring day, for no apparent reason, Ustad became inspired to go out for sightseeing around the town. Once out there he met a man -apparently an alien- sitting on a rock next to a green field deep in himself. Ustad Ali-Akbar became curious as to whom this man could be, who have never seen him in town. Who was he and where was he coming from. A force led him towards the man to inquire and in case he needed help could offer him. He went and sat next to the newcomer. After customary greeting they engaged talking on different matters. Soon Ustad found out that the newcomer was not an ordinary person but quite an educated man or maybe even a businessman. Abdu'l-Karim inquired about tea prices in bulk. Ustad Ali-Akbar gave him his residence address and told him to visit him the next day where he would accompany him to the tea market. Once back at home, Ustad recounted to his other two companions about his new finding. He had a premonition that the newcomer was a indeed a believer.

Next day Abdu'l-Karim went to the house of the Ustad as agreed. But there, instead of talking about tea market, Ustad Ali-Akbar, went straight to another subject and made a mention of the diversity of religions. Abdu'l-Karim became curious and intently listened to the words of his host. Soon to the delight of Ustad, Abdu'l-Karim declared that he also was a believer. Celebrating it with a cup of tea, each recounted his story.

Abdu'l-Karim was a devout believer. After staying for a while with his new friends in Ishqabad and consulting on all different matters related to the Faith he found out that the message of the Faith has not yet reached the city of Baku, the

capital of Azerbaijan. Abdu'l-Karim decided to go there instead of staying in Ishqabad. Once in Baku, he thought that he needed some literature with which he could engage in active teaching, as he did not have any, he wrote with devotion to Ustad and asked him a copy of the Most Holy Book -Kitab-i Aqdas- to be sent to him. Ustad Ali-Akbar had no copy of the book at his disposal but understanding the importance of the matter, could not turn down the request of his friend. He thought the only way was to ask for a copy of the Kitab-e-Aqdas, was to ask from the friends in the city of Sabzibar in Khurasan. He therefore, wrote to Haji Muhammad-Kazim Isfahani a staunch believer, asking for a copy of the Book. Upon receiving such a request, Haji left all his own affairs aside and immediately started making a copy of the Most Holy Book writing it word by word, which was the only way to facilitate the Holy Writings to the inquirers. Such a dedicated endeavor took Haji ten days to complete writing it and immediately he sent it off to Ishqabad through an emissary. Ustad Ali-Akbar upon receiving the Book, found the most secure way to send it to Baku to his friend Abdu'l-Karim. Thus, that was the very first book of the new Revelation ever to get to that city. This became the tool of teaching for Abdu'l-Karim who was able to acquaint and teach many people with the Faith and open Baku to the Revelation of Baha'u'llah.

Later on these two friends met in Akka when both were at the presence of the beloved Master. Ustad observed how Abdu'l-Karim was so dear to Abdu'-Baha, Who gave His own garment to him.

Abdu'l-Karim served the Faith of God with devotion, zeal and enthusiasm. Those who became believers through him remained staunch and dedicated the Faith. Abdu'l- Karim was recipient of many Tablets from both Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. He left behind a devoted family serving the Cause of God.

MIRZA IBRAHIM, THE ARMENIAN PRIEST

As Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions in his memoirs of Mirza Ibrahim who was a learned Christian priest having accepted the Faith through Mirza Husayn Hoda in his home town during the later years of the Manifestation of God. He originally was from Urumiyeh of Azerbaijan region. After his declaration and his commitment to his newly found Faith, he could not withhold himself of talking about the Faith, engaging whoever crossed his path wisely or unwisely. As a result of his actions, His ex-coreligionists rose against him and reported him to the Russian government, which used to give Mirza Ibrahim a stipend of a thousand Munat

(Russian monetary unit) per month. Consequently they made sure that his stipend was cut off. In spite of this, thanks to his good character, pleasing manners and agreeable face, the general people liked him and respected him. He was also somehow involved with the Iranian government, which had respected him by giving him an honorable title.

Mirza Ibrahim wrote to Baha'u'llah and later on to the Master and was honored by receiving answers from both. Later on he went to Ishqabad, not clear was it as a result of the Tablets he received or his move was of his own volition. Again, without any restriction, he would talk about the Faith everywhere and to everyone. He used to openly associate with the Baha'is who were from the Muslim background to the displeasure of the Armenian community, who reported him to the government. He was summoned for interrogation. He quite eloquently answered their questions to the point. After this incident he was released and shortly after he made a business trip to Tashkent before returning to his home in Urumiyyih.

Here is an amusing story of Mirza Ibrahim after his return from his hometown to Ishqabad, which was about a year later. This time he brought his grown up son and left him in the care of the friends in Ishqabad and left for Bukhara. Soon his son became ill and friends took him to the hospital. As his sickness became serious Mirza Ibrahim was called back to Ishqabad. Upon his arrival however, unfortunately, his son became unconscious and the medics lost all the hope of his revival. Mirza Ibrahim paid a photographer to take a picture of the youth for him to have it as the last memory of his beloved child.

As for the matter of the burial he approached the friends to consult together finding a proper place to bury his son. He was in the dilemma should he take the body to the Baha'i cemetery or the Armenian cemetery. His other alternative was to take the body to the Russian cemetery. After some consultation, his Baha'i friends advised him to take the body to the Russian cemetery, as the Armenians might would had preventing him because of his adherence to the Baha'i Faith, and this point of contention could cause him problem.

Mirza Ibrahim was expecting his son to die any moment. Together with a friend Karbila'i Muhammd-Ali, who had just got back from the Holy Land went to visit the condition of the son at the hospital and found no sign of recuperation in him. Karbila'i Muhammad-Ali offered Mirza Ibrahim some rock candy that he had brought from the Holy Land to give to his son as the last remedy, now that all the hope of life was lost with his son. These he took and diluted in water and

together poured the sweet water into the mouth of his son spoon by spoon. The miracle happened. It took only couple of minutes before the dying son opened his eyes, observing his father standing over his head. He sat on his bed with a smile on his lips. Two days later his 22 years old son was released from the hospital.

This miracle was for Mirza Ibrahim to celebrate the revival of his son, thus, he invited all the Baha'is in the A'azam land (partial future of the Temple land) and offered a sizeable feast. Mirza Ibrahim commented to the friends that he had heard of His Holiness Christ reviving people but in this blessed Revelation he saw with his own eyes how the blessed rock candy revived the dead one!

Anyway, the son remained in Ishqabad until Mirza Ibrahim finished his business in Khuqand and other towns, returning to take his son and left again for Urumiyyih.

Mirza Ibrahim was always on fire with the Teachings of Baha'u'llah. He mentioned in one of his letters to Ustad Ali-Akbar, that as a result of his constant teaching and proclaiming the newfound Faith, there were already forty Armanians accepting the New Revelation. Some of these even travelled to Ishqabad and established themselves in that city, associating with the Baha'is and becoming active in the Faith.

HAJI MIRZA SIYYID MUHAMMAD-TAQI AFNAN – VAKIL'UL-DAWLIH THE BUILDER OF THE MASHRIQU'L-ADKHAR OF ISHQABAD

Master Abdu'l-Baha wrote the brief story of this illustrious man in His book 'The Memories of the Faithful' (pp. 126-129 BPT Wilmette 1971). He was the cousin of the Bab, as his father, Haji Siyyid Muhammad was the maternal uncle of the Bab.

Ustad Ali-Akbar also writes in his manuscript is more specifically about the very day when the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkar's construction work began.

He was asked by the beloved Master to go the Ishqabad for the specific purpose of building the Temple. At the time he was over 75 years old. Arriving in Ishqabad in mid-April 1902, all the believers left the town to receive him on the road, giving him the welcoming that this dignified and respectful man deserved. He was accompanied by two of his sons, Haji Mirza Siyyid Muhammad and Aqa Siyyid Aqa. It was a delightful reception, making everyone very happy. He was proceeding from Yazd, his hometown, directly in obedience to Abdu'l-Baha's

instructions, to start the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar at once, the first of its kind in the Baha'i World.

FUNDS

In order to get some initial funds to start the building project, Vakil-ul-Dawlih, who was the executioner of his father's Will, Mirza Muhammad-Ali Afnan, who had already passed away and had offered in his Will an amount of 10000 Tuman, -a considerable amount in those days- of his wealth for the building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, with the full consent of the only son, Mirza Siyyid Ahmad Afnan, who was the sole inheritor of his father's wealth, decided to sell some of the latter's properties. Once this was done, Vakil-ul-Dawlih who had already sold all his own possession in Yazd for 20000 Tuman had in his custody a preliminary amount for the project. The monies received from the sale of these properties helped the sum already gathered by the friends of Ishqabad who for some years have been donating to this purpose, and who prayerfully had begged permission from the Master Abdu'l-Baha to start their important mission. To this end many Local Assemblies and wealthier individuals had also made contributions to additional sum of 30000 Tuman. Some extra money was also received from the Holy Land from which the Master Himself sent 95 gold pounds. With these funds, there was enough initial cash flow to start the building's foundations.

Abdu'l-Baha in a Tablet to the Hand of the Cause of God Ibn-i Abhar, indicated that He had asked Haji Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, Vakil'ud-Dawlih to move from Yazd to Ishqabad, so that by the bounties of the Blessed Beauty and the sanctity of the blessed Bab, to establish the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar whose fame would reach every corner of the world, having special influence in the promotion of the Faith.

In a gathering in Haifa on the 9th of March 1916, He addressed the friends and said that in future there will be hundred thousand Mashriqu'l-Adhkar built, yet Jinab-i Afnan has won this prize, building the one in Ishqabad, this is, as if he was the establisher of all the Houses of Worship of the world. Indeed he truly was a blessed person.

THE LAND

Before the start of the foundations work, the land of A'azam (the land purchased from somebody by this same name) was cleared and prepared by eliminating the old buildings standing over it, for digging of the foundation of the enterprise, which was started on Friday 31 October 1902. On that day all the friends of Ishqabad were gathered on the A'azam Land for the occasion. First prayers were offered

for the attraction of the Divine blessings followed by readings from the Holy Writings, then each and every present believer delivered a stone where the foundation was about to begin. They were all delighted to be able to contribute with such a symbolic act to the building of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar ever in the world. Ustad Ali-Akbar was happier than anyone else, as for this specific project he was assigned by Baha'u'llah Himself. In one of His Tablets to his honor of He mentions that 'building and development of that area is upon you, this is the God given bounty to you, this is a service that will remain as long as the earth and the heaven would remain. Blessed art thou'. (This specific mention of Baha'u'llah clearly indicates that Ustad Ali-Akbar was the architect of the Mashriqu'l-Adkar. Although Ustad Muhammad-Rida Yazdi, a colleague mentioned earlier, is also being mentioned in the book of 'The Years of Silence' as its architect.)

CEREMONY

On the 28 of November 1904 a special celebration took place where General Sobovitch as the special envoy of the Government was the guest of honor. He was the person who would place the silver box containing the Temple's building documents under one of the main building's foundations.

All the believers were present, as no one wanted to miss this unique occasion. A tent was pitched up at the higher spot of the land where the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was going to be erected. It was well-decorated tent with beautiful carpets stretched everywhere on the ground. All around there were many tables carrying fruits and sweets. Chairs were put in rows and special seats reserved. This was part of the protocol to receive the special envoy.

General Sobovitch was presented with the silver box containing all the documents and written history of this building, together with full copies of the drawings prepared in two different languages of Russian and Persian. The box was firmly sealed and the spot where to be buried was clearly indicated. After placing the box, all around of it was secured with stones and mortar, thus, it was covered properly. Once this ceremony concluded, General and other dignitaries entered the tent for socializing. Tea, sweetmeat and fruits were served. The special envoy expressed his total satisfaction of such a ceremony and stated of his eagerness towards the commencement of the construction of the building. One of the designated believers delivered a speech on behalf of the Baha'i Community, showing their appreciation to God and to the Government.

CONSTRUCTION

The average width of the foundations was between 1.5m and 2m and it was the same as its depth. Heavy stones and lime was used for the bottom before the

reinforced concrete was poured in. A special strong brick called green brick was used to build the walls.

DURATION

The first two years of the construction was spent to build the foundations, the columns were heavily reinforced and walls were built by reinforced cement. The internal floors were done on third year and the fourth year was dedicated to build the dome. The dome had an internal diameter of 8.5m. The total height of the building from the ground floor to the finial of the dome was measured to 26m. The flat open area around the dome was 3.5m wide. The same was the width of the inner balcony and the passageway around the gathering hall. There was an open terrace over the roof, which measured 4m wide leading to the parapet walls.

For the central drum had 7.5m of height, a combination of steel pipes and steel mesh were used. Thus, the very strong drum was connected the second floor to the dome. The dome had two layers of the internal part and the external part. The reinforced dome came to its completion in June 1906.

On the fifth year the stuccowork and inside painting work as well as the dome's ornamentation was started. Simultaneous with this work, the constructions of the two minarets were started. The height of these was raised to 20m high. (Mr. Nakhjavani indicated to the writer that originally in the design given to Ustad Ali-Akbar by Abdu'l-Baha, there was no minarets as the integral part of the design. These were added in a later stage. And the original size of the minarets were even much shorter yet, they were raised to 20m high.) Unlike the minarets of the mosques and the church towers are higher than their dome.

After putting the last touches of the dome of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in 1909, Vakilu'd-Dawlih, at the age of 83 left for the Holy Land. In fact, Abdu'l-Baha wrote and asked him to join him in Haifa. The building work was not completed by then, and the remaining of the work took some ten more years to get to its final completion. Soon after Mr. Afnan moved to Haifa, he passed away. Obviously Abdu'l-Baha knew of this forthcoming incident and that was the reason of him being called to the Holy Land. His blessed grave is in the Baha'i cemetery of Haifa.

To run the rest of the project and managing the finances was left to the institution of the Local Assembly of Ishqabad and to his older and generous son Haji Mirza Mahmoud Afnan. This matter was handled for three years, receiving the contributions and advancing the finalization of the building work. However by 1912, there was a slow down in the contributions and consequently, in the

progress of the building work, which was already in its tenth year since its commencement. Still there was some unfinished work to attend to. All along Abdu'l-Baha was constantly writing and encouraging the friends to continue the construction work, which was only resumed in 1915 by special contributions received by the friends of Turkmenistan and all the effort in order to finish the work. It was during the WWI when all the stuccowork of the interior walls, balconies, the main hall, the passageway and the terrace of the roof came to its final stage of completion. Small touches kept the scaffolding around the building up until 1917 when it finally was removed, leaving the landscaping work and beautifying of the gardens as the only outstanding job.

There were nine pools within the nine gardens as per Abdu'l-Baha's original design that needed to the landscaping work. Waterways and ducts to irrigate the gardens and some outstanding electrical work for the gardens were all completed by 1916. The building of the boundary wall to secure the property, which was made out of brick, the internal avenues, the making of the huge iron gates for the main entrances and the final work on the minarets, all took the project to 1920, one year before the ascension of the Master.

The well-decorated main entrance terrace with the two minarets at its sides was done by a special contribution of one of the believers of Ardabil, by the name of Mirza Abdu'l-Karim. After 17 years of almost continuous hard work, the stuccowork of the four cement fountains in the front of the building were left to be done in a future possible time. The total calculated years spent for the building of this magnificent enterprise were 19.

COST

The Soviet Engineers meticulously calculated the approximate cost of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in 1928 and they came to a total figure of 550,000 Ruble (According to Wikipedia, the approximate exchange rate was 30 to one USD between the years 1900 to 1920, coming to the figure of USD 18,350). A copy of their calculation was also sent to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Ishqabad. In addition to the already gathered funds from the very beginning, time and again, the Ishqabad friends made special contributions. Funds also came from the other cities such as Tashkent, Bukhara and Merv. Very special contributions came from the sale of the jewelries of the Baha'i women. It is recorded that Abdu'l-Baha constantly encouraged the friends in Haifa to contribute to the Temple Fund and He Himself made contributions. There is no doubt that contributions were also received from abroad i.e. Iran, although not specifically recorded.

It is to remember that from the beginning the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adkar went through difficult times. At the early period of the construction the beloved Master was imprisoned for the second time and was confined to the town of Akka. The persecution of the Baha'is in Iran was incessant. The mischievous works of the Covenant breakers was an on-going menace in the life of Abdu'l-Baha, where they were not only causing innumerable problems for Him but also were siphoning the most of the proceeding funds of Huquq'ullah from Iran, which Abdu'l-Baha sent their outcry. Almost at the same time, the beloved Master was building the Shrine of the Bab and the inflow of the Western pilgrims was on the rise. Soon afterwards, He had to build a house in Haifa to represent the Head of the Baha'i Faith, which was gaining fame and importance, where people were constantly seeking Abdu'l-Baha's advice on their affairs. Addition to these local projects, He also had the House of the Bab in Shiraz to be repaired. Then came the repair of the House of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad. As soon as He was released from the prison He embarked on the internment of the holy remains of the Bab, whose sarcophagus and the holy Remains were in Haifa from the turn of the century. He always was the refuge for the poor of two cities, Akka and Haifa, where He distributed alms –for which He had sometimes to borrow money- and sheltering the poor, and only Him and God knows of how many thousands of people were depending on His help, the poor, the widow, the sick, the orphan, as well as the martyrs' families in Iran, which were also depended on the help from the Master. Soon He had to embark on the voyage of the century, His travels to the West. The friends of America were mostly contributing towards the construction of their own House of Worship. Soon after He returned the First World War started for four solid years, at the end of which devalued the Russian Ruble to half (Although this was not shown in the Wikipedia currency Table). So, the work of the House of Worship of Ishqabad, practically was on the shoulders of the friends of Russia and Iran, who were at the same time building schools and other ancillary buildings as well as their Haziratu'l-Quds. They went through many sacrifices to meet with all the expenses in order to finish with their unique building. Indeed there were difficult times. Thanks Baha'u'llah, all the problems were solved one after another through His incessant divine bounties and constant encouragement of Abdu'l-Baha, inviting the friends to put the affairs of the Faith ahead of everything else and contribute for the sake of the beloved Cause.

In a Tablet revealed to one of the friends during those difficult times of the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of Ishqabad, Abdu'l-Baha mentioned that the clergy of Iran keep on stinging the people of God like serpents. They are destroying the core of Islam and accusing the Baha'is in every land as the exterminators of the law of Shari'ah, thus widening the path of martyrdom and

sacrifice for the believers. Nevertheless, He says, the matter of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is the pressing issue. Abdu'l-Baha urged the friends in that Tablet to be hundred times more active in the accomplishment of this enterprise when now the foundations of the building are being raised. He wrote that sweetness and joy in such difficult times the banner of this edifice is being hoisted in second to none. Then the beloved Master added that He Himself rose up believers to build the spot for the Holy Dust - Shrine of the Bab – as well as the repair of the Holy House in Shiraz. He assured all that confirmation and bounties ceaselessly descend from the Lord to accomplish these projects.

In another Tablet known as the Tablet of 'Saboktakin', (name of a certain wealthy king that at the end he lost everything he possessed) Abdu'l-Baha addressed the 'O spiritual youth' who had arisen to bring the pending work of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to its final completion. In this Tablet, Master first described that every youth on his earthly life, thinks only of the earthly matters pertaining to the world as well as involves himself only to the lusts of the animal world. That is, the revolving their thoughts around eating and drinking and a place where there are jewels and pearls. What do they have at end, nothing but regret and sorrow. Lamentation is the end of the people of wealth, unless they spend their wealth on developing others and the matters of general importance. Such blessed people will be ever shining from the eternal horizon like brilliant stars. Abdu'l-Baha specifically addresses the youth, calling them 'dearly loved youth whom for the sake of finishing the remaining work of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, well beyond their endurance, have offered all they have and seek nothing but God's good pleasure'. He states that they are well off in both worlds and are counted among the people of names within the world society. Then He prays that the hidden confirmations of the Blessed Beauty would manifest and they become the recipient of His bounties in both worlds.

It was only through such Tablets, all encouragement and praise, that it became possible for the Community of Ishqabad, in such dire conditions, making it possible to finish the divine task entrusted to them.

In his book the Nine Year Memories of Akka, Younes Afroukhteh mentions of a story about the happiness of the believers there when learned through Abdu'l-Baha that the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is to be built in Ishqabad (pp. 222-227). He confirms that there was a universal participation in contribution towards the expenses of the building of the Temple. He writes:

“Abdu’l-Baha made an announcement: Although the scope of Jinab-i Haji Vakilu’d-Dawlih’s business activities has become severely restricted, nevertheless, having estimated the total worth of his wealth to be some twenty thousand tumans, he had decided to consecrate the whole sum to the construction of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar. Moreover, despite his state of health and weakened condition, he had taken upon himself to begin the construction activities and had therefore started on the excavation work. I have written to him that the construction of this type of public Baha’i institution requires the participation of the entire Baha’i community.

“The beloved Master “explained the importance and necessity of universal participation in such projects; that a single individual should not undertake alone the construction of a great edifice, but that everyone should participate, no matter how modestly. He repeated that universal participation was necessary and required.”

He also mentioned that such an undertaking could become a test: for the friends:

“They wrote that the construction of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar has become a real test. Those from whom much was expected have not assisted at all, or contributed very little, while on the contrary, those from whom nothing was expected have truly sacrificed everything they had, especially the poor and the downtrodden. They have truly done their utmost.”

“And so, one should be aware that this Mashriqu’l-Adhkar of the land of love (Ishqabad), constructed in the midst of much hardship and pain, was an added ordeal in the everyday life of Abdu’l-Baha.”

AN APPRECIATION

Amin Bakhshandegi the grandson of the last custodians of the Temple, had the following story recorded in his manuscript:

“Mr. Kal Mikov, one of the high officials of the Russian Government in Ishqabad, wrote the following in his memoirs:

“I participated in the ceremony of the cornerstone of the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkar of the Iranians’ religious sect of Babi.

“The Founder of the Babi Religion was publicly fusilladed in Tabriz in 1850. Now, in my time they still kill the Babis in Iran. A group of them have gone to Russia and America and are known as Baha’is.

“The Babis of Ishqabad have established an honest and law-abiding community, like the early Christians at the beginning of the Christianity.

“Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Afnan came from Yazd to Ishqabad in 1902. He was an elderly wise, kind and an affluent man. For a long time he was the Consul-in-Charge of Russia, England and France in his native land, a well respected personage there. He was obliged to leave his home due to ever arising opposition incidences against the Babis in Yazd. I came to know of his coming before he arrived in Ishqabad by a good friend of mine Dr. Vinogradov, who later became my brother-in-law. He knew Haji Mirza Muhammad-Taqi from Yazd. He made of him a special recommendation to me.

“After his arrival, he was warmly welcomed by the Baha’is of Ishqabad. He decided to reside in this City until such time that the beautiful Asian Mashriqu’l-Adhkar is built. He lived very simple and with a little, yet he was generous in spending on the building.

“I introduced him to the general-governor of the Caucasia, General Sobotich, where they became good friends. He agreed to lay down the cornerstone of the building in a special ceremony.

“It was a pompous ceremony, which was the first encounter of the Baha’is by the Russian government, where these people are being killed in Iran. They presented a gift of a painting to him. The famous Mishkin-Qalam had done the artwork. It was the image of a heavenly bird and tree, which was done in a form of calligraphy with big letters. It was designed in a beautiful form and attracted a lot of attention.

“The Baha’is are those easterners that live in European way. They are the best Iranian living in Ishqabad.” (Tarikhche Ishqabad, unpublished manuscript)

SIYYID MIHDI GULPAYGANI – THE RESIDING ERUDITE (1864-1928)

He was son of Mirza Abu’l-Qasim, the Imam-Jum’ih, the Prayer leader of the mosque in Gulpaygan. He was from an erudite family, mostly were knowledgeable leaders of their time, and highly regarded and respectable Siyyids –descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. He was maternal cousin to Mirza Abu’l-Fadl.

Siyyid Mihdi studied religious sciences in Isfahan and while there he became familiarized with the Faith and became a believer. Once he became confirmed in the truth of the Faith, he became truly a new creation. Seeing through his own eyes the fulfillment of all the prophecies in the new Cause of God. He left behind

the clergy garment and whatever else pertaining to the previous dispensation and wholeheartedly accepted the truth in the new Revelation. Everything else was considered worthless. He became truly a lover. Wrote to the Blessed Beauty and received several Tablets from His glorious pen.

It should have been round May 1892, when he travelled to Baghdad to visit the House of Baha'u'llah. There, he had a dream that the Blessed Beauty had passed away. And after few days, the news of His ascension reached, which saddened him very much, but nevertheless, he took the road to Akka. There he went to the presence of the beloved Master and was able to go to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah. He saw in Abdu'l-Baha the fruit of the Tree of Baha'u'llah. He remained there for some months where he received special blessings of the Master.

After he ended with his long pilgrimage in fall of 1892, at the recommendation of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani, who was by then resident of Ishqabad and was called for international travels, Abdu'l-Baha urged Siyyid Mihdi to take his residence in Ishqabad, filling soon be vacated place of his prominent cousin, serving the Faith in many different areas. In fact, there was not a better choice for that community where the Faith was getting prominence in all circles than a person at this category. Only few months after Siyyid Mihdi arrived in Ishqabad, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl left for the Holy Land. He received many Tablets from Abdu'l-Baha, which he treasured them to the envy of the kings who value their earthly treasures. (He had ten Tablets from, Baha'u'llah, 24 Tablets from Abdu'l-Baha, 15 messages from Shoghi Effendi and six letters from the Greatest Holy Leaf. Sahba, Payam Baha'i, #459, p.25).

At the time Siyyid Mihdi was on his way to Ishqabad, Ustad Ali-Akbar the architect was on his way to the Akka to meet with Abdu'l-Baha, probably to discuss the design of the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar. These two met briefly in Baku.

Siyyid Mihdi was most knowledgeable and erudite in many branches of sciences. His manners, morals and other unique qualities were exemplary. He was fluent in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and he knew Russian but for official meetings, he would prefer to use an interpreter. He was the pillar to the community in Ishqabad. When the Bolshevik revolution started and later on started to make their attacks on the Faith, he was the first and foremost defender of the Cause of God before the atheist Soviet government. Stories of general meetings held openly with the Soviets are mentioned in told in the following pages.

Siyyid Mihdi in 1899 married at the age of 25 the daughter of Ali-Akbar Najjar Kermani in Ishqabad. The couple had one girl and one boy, which accordingly, the whole household was an example of a Baha'i family.

On a cold day of February 1928, as a result of flue, Siyyid Mihdi at the age of 64 passed away in Ishqabad and was buried in the Baha'i Cemetery. In his funeral, over 5000 people participated. (Sahba, Payam Baha'i, #459, pp23-29)

STORY OF ABDULLAH SON OF SULAYMAN – SELF SACRIFICE

One of the stories of Ishqabad that Ustad Ali-Akbar recounts in his manuscript while he still was present is a description of the general condition of life of the people at the turn of the 20th century in that city.

Early morning of 12th of February 1903 Ustad Ali-Akbar went to the building used for the Mashriq'l-Adhkar while still there was no one around. He turned on the lights and sat waiting for Abdu'llah, Abdu'l-Karim and Nasru'llah to come in. These three brothers would always come before anyone else for their prayers. Most of the time there were only five or six of the believers that would go to say their dawn prayers. No matter how many would be present, yet these three brothers were certainly among them, and sometimes they were the only ones present.

One of the brothers, Abdu'l-Karim had had gone to Mashhad for teaching and was not going to be present that day. While Ustad Ali-Akbar was waiting for the arrival of the other two brothers, suddenly heard a deep cry followed by loud moaning. When he rushed out, saw Nasru'llah, the youngest brother crying in distress and running towards the building. He was saying that Abdu'llah has killed himself and I don't know why he did so. Together they rush towards the house of the brothers. On the way Nasru'llah was recounting that the previous night, Abdu'llah gave his brother the key to his safe. While he inquired the reason, he has only said that as my brother he wanted him to also have a key to his safe. While there, some other believers also arrive. They also had their version of the story, saying that after the meeting the previous night at their house, Abdu'llah kissed each and every friend present. No one detected the reason for this affectionate act. He already had prepared the suicidal means without divulging a word to anyone.

Ustad Ali-Akbar urged Nasru'llah to go open the safe to see if there is any written will in its custody. Effectively, there was a handwritten envelop by Abdu'llah. The heading read: 'Will and Testament', followed by the statement: *'The Prophet of*

God, Muhammad has said that a person is defrauded if he has two identical consecutive days; and the Blessed Beauty has said that if someone's words exceed his deeds, his non-existence is better than his existence and his annihilation is preferred to his permanence. And now it is for sometimes that I can see in myself no progress, but in fact some regress, therefore, it is better for me not to live, hence, I am killing myself, dated: 11 February 1903'. On the second page, he had written his dues and his claims.

After reading the Will and the Testament, it seemed a sense of relief and calm reigned among the friends. Nasru'llah observed that 'all night Abdu'llah's light was on and he was chanting prayers. Early in the morning the chanting had stopped and there was not a lightest sign of life from his room'. Thinking that he has gone to Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Nasru'llah left the house. There in the courtyard there was a body lying on the ground. Approaching the corpse, he saw Abdu'llah in blood. Crying for help, an uncle, Ali-Asghar and a friend, Mulla Ali had rushed to the scene. By that time he still has been alive. He had pointed to himself indicating that he had killed himself by cutting his throat. All helped to pick up the still alive body to the room, Nasru'llah hurried to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to give the news.

Ustad Ali-Akbar and Nasru'llah run to his bedside. Abdu'llah was calm and quite on his bed. There, it became clear that he had not cut through the main artery. As if nothing had happened, he said he did not feel any pain. A physician was called to give treatment to heavily injured throat. Abdu'llah recovered within two days. He was able to stand up again, shake hand and hug his friends, kissing them on the cheek. He was in a special haze, as if he was in a spiritually absorbing state, very strange to everyone. He was asked of the reason for such an unwise behavior, to which he responded no remorse and affirmed that never felt any pain during or after his action. Strange enough, Abdu'llah's body was losing heat and on the sixth day after his suicidal action, he passed away. He proved himself truthful and asked for his death. He was given. Such an episode was unprecedented. He welcomed death in the path of his Lord.

Abdu'llah did recount that he had left his room going to the courtyard. There, he had faced Akka and had said the Tablet of Visitation of Baha'u'llah, then, using the knife he had taken with him, he had cutting his own throat expecting the death to take his soul away. All along he has been conscious of every heartbeat.

Abdu'llah was a young man of twenty-five, in the age of full vitality. He has always been a wonderful, virtuous and pious man. No one ever had seen any wrongdoing from him. He was fully a service and charity oriented man, truly a well-behaved person in all aspects of life and quite obedient to the precepts of his beloved Faith.

Later on, his brother Abdu'l-Karim commented that Abdu'llah was usually thoughtful, introvert and mostly in meditative mood. Abdu'l-Karim recounted that once he found him was particularly quiet and sad. He asked the reason. Abdu'llah he sobbed and complained that, some of the believers have opened a coffee shop, where the business is well known as Baha'i coffee shop. He ventured once by going inside observed that some are playing cards while others are playing music. To him, this was degrading for the fame of the Faith to be stained as such. He had argued that there should be a difference between a Baha'i oriented business and other ordinary one. Playing card in a known Baha'i business is not dignified for the fame of the Cause otherwise, what is the difference between a Baha'i oriented establishment and a non-Baha'i establishment? He had questioned if is it correct for a place that is known with this blessed name of Baha'i, become a place of such ordinary actions? Abdu'llah had suffered greatly after having observed it. He urged his brother to find a mean to stop such an improper actions among the Baha'is, although he was explained that people are free to do as they wished, yet, he had stopped going to any kind of show that in his opinion would not be proper.

Abdu'llah would never miss any meeting or going to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar for prayer sessions early in the mornings. Among the believers, according to their general view, there was no equal to Abdu'llah in all points of view. He was overly pious. He believed and lived in the words of Baha'u'llah to every detail and letter. When it was said that if someone's words exceed his actions, his non-existence is better than his existence, Abdu'llah believed faithfully in these words. Therefore, it profoundly bothered him when he observed others do not take the Divine Words in their daily practice and not live accordingly. Maybe the Community learned a lesson from Abdu'llah to be more pious and live the Baha'i life.

Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions two dreams that he has had prior to that episode, in the first dream he observes that Abdu'l-Baha has gone to Ishqabad and has gone to the house of a friend, sitting over a stool in the courtyard where there are trees and flowers. His blessed hair and beard was dyed by henna. Friends are gathered around him and He has His hand next to his ear and is chanting very

gracefully. After the chanting He started to clap His hands and asked the friends to do the same. Everyone obeyed and all started to clap their hands.

After two days when Ustad Ali-Akbar enters the house of Aqa Abdu'llah and goes over where the body of Aqa Abdu'llah was in the courtyard, he remembered that in fact that exact place was where the beloved Master had stood and clap hands.

The second dream had come to Aqa Mirza Mihdi at whose shop Ustad was on the day that Abdu'llah did pass away. While visiting Aqa Mirza Mihdi Yazdi who was reading a letter from Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani, handed it to Ustad Ali-Akbar and asked him to read it, it was a written down dream. In the dream Aqa Siyyid Midhi observed that over the Gonbad Qabus dome a black banner there was installed. A person at the foot of the banner was saying loudly that the mention of Covenant in the world came to its end. Aqa Siyyid Mihdi has become disturbed by this dream. During their discussion someone approaches them from the hospital bringing the news of Aqa Abdu'llah that his life had ended. Ustad Ali-Akbar tells Aqa Mirza Mihdi to write back to Aqa Siyyid Mihdi and tell him that his dream has become fulfilled.

Ustad Ali-Akbar says that this was the proof of Baha'u'llah's message. From the time of the Centre of the Covenant up to now, he says, all the signs that were present in Baha'u'llah's era, the same, appeared in the time of Abdu'l-Baha to its perfection. The rushing to give one's life for the fulfillment of the precepts of God has been in every city, in Mashhad, in Torbat, in the land of Fars, in Tihran, Varqa, Ruhullah, in other cities where the friends of God became martyrs, yet all, according to Ustad Ali-Akbar, is the greatest one, that a pious youth as such would cut his own head in the path of God, and that appeared in the City of Lovers.

This episode was written to Abdu'l-Baha, where He revealed a Tablet in his honor addressing his family. The revelation of this Tablet was just prior to the event of the great martyrdom of the friends in Yazd, as if Aqa Abdu'llah had anticipated it just before the time when the doors of martyrdom were going to be wide open and he sacrificed himself to be a martyr in Ishqabad.

Not much later than this happening, the insurgent of the seditious people instigated by the clergy rose up against the Rasth Baha'i Community and soon the fire of wickedness was blown to Isfahan and the disturbance covered all the cities of Iran, making it a general religious riot against the New Faith. Doors of escapade were closed to all, the wolves of wickedness attacked the innocent friends of God in every corner of the land and made groups of martyrs to rush to

the vineyard of the Lord. (It should be mentioned here that soon after the martyrdom of Aqa Abdu'llah, by the instructions of Abdu'l-Baha, Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna, went to Yazd and fifteen days after his arrival, riot broke out and he suffered greatly before he became one of the martyrs of Yazd in that period).

In a Tablet Abdu'l-Baha addressing the family of Aqa Abdu'llah mentions words of comfort that that soul who has reached the highest shores detachment, indicated that according to the Divine Wisdom, something important had to happen in Ishqabad in order to be an admonition to every friend and foe so that the people not to become attached to defilements of this earth and become attracted to the everlasting world and to desire for spiritual food. His holiness the martyr (Aqa Abdu'llah) became totally oblivious of this world and rose wholly possessed, he made such a fire that its flame ignited those who had inner eyes become filled with zeal and enthusiasm. Don't be sad or astonished in the least, but be revived by the breezes of detachment wafted from that spiritual soul and remember his sacrifice that what made him to become so intoxicated, that he wholly forgot himself, until he could not bear anymore and rushed to the abode of sacrifice. Of course the result would have been much better if he would have kept his condition alive throughout and would have been alive, thus, would have bore sweeter fruits. It would become the cause of awakening of those in slumber and awareness of the downtrodden.

THE A'ZAM LAND – THE LAND OF MASHRIQU'L-ADHKAR

In the manuscript of Dr Amin Bakhshandegi, the brief story of the land for Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is being mentioned. His story somehow differs a bit with what Ustad Ali-Akbar has written in his manuscript. His story goes this way that Jinab-i Vakildud' Dawlih, Haji Siyyid Muhammad-Taqi Afnan had written in his notes of 1905 that when his brother-in-law, Haji Siyyid Muhammad-Ali Afnan was returning from his trip to China via Ishqabad, he wrote to him and asked him to buy some properties in Ishqabad. In 1886, Haji Siyyid Muhammad-Ali asks Ustad Ali-Akbar to find a property for him. The latter having spent sometimes in Ishqabad, finds an Armenian by the name of A'azam (a strange name for an Armenian, as this name which means –the most great - in Arabic is more a Muslim name rather than an Armenian, yet, it is also being recorded in his manuscript by Dr Amin that the previous owner was a Turkoman) for Jinab-i Afnan, and by his request a building of two levels with a pool in the middle was built at its corner; the land already had few room-like buildings on it. The established date for this first building is being recorded as 9th of December 1887.

To the friends, the land became known as the 'land of A'azam' and the mentioned building became centre of the activities of the first group of Baha'is for 16 years. The building was spacious enough to hold larger meetings.

According to Dr Amin, as this was brought to the attention of Baha'u'llah and He spared this land for the building of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.

Later on, friends also started to buy their properties just around the A'azam land. One of such believers was Haji Muhammad-Husayn Isfahani, who decided to divide his land, which was located at the north side of A'azam's offering half of it for the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and the other half, he sold it for the same purpose to the Faith. With this new land, the whole bit became a sizeable piece of land.

In 1910, a certain Muslim who had his land adjacent to the A'azam land, sold it to the Baha'is. And only two years later, in 1912, when a Girl School was built on the land of Aqa Mirza Abdu'l-Karim Ardabili, which was located at the south of the A'azam's, and he had already donated half of his land to the Faith and the other half was purchased from him to be added to the Temple's land.

Finally, by the purchase of the last piece of land from certain Russian widow woman and her children on the north side of the A'azam's, that she sold it to the Baha'is at the price of 7000 Russian Manats, the whole land became a square land with no dents in it. It measured, according to Dr Amin, some 3730 sajin (Each sajin equals to almost 4.5 sq meter, therefore 3730 sajin is 16,785 square meter).

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was built at the centre of the land and there were four buildings on the four sides of this land.

At three sides of this land with concrete walls, three streets of the city were built. At each side, there was a sizeable entrance gate to each side. The main side faced the west and on line with the main road of the city, with a huge metal gate, well designed and beautiful. From the entrance to the property straight to the building of the Temple, on the both sides of the spacious pathway, there were two rows of trees facing the two pleasing minarets of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. Two boards one on each side of the path, standing on columns, giving the information to the visitors in both Russian and Persian languages.

The main path, together with eight other paths, covered by grey pebbles would end to a circular path all around the building of the Temple, like a sun's rays, extending to different directions and the end of which there were some kind of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar's dependencies. Between the paths there were exquisite landscaped rose-flower gardens. The fragrant roses not only perfumed the surrounding of the building, but, the distilled rosewater extracted from the roses of the gardens, were constantly sent to the Holy Land for the benefit of the pilgrims. Bottles of rosewater were always kept at the mezzanine of the Temple to be dispatched to its final destination.

At the center of these gardens, there were nine-sided pools. On the four sides of the pool, there were four benches for the visitors to relax. These gardens were watered by hand, but the rows of trees watered by the city water; which was conducted through a channel inside the property. The paths were two steps lower than the gardens and the platform of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was three steps higher.

DESIGN OF THE MASHRIQU'L-ADHKAR

In early 1903 the beloved Master in a Tablet addressed to Ustad Ali-Akbar, telling him that He only desires for him 'absolute nothingness' in the path of God and at the same time wishes him to 'achieve many services'. He calls these two attributes as the 'ancient glory' and 'eternal bounty'. Then He recalls the days when Ustad was asked to go to the Holy Land and receive the concept of a Baha'i Mashriqu'l-Adhkar from the Master upon which he would draw the design. He mentions that while Ustad was in the Holy Land, the design of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar based on number nine was prepared and it remained with Ustad Ali-Akbar, and he took the design to Ishqabad (the date when he was at the presence of Abdu'l-Baha was 1893 where the design was given by Abdu'l-Baha and Ustad made the drawings for His approval, and the date the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar started to be built was 1902). Abdu'l-Baha tells Ustad that now that Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is being built in Ishqabad, make few copies of the design and send them to Ibn-i Abhar (the Hand of the Cause of God), and then the beloved Master mentions the reason for this urgent request is that friends in many areas are considering building Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and requesting for the design as they don't know how the design should be. He then asks Ustad to do this work immediately, which is the cause of great bounties.

Then, the beloved Master asks Ustad that in spring, if possible to make a trip to the Yazd region, which would be very useful, because there is a great capacity in

Yazd to receive the fragrances of God, meaning its capacity is more than any other place. And then He urges him saying during the spring he should not hesitate and should leave immediately, because there is a wisdom in this, which should not be missed.

Of course it is known that this was an invitation to his martyrdom as the highest prize given to anyone and Ustad had already sensed it and in that great upheaval of Yazd, many friends were massacred inclusive of Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna who accepted this invitation wholeheartedly. When Ustad received this Tablet, it was already six months through the construction of the Temple and Ustad himself has been helping in building. In one picture where all the dignitaries and special guests together with the friends appear, Ustad is standing on the front row.

It becomes clear by this Tablet that the architect of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is indeed Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna Yazdi, the master builder. And most possibly, this design was also sent to the Chicago, where the friends were seriously thinking to build their House of Worship.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE RUSSIAN ENGINEERS

The Baha'is of Ishqabad on the first year of the construction of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, decided to approach the government and request a professional engineer to oversee the building process. The engineer appointed to this job by the government was engineer Aknov, who was also at the same time of the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, supervising the building of the National Church of the City. He took his duty very seriously and within the first two years, he was able to build solid foundations for the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkar with bricks. Engineer Aknov, although with good principles, yet he was too strict and somehow selfish, that is why he soon lost his position and in his stead, the government appointed the experienced Engineer Volkov to take over and continue with the work. He was very friendly and had good character, that is why he could continue the work almost to the end. He did his work as required by the Baha'i Community. Unfortunately, one year before the completion of the building, he passed away. Although he was not a Baha'i, yet the Community of Ishqabad prepared an outstanding funeral for his loyalty to the Baha'is.

The matter was reported to Abdu'l-Baha, Who also praised him highly and his outstanding work. A Tablet was revealed for the Community of Ishqabad, He honored the late engineer by mentioning him by name and calling him the loyal

engineer at the service of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and acknowledged his dedicated work, his sincerity and his purity in his work. Then Abdu'l-Baha mentions that while he was building the House of Worship, at the same time he was building himself a palace for himself in the world of spirit whose walls were reaching the Kingdom On High, and he lit a light in this passing world that its luminous rays is shining in the Kingdom. The beloved Master mentions that Abdu'l-Baha was present at his funeral both in soul and heart, praying for that special personage to repose in the Most Pure Kingdom, in the palace that he has built for the service he has rendered for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. Then Abdu'l-Baha praises the Community that indeed showed their loyalty towards him. This is the way the friends of God should act which is the true value of those who are alight with the fire of love of God.

In another Tablet Abdu'l-Baha addressing the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar Committee, He refers to a letter written to Him. The Tablet was date 4 of July 1919. Abdu'l-Baha encourages and praises the activities of the friends saying that where other nations's people are engaged like the beasts of wild color their teeth and claws with each other's blood, the friends of God in Ishqabad were busy building the divine institution and disseminating the fragrances of the Faith of God. Then the beloved Master describes the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as the source of illumination, the gardens verdant as shining lamps, the paths adorned with wondrous flowers, the pools like overflowing rivers and fountains like boiling hearts of the lovers. Abdu'l-Baha praises the members of the Assembly who were busy day and night hoisting the banner of divine confirmation and success, becoming the source of public astonishment and understanding, becoming as a symbol of whatever Baha'is deserved. Abdu'l-Baha praises the unity of the friends, which is more precious than the whole world.

Dear Master was satisfied with the purchasing altogether eight pieces of land for the institution of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which its building is of enormous importance, and He adds that the friends of Ishqabad have won the ball from the game of this world and of the Abha Kingdom, hoisting the banner of service. Finally Abdu'l-Baha begs the Blessed Beauty to take the hindrances away from His path that He can rush to that spot and pray and supplicate in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar

INTERESTING DETAILS IN THE ORIGINAL DESIGN

A question has been raised that the universal design of the Master could have had minarets or not. As it was mentioned earlier, Abdu'l-Baha asked for several

copies of the original design from Ustad Ali-Akbar to be sent to other communities, which were asking for the design to be implemented in their community, therefore, the matter of oriental mosque like minarets for a House of Worship in the West, couldn't have minarets. This matter was solved by Mr. Ali Nakhjavani as an intriguing historical matter. The following is his answer to this question:

“However, I was interested in the building of the first Temple in Ishqabad. When Ustad Ali Akbar-i-Banna was on pilgrimage in the days of the Master, He explained to him how Baha'i Temples should be built, with nine sides etc.. It was then and there that He asked Ustad Ali-Akbar to make a sketch of such a structure and show it to him. This was done, and the beloved Master approved the sketch as drawn by him. This incident is [being] recorded by Adib Taherzadeh in Volume 4 of [his] the "Revelation of Baha'u'llah".

“I heard from Jinab-i-Ali Akbar Furutan that he had heard in turn from early believers in Ishqabad that the original design approved by 'Abdu'l-Baha did not include minarets. However, upon the suggestion of either the Afnan or outstanding believers in Ishqabad, He agreed that at least two minarets would be added--- (because of the large and influential Muslim community in Ishqabad).

“I also remember seeing a photograph of the original design, as initially approved by 'Abu'l-Baha (a picture taken in the Holy Land or in Ishqabad) with Ustad Ali-Akbar standing in the picture. It would be a great and significant document if such a photograph could be found--- most probably in the Audio-Visual Department at the World Centre--- to determine whether Jinab-i-Furutan's memory was correct. Although I saw this picture so many years ago, yet I cannot unfortunately be definitely sure on this particular and crucial detail.

“If the Audio-Visual Department does not have such a picture in their files, then it could be that the picture (that I certainly remember seeing) could be in one of the old issues of "Star of the West". A search of this matter would surely be worthwhile.”

The search of the writer in the volumes of the Star of the West did not bear any fruit but, upon Mr. Nakhjavani's recommendation, another detail became clear and that is:

There is also a book compiled by R.Kackson Armstrong-Ingham entitled "Written in Light". On page 63 of that book, there is a design of the Ishqabad Temple -----with notes written in long hand in Russian on the left hand side and more elaborately on the right hand side of the picture. It looks as if the notes indicate approval of the Municipality of Ishqabad of the design as submitted. The important thing about this picture is that the two minarets are relatively short, and end very slightly higher than the drum, which supports the dome. I am sure you will be able to find a copy of this book published by Kalimat Press (1600

Fortunately in the copy of the book that was provided by the Kalimat Press the mentioned picture of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar with shorter minarets is clear. Of course it make quite sense to insert two solid minarets but with no function as such to call for prayer, but to show respect for the Islamic environment and not to cut off completely from it.

The final design of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, as the first Baha'i House of Worship could be considered as a link between the two epochs, the past Islamic and the new Baha'i eras. And as the time went on, the designs of the following Houses of Worship, were totally devoid of such linkage.

SOME DATA ON THE ACTUAL BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

In the manuscript of Dr. Amin it is recorded a brief description of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar:

The building of the Mashriqu'l-Adkar was build in the most modern system of construction of the day and it consist of three sections namely:

1. The central circular hall, which is the sitting and gathering area.
2. The gallery all around the hall which overlooking the hall.
3. The dome structure, which surrounds the hall and the building both inside and outside.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was built in a nine-sided shape and had on the one side only the main entrance the big double door was located. At the entrance to the

building, there was a semi circular area where the two minarets were. The shape of the building has the looks of Taj Mahal of Agra in India, one of the finest of the world's architecture.

The main entrance to the Mashriqu'l-Adkar opened toward the Holy Land. The building was standing on a three step elevated terrace, which made it in a higher position than the surrounding gardens. And the building itself was made of five different levels one is over the other and continued from the central hall to the interior crust of the dome.

First, there was a chain of nine columns connected to each other by nine arches, surrounding the hall. Then, there was a round passageway around and outside the columns and the main hall. There was a balcony above the passageway, which was accessible through two sets of stairways at the sides of the main entrance connecting the lower floor to the higher floor. This balcony also had nine columns and nine connecting arches. On the third floor, there were nine arches with decorative boss reliefs of framed Greatest Name of Ya Baha'ul-Abha. Above them on the fourth section, all around the building, there were nine arched huge windows, which go around the building. On the fifth section, there were eighteen smaller windows, for proper light penetration to the inside of the building. After these five sections, then there was a semi-sphere dome located above the small windows.

The inside dome had beautiful stuccowork. Above the inside sphere dome, there was an outside dome with its own decorative elements, in other words, there were two layers of domes.

The building is quite imposing as to its formidable size and strength. Its beauty and charm within the green environment of the gardens, give a sense of harmony of nature and science.

THE ANCILLARY BUILDINGS OF THE MASHRIQU'L-ADHKAR

After the purchase of the A'azam land, in 1886, Jinab-i Mirza Muhammad-Ali Afnan built a building two storey high and a pool, so that the friends could benefit of for their gatherings, etc. The place also was large enough to house the visitors as a guesthouse. This building practically became the gathering place of the friends for the next 16 years.

One of the visitors was Mirza Husayn Yazdi, who arrived in 1894, stayed in the guesthouse and started to establish a school for children. Initially, the place was also used as school. Two years later, in 1896, permission from Abdu'l-Baha arrived to establish a Boy's School. The southwestern border of the land of A'azam was spared for the school building. Soon this school got a fame of being the best school and had very good attendance.

In 1911, with the approval of the beloved Master again, a Girl's School became established on the opposite side of the A'azam Land, on the southeastern part. These were the first ancillary buildings of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.

The piece of land, which was purchased from the Russian women on the northwestern of the land of A'zam and was added to the whole lot, became the Haziratu'l-Quds of the Baha'is, and part of it was also used as the Library and another part specifically was named and used as the House of Teaching. In a later stage, when a new Haziratu'l-Quds was built on the southwestern part of the land, the existing building was converted into a Kindergarten, where the youngsters were taught with the basic Baha'i morals and other human virtues.

In 1918 the first building, which was used as the guesthouse, and was never totally finished, was demolished and in its place, a large gathering hall, called by the Russians friends as 'Dhall', i.e. The Gathering Hall of 19m long by 9.5m wide, took three years to be built and completed and was inaugurated in 1921 at a cost of 12000 Tuman. This became the permanent Haziratu'l-Quds of Ishqabad.

Only seven years later, in 1928, by the decision of the Soviet Government, all the religious gathering halls were nationalized, inclusive of the Baha'is Haziratu'l-Quds and the schools. As much as the Baha'is tried to save their buildings, it became impossible. The Baha'i schools and the kindergarten became the properties of the State. With the latest decision of the government, no attempt was done to build any extra ancillary building. (NB: In this description, Dr Amin does not mention any ancillary building as a clinic or a hospital pertaining to the Faith, at least on the land of A'azam. In fact, in his manuscript, there is no mention of such a function).

By the approval of the Spiritual Assembly in 1934, only a plant nursery was built in order to keep and grow flower plants and other needs of the gardens of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, especially during the hard winters of Ishqabad. This was a large hall of 33 meters long by 10 meters wide and its place was next to the

Kindergarten. Flowers and plants were sold to the public for covering the expenses of the maintenance of the gardens.

As it was mentioned earlier, there is no mention of Baha'i hospital or clinic in the book of Zohuru'l-Haqq of Fadil Mazandarani, or in the manuscript of Ustad Ali-Akbar's, nor in the manuscript of Dr Amin, which deals more with the stories after the completion of the House of Worship. It does however appear in those articles written in recent years but do not source this item.

STORY OF TWO NEW BELIEVERS IN ISHQABAD

Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions in his manuscript the arrival of the friends from Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian background, many were already believers when they arrived and others became believers while there. Some were prominent religious leaders who became ardent believers. There are many interesting stories on many of them, but majority of the stories belong to their past and prior to their move to Ishqabad.

Two of those who became ardent believers in Ishqabad in 1888 were two inseparable friends by the names of Aqa Mashhadi Ali and Aqa Mashhadi Muhammad-Quli. They were intimate friends and had a common business together. When they got tired of their business, they decided to go the presence of Baha'u'llah to the Holy Land. Few days before their arrival to Akka, Baha'u'llah had passed away, where they were lead to the Holy precincts of the Holy remains. They met Abdu'l-Baha and their hearts become filled with His love. Once satisfied of their pilgrimage, they return to Ishqabad.

Aqa Mashhadi Muhammad-Quli was present at the martyrdom of the Jinab-i Haji Muhammad-Rida when the enemies attacked him. Without any fear he went to the fallen body, twice circumambulated around the body of that luminary of the love of God and constantly shed tears, and then took that body which was torn into pieces on his back and carried him to the carvanserai, to be away from the hands of the enemies lest these do more affliction to the body. For this, Baha'u'llah revealed a Tablet to his honor. He was always ready to serve the friends, especially for charity work and helping the poor and desolate, he was always the first to act.

Once this pious man, observed an unseemly act from one of the believers. He could not bear it, he purchased some poison and went to the cemetery, where he

swallowed the poison. When he did not return home, they searched for him and found him still with life in the cemetery. He was taken to the hospital in the A'azam Land and physician was called over, but the next day the poison worked and killed him. It was 1899 when this episode happened.

Aqa Mashhadi Ali, his sole companion was indeed very heartbroken and lonely and ever tearful searching for his friend. He would only be consoled by the service that he could render to the Faith and its servants. He donated that enormous samovar for the Centre and upon his death he wanted whatever his wealth was to be spent on the cemetery wall, in this way, he could even serve the Faith to the last penny.

BAHA'I INSTITUTIONS AND ACTIVITIES IN ISHQABAD

As it was much earlier, the year 1882 the region of Ishqabad seized by the Russian government and that is the time when two believers by the name of Aqa Muhammad-Rida son of Muhammad-Kazim Isfahani, Haji Abdu'r-Rasul, son of Aqa Muhammad-Ali Yazdi moved to Ishqabad. A year later the two colleague builders, Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna and Ustad Muhammad-Rida both from the city of Yazd, established themselves in Ishqabad. Soon after, by the encouragement of Baha'u'llah, friends of Iran started to move to this region in order to escape the sever persecution of the Babis/Baha'is. By the end of 1883 the population of Ishqabad grew steadier and the community become stronger.

The purchase of A'azam land and the martyrdom of the Jinab-i Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani in 1889 whose blood irrigated the institutional tree of the Faith, started to give much positive fruits. The constant arrival of the prominent teachers of the Faith to Ishqabad to settle for short or longer period of time, along with the new pioneers sent by Abdu'l-Baha helped success in the teaching. Friends slowly became successful in their business and becoming known in the city circles as fair and friendly people, and added to this, the good relationship of the local and regional government with the friends, hand in hand helped a good start for the Faith in the region. The golden era of the Faith could be marked in 1928 – 1930, where there was the zenith of fame for the Baha'i community in all circles.

The Russian Revolution took place in 1917 and it did touch the southern regions of the country only negligibly during the Lenin era in 1925. Although the influence of atheism and godlessness was becoming strong every year, from 1921 to 1925, the government representatives in the large Baha'i meetings

trying to shake the foundations of the Faith were practically dismissed. As soon as Stalin established his government with strong fist, things started to change for the Baha'is too. The government was becoming alert that their only strong adversary is indeed the Baha'i Faith. They were not at all concerned with the other old Faiths. As they saw themselves impotent to resist the Cause of Baha'u'llah, they decided to root it out from the foundation. They targeted the building of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, as the heart of this community and nationalized it and its leaders such as the strong and knowledgeable believers together with the members of the institutions were imprisoned and harshly treated. Many of the believers were exiled either back to Iran or to Siberia in a very severe climatic condition and infinitely and systematically were tortured. The book of 'Years of Silence' by Asadu'llah Alizad, printed in 1999 by George Ronald, is highly recommended to be studied in this regard. This book so far, is the only evidence showing how the friends were treated and tortured. Some died and few could finish their sentence, like Mr. Alizad and eventually return to Iran. Thanks to his sharp memory, he was able to write later on his memoirs, which are precious part of the Baha'i literature.

Around the time of the completion of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar the population of the Baha'is in Inshqabad reached to almost four thousand, and there were some Persian Baha'is in other cities of Russia at the time. When the revolution of 1918 happened, at the beginning there was no opposition to the Faith. Yet in the "official gazette of the new Soviet regime in 1922 an article was published indicating that the Baha'is were turning the thoughts of the Russian youth from Bolshevism to their own religion and beliefs and consequently, their efforts should be stopped". Of course there were some concern among the Baha'is by the appearance of such an article, but there was no open hostility until after the death of Lenin. The first occurrence against Faith started in 1926 where the believers of Moscow were detained and interrogated. All their books and papers were confiscated and in some cases their properties and homes were seized.

The same thing happened in 1928 in Inshqabad, where first the prominent Baha'is were arrested, the Baha'i activities, especially those of the Local Assembly were severely curtailed and suspended. The publications were stopped and their mail was also confiscated.

In the summer of the same year, 1928, government decreed that all the places of worship, churches, mosques and the Baha'i House of Worship were to become the property of the State. In fact, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was barred from

attendance for a period of three months and the government put it for rent in the meanwhile, forcing the Baha'is to rent their own place, and they succeeded the Baha'is to rent their own place of worship with a high rental for a period of five years. In 1933 the lease of the House of Worship was renewed but after a period of relative calm, the government decreed again after two years that the structures could be returned to their original owners provided they do a major repair on them, a kind of trick to get the repairs done and to confiscate it again at the expense of the owners within six months. Money was quite scarce and communication with the outside world was much restricted. The Baha'is of all over Russia had to make a special sacrifice, to sell the remaining of their possessions in order to meet with the tricky request of the State. The repair work was completed before time and the Temple was returned to the Baha'is.

Baha'is resumed their activities, their public meetings, which they had them twice a week. Baha'i principles in four languages were written in big letters, written on a big sign and placed it outside at the entrance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. The Haziratu'l-Quds' large hall was having activities again in full with music and chanting; other activities were also in place. But soon the trick was discovered as on the 5th of February 1938, almost at the end of the second lease period all the members of the Local Assembly and a large number of the Baha'is altogether 400 believers, were arrested right from their houses. The houses were searched during the same night of the public arrest, then all the books, Tablets, Baha'i records and whatever articles were all confiscated. The active women in the institutional affairs of the Faith were taken to prison.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was seized again. The law of Soviet government this time was as a requirement of a religious community to have at least fifty members for to maintain a place of worship. During the excess of force, the Baha'is had many gone back to Iran and many of them have been exiled to different parts or imprisoned, which made the population to rather minimum. Soon after this event, the Soviet government took control of the House of Worship and converted it to an art gallery, keeping it in its original condition, which for many, it was profane and not at all dignify of the stature of a House of Worship. But the divine decree and patience came to its end when in 1948 ten years later, a strong earthquake shook the region and demolished the entire city. The House of Worship was also badly damaged. It was reported that "although the central rotunda remained intact, it was later on weakened by heavy rains, threatening the houses nearby which were built later on. It remained for 17 years in this state until the Soviet government, for the safety of its citizens, ordered to raze the building to ground

in the year 1963, which coincided with the establishment of the Universal House of Justice in the same year. The House of Justice wrote to the General Secretary of the Soviet Party and the leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khurushchev and requested that the land to be converted into a public park and to mark it as an important spot for the Baha'is of the world. This letter was never answered. But the land was converted eventually to a public park and the statue of the Turkoman poet, Makhtumquli was installed at the center of the pool where once the Mashriqul-Adhkar stood. Makhtumquli was the mystic of the seventeenth century and has some poetries regarding the coming of Baha'u'llah.

SOME INTERESTING INSTITUTIONAL DATA

1. By 28 February 1918, the 3rd day of the Ayyam-i-Ha of 74 Badi, the first Local Youth Committee was established under the name of 'The United Baha'i Youth Committee of Ishqabad' and its acting committee, was 'The Acting Committee of the Baha'i Youth' officiated its work with the youth.
2. By the request of Abdu'l-Baha, the first Baha'is-Women gathering was established for the deepening of girls and women in the Baha'i teachings. This was organized by Mirza Muhammad Sabet (Thabit), who taught the equal right in all aspects and freedom of women to equalize their rights with those of men. By the year 1909, Mr Sabet, organized for the first time the 'Majma' Taqdis' (the gathering of purity' and educated two of the maidservants of God, thus decisively acting on this principle of Baha'u'llah. These two ladies became the erudite among the women. One was called Mu'allimih khanum and the other Qudsiyyih khanum.
3. The Khorshid-e Khavar (The Eastern Sun) under the leadership of Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani who also was its chief editor, and some other knowledgeable believers as well as some active youth, started by 1917. The copies of this weekly magazine were mailed to most of the Baha'i communities of the world. The contents of the magazine were quite informative and appreciated by the end receivers.
4. The Teaching Committee under the auspices of the Local Assembly was the most important committee and usually consisted of some 15 members appointed by the Assembly. This Committee was quite active in teaching the Faith first with those of Persian origin who were living in Ishqabad and later on as soon as it became possible opened its circles to the European people who were sympathetic towards the Faith and they were quite successful in their endeavor. Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani was one of its prominent members due to his scholarship in the Faith.

Because Ishqabad was a central city in that region with a railroad connection as well as safe land road to most of the cities, Muslims pilgrims from Caucasia and other areas would use the Ishqabad in order to go to Mashhad for pilgrimage, visiting the Shrine of their 8th Imam – Imam Reza (Rida). The Faith being well known in that city and the existence of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as the clear sign, and both the local population as well as the government knowing well the Baha'is, made it easy to teach the Faith with liberty and freedom, being Ishqabad the crossroad of the Baha'i teachers back and forth.

In 1893 Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani was called by the Master to go to the Holy Land. Soon the gap was filled when his nephew who moved to Ishqabad, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani and the teaching of the Faith continued with full zeal and enthusiasm that sometimes would overboard.

Once, after the formal recognition of the Faith by the Russian government, a member of the Teaching Committee, a certain Ustad Baman-Ali, a master builder, without consulting either the institutions or other believers, wrote on a piece of paper addressing the Muslims saying: 'O ye Islamic people, ye that follow His Holiness Lord of Messengers (Muhammad), and are waiting for over a thousand years the Promised One, know ye that He has come and the Lord of the Martyrs (Siyyidush-Shuhada – Imam Husayn) has also returned, and the light of these two Luminaries have illumined all the world and the Baha'is are their followers and this Mashriqu'l-Adhkar which has risen to the skies, is their Temple. If ye are real worshippers of God and would like to see this Truth, meetings are held in the main hall and other Baha'i gatherings are being held every day at the houses of Baha'is and their doors are open to everyone. It should do ye good if you would leave the negligence and come after the reality in order to recognize this Truth and ye reach the shores of salvation both in this world and the next.

The said piece of paper was about to be glued on the door of the entrance to the most important mosque of the town at the time when the Muslims were leaving the mosque after their dawn prayer. Catching him red-handed. They considered this a general public invitation of the Baha'is. Therefore, they attacked him violently. If it were not for the intervention of some passers-by Baha'is in that hour of the day going to open their business, Baman-Ali would be a dead person. The Baha'is told the mob

that this man for sometimes now has lost his mind and has gone mad, thus, tried to rescue him and this matter would have become an issue of great importance.

The government wrote to the Local Assembly and formally requested an explanation. The Assembly acknowledged the wrong doing and that this matter has been done unilaterally by one believer without any consultation, condemning this action, promising that such an act will not be repeated again.

The matter was discussed at the meeting of the Teaching Committee, where Ustad Baman-Ali and Aqa Siyyid Mihdi were both members. The matter was discussed and condemned. Ustad was requested by the Committee either resign from the membership of the Committee or pay a fine of 25 silver Tuman to the 'fine box'. Ustad Baman-Ali humbly paid the fine and sheepishly said: "I paid the fine, yet I don't listen to your condemnation. You are right to condemn me because you are not constantly in contact with the Holy Writings. If you would also read the Holy Tablets, and would have tasted their sweetness, all would have act as I did!!"

5. Another institutional activity of Ishqabad community was a special weekly meeting by the name of European Meetings, whose seekers were the Russian erudite and important people of that background. Themes discussed were religion from scientific point of view, proving the religion by reason. The result of such meetings was quite successful. Many accepted the Faith and much people became friends of the Faith.
6. The other active committee was called the Committee for Service, whose membership would rise to 19 individuals. This Committee's function was to organize all kinds of meetings and their programs, celebrations and the Nineteen Days Feast. All these meetings were held in the main hall of the Haziratu'l-Quds. At the adjacent refreshment room –the Tearoom – there were three samovars (teapots), one oversize, one medium and the other one a smaller in size, depending on the quantity of the participants, the corresponding teapot would be prepared for tea. And sometimes all three of the samovars would be serving at the same time when more than a thousand people would join the meeting, occupying both the hall and the balconies.

7. The Local Spiritual Assembly as the head of the community and institutions held its weekly meetings and in many cases go to extraordinary meetings in order to deal with such a large community. Both the Chairman and the Secretary of the Assembly would be engaged the whole day dealing with the matters of the community.

The Soviet government added to all the burden of the Local Assembly by constantly causing problems. Nationalizing the Baha'i educational and religious institutions, adding heavy taxes on them, charging with high insurance amounts, making fake maintenance accounts adding to already high expenses of the Faith there.

By 1930, the government advanced their daring behavior by imprisoning the active and erudite believers and when it was tried to seek their release, they were exiled back to Iran. Slowly this tactic of the government made the believers to start leaving Ishqabad and going back to Iran in big groups. Until 1938 a heavy blow to the activities of the Faith was given by the State in order to destroy the very foundation of all activities. All the active members were taken to prison and a while later they were either exiled to Iran or to Siberia.

The gardener who was also the custodian of the A'azam land in general, Aqa Hasan Bakhshandegi (grandfather to Dr Amin Bakhshandegi), who was serving in that position for over 13 years, 48 hour visa was given to leave Ishqabad and the State seized the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar and all its dependencies. The gardens soon became a public part.

BAHA'I SCHOOLS OF ISHQABAD

a. BOYS SCHOOL 1896

Dr Amin mentions in his manuscript that Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna, an early pioneer to Turkmenistan, prior to his final departure to Yazd and consequently becoming a martyr there, wrote to Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Afnan that the Baha'is of the area need a teacher for the education of their children. The recipient of this request, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Afnan, who knew the background of a certain believer by the name of Haji Mirza Husayn entitled Mu'allim (Teacher), brought this request to his attention that if he is interested, arrangements could be done for his transfer to Ishqabad. Mu'allim wholeheartedly accepted this proposal of educational service and pioneering in the path of God, hurriedly prepared his

wife (Maryam-Sultan) and his two children (Munavvar 9 and Enayatu'llah 7) leaving Yazd and rushed to Ishqabad. It took them two months to reach to their destination in the year of 1894. As soon as he reached the land of A'azam, he didn't lose time, prepared benches and started his classes for the children.

After Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani arrived to Ishqabad from the Holy Land, he joined forces with Haji Mirza Husayn in order to attend to rapidly growing number of the children and pre-youth, due to flow of the Persian believers to the city.

As soon as some families pioneered to the city of Marv, there too needed teachers, thus, Haji Mirza Husayn moved to Marv engaging himself with the children of that city, where he remained there for two years. In Ishqabad, the growing number of pioneers and the problem of the different age of the school children all at the hand of Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani, needed to have Haji Mirza Husayn to return to Ishqabad and together again embark on a larger scale project in order to respond to this problem.

The ever-growing number of students and lack of enough teachers, made the community to create their first formal school. They wrote the matter to the beloved Master, Who gave them the blessing of starting their school. With His approval, the community approached the government and applied for permission to have formal Baha'i community school. The Russian government granted the permission and the Boys School was established in 1896 by the efforts of their founders, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi and Haji Mirza Husyan as the teachers of the school, hiring also a Russian-speaking teacher to teach Russian language to the children.

Gradually, the school grew bigger in size and more teachers came to serve. Aqa Sheikh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini, Aqa Taqi Kahn, Aqa Shaikh Heydar and certain Mr. Sulaymani (no name is being mentioned by Dr Amin, yet it could have been Mr. Aziz'ullah Sulaymani, the historian and erudite believer of Khurasan). Some non-Baha'i teachers were also hired to cover teaching different subjects at the school. The curriculum of the school was according to the program of the Department of Education of Russia. Classes were conducted in Russian and some Persian classes were also kept in the curriculum. Arabic was also part of the literature, according to the books received from Iran. Baha'i classes were freely conducted according to the approval of the government.

Aqa Shaikh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini a truly erudite of the Faith, for the deepening of the friends in the matter of the Faith, authored a book under the title of

“Durusu’d-Diyanah”- Lessons on Religion. This was the very first book, which became a text. The text contained matters on the principles and ordinances of the Faith and the Baha’i beliefs, in a simple but logical, convincing and in a clear language. Aqa Shaikh Muhammad-Ali also in classes dictated to the students another book based on questions and answers to increase their general knowledge. The students took down the dictations in a separate notebook.

The School functioned as a Baha’i school and the students were brought up wholly with Baha’i education, morals and Baha’i spirit from every point of view.

Abdu’l-Baha had instructed that all the students before the start of the classes say the following prayer: (un-authorized translation) “O God, protect the children that have been born in Thy day and have drank milk from the breast of Thy love, and educate them in the bosom of Thy succor. O God, illumine them with the light of Thy knowledge and adorn them with Thy moral standard”.

b. GIRLS SCHOOL 1911

Effort had to be done to educate the female children of the community, knowing that their education precedes the education of the boys.

Haji Mirza Husayn would only teach girls and women of the community at their houses, also deepening them in the matters related to the Faith. This method was continued until Haji Mirza Husayn after asking the blessings of the Master, established the Girls School in 1912 through a pilgrim, (Nb: the granted permission from the beloved Master should have been obtained prior to His departure to the West). In a Tablet addressed to Haji Mirza Husayn, Abdu’l-Baha highly praised this thought and assured him of divine confirmations and blessings.

The community of Ishqabad, according to the strict obedience to the Master’s instructions endeavored to establish this highly valued matter and on the southwest of the A’azam land, identical to the Boys school, another building with various classrooms was built as the Girls School. Two subjects of the curriculum taught by Haji Mirza Husayn and one subject by Shaikh Ahmad-e Oskui to the girls (not specified). Soon after the transfer of the girls to the new school, more friends sent their daughters to the school to become educated. The Girls School the same as the Boys School, had the blessing of the Master and the approval of the Russian government.

Soon a local Russian woman was hired to teach Russian language to the girls. Slowly the Girls school was expanded due to the growth of the Baha'i population, which required more teachers and gave a much better quality to the education of the girls, bringing it to the level of the boys' education. All based on Baha'i education with emphasis on the Baha'i culture and its way of life such as cleanliness, truthfulness, loyalty, chastity, courtesy and good morals, as well as all other principles mentioned in the Holy Writings.

These schools among all similar centers of education were an outstanding example.

Girls, before the start of their morning classes, would recite the Holy verses in loud voice, such as 'be chaste with your eyes, trustworthy with your hands, truthful with your tongues and reminding in your hearts'. This was because the moral and spiritual education takes precedence to any other education.

Another teacher of the both schools was Husayn Big Kucherlinsky, who was invited by the Local Assembly to join the Ishqabad community from Baku of Azerbaijan in 1925 specifically to teach the Russian language. He soon became very popular among the teachers and students.

The other teacher who himself was one of the former students of the Boys School was Aqa Hasan Fuady (author of the book of The History of Khurasan). He had an excellent managerial capacity. First he became schoolteacher and soon he was elected as the headmaster of the schools causing much progress in that center of education.

Shaykh Heydar Mu'allim, also from the time of his arrival Ishqabad in 1905, he taught at the schools for 30 constant years. He was hand selected by Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini mentioned earlier as one of the early teachers of the schools.

Mirza Muhammad Sabet (Thabit) also managed the affairs of the school for sometime. He was an excellent Baha'i travel teacher, especially in the Azerbaijan and Caucasian areas.

Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani who also was one of the early teachers who became the headmaster of the schools. He managed the school's affairs with excellence.

Each and every one of these spiritual personages, rendered invaluable services in the growth and up-bringing the Baha'i Schools of Ishqabad.

After the establishment of the Girls and Boys schools, the Baha'i kindergarten was established as mentioned earlier, whose best period of success was from 1928 onwards until its confiscation; and Mirza Muhammad Sabit and his wife managed the kindergarten at the instructions of the Local Assembly, the function, which they carried with excellence.

In a Tablet to the Schools Board of Ishqabad, Abdu'l-Baha wrote in 7 July 1919 in which He acknowledges the receipt of their elegantly written letter where they mention of their high endeavor of educating boys and girls and He says that this is the most important of all matters. All efforts should lead and all means should be prepared for their education, because this is what makes the world of humanity to shine. He relates the education of the children with the completion of the Mashriqul-Adhkar, which should lead the children's education to perfection. War could not stop either one of them in Ishqabad. He exhorts that the circles of education should be widened for higher centers to be established so that the City of Love to become the centre of sciences and crafts of the Baha'is. And then He assures them that with the confirmation of the Blessed Beauty the means will be prepared.

Then exhortation of the Master concentrates on the education of girls, because the progress of the world of women will show the greatness of this Revelation and wonders of this Cycle. This is why all over, the world of women is on progress and this is because of the influence of this Great Revelation and the power of the Divine Teachings. He affirms that in the schools, the spiritual education take precedence to all other educations. First the love of God and the observance of the teachings should be established in the hearts of the children then other sciences be taught.

Abdu'l-Baha hopes that such centers of education would also open in other cities such as Marv, Qahke, Takht-bazar and Tashkent. This is upon the friends' efforts to open the circles of education in those areas.

STORY OF THE BIRT OF THE MAGAZINE KHURSHIDE - KHAVAR

After the episode of the martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani on the 8 of September 1889 and the court case period of four months, finally the justice system ended ruling in favor of the Baha'is. The Baha'i Faith was separated from Islam and became known before the government and the general public as an

independent religion. Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani was a real leader in this matter, which led to the Faith's triumph. The condition of the Cause of God and the living condition of the friends improved in Ishq-abad. A relative calm was established, which lead many seekers to search freely at the firesides and inquire about the Faith and many accepting the Faith of God, resulting the teaching activities of the Faith disseminating far and wide. This lead Abu'l-Fada'il Gulpaygani to consider of having a self run newspaper and a printing shop and was insistent on this matter. He lost hope in Ishq-abad, and wrote to Tihran, describing in these words: "Everyone knows well how a newspaper can be effective in disseminating the teachings of God, and at present there is no a better other place but Ishq-abad for such an enterprise. This servant has explained to the friends of the high importance of this matter, yet no one seems to become aware this issue and no assistance is being received in this regard. This servant has consulted with the people of importance and there is no hindrance on for its accomplishment, the government is prepared to give permission. And at the present, there is a Russian person who is quite knowledgeable, able with proven friendship. It is possible to have the newspaper in his name and this servant will act as his secretary. Wisely, many matters could be written in it with wisdom. If a printing shop is being established here in Ishq-abad, it could do much good for these regions, as, there is no printing facilities neither in Khurasan, Kharazm, Bukhara and Samarqand, not even in Afghanistan...as a result nowadays, a newspaper today can be more effective than a thousand (Baha'i) teachers and assistants. In Europe the misguided Iranians, wrote and printed many articles, giving wrong concepts of the Faith to the public – as being attested in the revealed holy Tablets. I brought the importance of this matter to the attention of the friends, yet no one has so far arisen to help towards its realization..."

Jinab-i Abu'l-Fada'il was not able to establish a newspaper in Ishq-abad then, and soon he was called by Abdu'l-Baha to go to the Holy Land. He gave his excuse in delaying his trip because Ishq-abad had recently gathered importance due to its centrality; many pilgrims from Iran travelling back and forth through Caucasia and Ishq-abad for their pilgrimage to Mashhad visiting the Shrine of Imam-Rida. The Baha'is of Ishq-abad were all well known and quite famous with their identity. The martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani has caused a clear separation between the friends and foes, therefore, it is necessary that a learned and well informed Baha'i to be residing in this city so that to help to answer the forthcoming questions when necessary and satisfy the needs of the seekers, resolving their queries, and until such a person is not staying here in this city, it is not beneficial for the believers to leave and desert this place. Soon after Jinab-i

Abu'l Fada'il left Ishqabad, Abdu'l-Baha sent Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani from the Holy Land to Ishq-abad. He arrived in 1893.

When the government decided to produce a newspaper/magazine in Persian language, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani was appointed to the position of chief editorial, paying him a satisfactory salary. That newspaper was called 'Majmu'e Ma-vara' Bahr-e Khazar (News of the Caspian Sea area). It didn't stay functioning for long.

After the triumph of the Revolution of Russia, the dictatorial Empire governorship ended and the Soviet government took over. The new government gave freedom of writing and speech. This opened the doors and gave the means of teaching the Faith with liberty. Then the friends decided to establish their own Baha'i magazine.

Aqa Husayn Tamaddoni from Azerbaijan was at the forefront of this idea. He was an open-minded man. What triggered his mind was the day that he was reading a newspaper from Mashhad called Nobahar when he was standing next to the House of Worship, he realized that its publisher Shaikh Ahmad Bahar, has written an article attacking the Cause of God, containing untrue matters on the Baha'i Faith. He took the matter to a certain Mirza Mihdi Rashti, who was a wealthy and a well-respected believer who always was thinking of how he can to promote the Faith. Showed him the article and said that if there would be a Baha'i publication, good answer publicly could be given to this kind of nonsense articles. Aqa Mirza Mihdi Rashti was deeply touched by the lack of such a medium then, both decided to establish a publication. They decided to take this matter with some prominent and knowledgeable friends in order to be able to meet the costs. To do this, they thought of a certain amount as down payment and would ask others to help to this end. They also thought of Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani as its manager. Without losing time, they travelled to Marv by train in order to meet Aqa Siyyid Mihdi and opened the matter with him, who liked the idea and agreed with the proposition, provided a teacher to replace him in Marv and take over the work of the teaching the children in that city. Mirza Husayn Yazdi became the candidate.

They took the train back to Ishq-abad and on the way, they planned how to make a meeting with the friends in order to contribute for such an enterprise. Two days after their arrival to Ishq-abad, they invited some of the prominent friends such as Abdu'l-Vahhab Shahidi, Zia'ullah Asghar-zadih, Ali-Akbar Aliov,

Mashhadi-Ali Asgharov, Aqa Ahmad-i Aqa Husaynov, Aqa Mir-Ali Asghar Faridi Oskoui and Ustad Abdu'l-Karim Baghirov Yazdi. They all met together and the matter was explained the whole to them, telling them how they can help for the realization of the plan. The whole budget was contributed and means to transfer Mirza Husyan Mu'allim Yazdi, the teacher to Marv was prepared. They gathered around 15000 Munat (Russian money) and they also chose the name for the magazine, 'Khurshid-e Khavar (The Sun of the East), and they divided the basic tasks among themselves.

Zia'u'llah Asgharzadih was appointed to get the proper permissions for such a magazine from the government.

Aqa Ahmad-i Aqa Husyanov was appointed to find a proper place to establish the publication of the Magazine.

Abdu'l-Vahhab Shahidi took the responsibility of preparing the stationary.

Husayn Tamaddoni was the person to travel to Marv to make the preparations of transferring Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani and his family to Ishq-abad.

In their second meeting the distribution of the finances and salaries for the maintenance of such an enterprise was agreed. The Committee was called from then on as 'The Committee of the Magazine of The Sun of the East' and during the first week, the first edition of the magazine was prepared and distributed. Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani was truly a dedicated manager and a thorough perfectionist as attested by Abdu'l-Baha. As long as he was alive, he was busy with that sublime work, and after his passing on the 22 February 1928 at the age of 66, the publication of the magazine of The Sun of the East unfortunately came to its end.

Magazine's most articles was written by the powerful pen of pen of Aqa Siyyid Mihdi, although many times he would also write an essay at the request of a friend and would publish it on the name of the person who requested it. Thus was his high standard and humility.

Ishqabad was the Center of open and free activities to all who the residents and the travelers. The knowledgeable and rudite Baha'is who came to give classes, made their publishing of the material on the Faith freely and relatively in big numbers. Compilation of the Holy Tablets as well as books of proof on the Faith were mostly written in Persian and Arabic, were published there. There were constant classes on teaching the Arabic language for the sake of studying the Holy Tablets. Some of the publications would be shared with the magazine of 'The Star of the West' published in the United States.

With the help of the youth a Baha'i theater was created and became popular in Ishq-abad. Many youth were engaged with passion to partake and try hard to excel in their role (no name of the choreographer).

Another interesting phenomena that engaged many believers was writing songs and performing Baha'i choir. In most of the celebrations, groups of youth would perform. One of the most popular songs was the song of 'Allah'u'Abha', which would start saying: 'Friends, call the name of Baha', and from the bottom of your hearts chant His beautiful name: Allah'u'Abha, Allah'u'Abha'.

The Beloved Master on the 4 of July 1919, also revealed a Tablet in the honor of the Magazine Committee where He acknowledges the receipt of their letter where He admires and respects their high goals. He mentions that many essays and articles have been published in Iran through the instigation of the Azalis and some have been done directly through them. Those articles, the Master affirms are pure nonsense and brings misunderstanding and these could be corrected only by the means of Words of God. Such a publication would be most beneficial. Abdu'l-Baha affirms that the author is an Azali disguised as a Muslim and is a true enemy of the Faith. These Azalis pretend they are staunch Shi'is and even to Mecca and Karbila and get themselves the titles of 'Haji' or 'Karbilai' and then attack the Baha'is with all kind of nonsense so that they can incite the people and ignite a burning fire, making problem between the Baha'is and the Shi'is. Then Abdu'l-Baha mentions that the simple Iranians are unaware of this kind of plots and the Azali person uses a Siyyid's turban (green or black only) and pretends that his love for religion has prompted him to sympathize with the people, while he has a hidden agenda of making a big problem among the Iranians, Baha'is and Shi'is, finding the arena open for their intrigues, promoting their own plan and secretly calling the people to their own sect.

Then the beloved Master in His address to the members of the Committee indicates that it would be helpful if this kind of matters is brought up in the articles, and Aqa Siyyid Mihdi is of such a duty as a writer for the magazine. Then the Master instructs that the language of the magazine should be moderate and calm and to the point possible, it should be sympathetic so that no misunderstanding might arise and no one or cause apprehension. At the end, Abdu'l-Baha says that due to too much work he has not been able to study the copies of the magazine sent to him by Aqa Siyyid Mihdi, but He promises that these will be soon studied and if anything needs to be mentioned, He will write to the Committee.

MEETINGS TEACHING THE EUROPEANS (White Russians)

After the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the establishment of the Soviet government, the Teaching Committee of Ishq-abad decided to prepare special meetings to provide the needs of the European seekers and bring the Baha'i message of to their attention.

At the beginning, these meetings were held at the house of Haji Husayn Panahi and only few seekers would come to meet there, and as the quantity of the seekers grew bigger, the venue was changed to the house of Zia'u'llah Asghar-zadih Milani, whose house was bigger and had better way of receiving the seekers and serve them more adequately.

These large meetings were held once a week and the host himself served the guests at his own expense. Some 50 to 60 of the learned Baha'is, men and women were also present. Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani, then would brief the meeting by the opening remarks on the basics of the Baha'i Faith and other philosophical matters, which Dr. Aminu'llah Ahmadzadih would translate his words for the participants into Russian where later the seekers would enter to a period of discussions followed by questions and answers on the spiritual matters, where Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani would answer the questions to the satisfaction of all. These meetings were held for quite a long time and were very successful meetings.

As the quantity of the seekers still became more, the meeting's venue changed to the main hall of the Haziratu'l-Quds, on the A'azam's land. Each week between 500 to 600 people would gather in that venue listening to the speeches on the topics related to the Faith. Many of the European accepted the Faith and a large amount of them became friends of the Faith. Some even would participate giving talks in those meetings.

In such gatherings, sometimes Jinab-i Abbas-i Zein and sometimes Jinab-i Amin'ullah Ahamdzadih would do the interpretation in the most eloquent way.

It was during these period that representatives from the newly formed government would appear to observe and participate in the meetings to present their points of view. These specific types of meetings were initiated on the 8 and 9 of July 1921.

RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION MEETINGS IN THE SOVIET UNION

Freedom of writing and expression of opinion became fact after the Russian revolution in 1917, but the opinion of Vladimir Lenin, as the leader of the revolution as, 'religion is the opium of the society' remained as a concrete fact in the minds of their leaders until 1921 when special governmental committees combating religion were created. Confrontation in Marv and Ishq-abad with the Baha'is who had firm beliefs became a common issue. These meetings, which were held openly and regularly, were called 'religious discussion meetings', yet in fact they were the combat between the materialists and religionists. Some of their staunch and knowledgeable supporters of the materialists were the former famous orthodox church priests that had changed their garb according to the convenient changes of the social atmosphere of the time and with the full support of the government were in the field of combat to confront the religionists. These people had their open discussions on the matters such as: 'The need or the option of a Creator'; 'Are the Prophets good or not for mankind'; 'Do the religions propagate truth or superstition in the society; etc. They had organized huge meetings in different parts of the city and their prime objective was to diminish the religious station and prove the short mindedness of their adherents. The result of some of these meetings even was published in the daily newspapers.

In the beginning, they were successful as, neither Christian priests nor Muslim clergies and other religious leaders were prepared to confront them in their arguments. None of these religious people had anything to prove the philosophy of their religion in the eyes of the present intellectual gatherings. Indeed, during that time, it became clear that these old religions had nothing to offer and they were as strong as the spider's web.

Such meetings were held twice during the governorship of Lenin in 1921 and twice again during the reign of Stalin in 1924 and 1925. The result of these meetings and conversations set the basis and changes of the relationship between the government's policies with the Baha'i Faith and finally, it showed up its true character by nationalizing the Baha'i institutions and consequent difficulties. As a result, the Baha'i Faith showed its strength in that illumined spot and truth from falsehood became manifest by showing its proofs in the middle of the created tests.

The first series of these open discussions were held by officially inviting the leaders and the followers of all the present religions to contribute their points of view. These were held in the Star Club patio in Ishq-abad on 8, 9 and 11 of July

1921. In the first gathering, whose participants number came to close five thousand people, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani first gave an introduction about the history of the Baha'i Faith and the need of the time to adapt its new principles. Dr. Abbas Zein translated the lengthy speech into Russian language. These gatherings were held after sunset till midnight. The members of the government Committee who would give their talks were Messrs. Gosov, Barisov and Sinitsin and the only person who would defend single handedly was Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani.

In the first meeting, Mr. Barisov during his talk hurled an attack towards the Baha'i Faith, which prompted Aqa Siyyid Mihdi to stand up and put his strong objection formally and emphatically with solid proofs to the coordinator of the meeting. He said: "Mr. Sinitsin claims that such meetings with the presence of all who are gathered here is to learn the truth. For thousands of years such meetings have been holding with the presence of the most knowledgeable and erudite and respectable philosophers in the history. And now, a person who counts himself a knowledgeable in this field is attacking an ideology of a group, without knowing anything about them and their culture. I would like to offer my strong objection here on my behalf and behalf of the Baha'i Community". The chairman of the gathering immediately stood up and apologized. He promised that never again such a matter would be repeated in such gatherings.

In the consequent meetings Mr Barisov did not make any more presentations. The story of these meetings is very lengthy and very different from what is being mentioned here in few lines. At the end, it became quite clear to all that the Baha'i Faith is the real life of this era and is according to the true science and logical mind. It also became clear that whatever other bygone religions present, are all made up by the ignorant and superstitious priests.

Similar gatherings were also held in Marv and they invited the adherents of all the religions to come and wrestle with them, yet none of the leaders of religions accepted the invitation, only the bright youthful believer Hasan Fuady, all by himself answered to whatever the materialists presented as questions and responded to their problems against the Manifestations of God. He proved to them the truth and the reality of the religions, the necessity of their manifestations throughout the ages. He could present to them at every strata, his caliber as a Baha'i and the wealth of knowledge his religion has given him.

At the beginning of these meetings, the materialists could probe the taste of defeat, which came upon them unexpectedly, in spite of all their triumph in all other fields, with all the support they needed from their superiors. Their defeat sent them back to their centers in order to become better prepared with newer ammunitions and newer ideas to continue the combat.

These kind of meetings were held on the 10th of December 1924, again on the 24 and 25 of April 1925, and on the 19 and 20 of October of the same year, as well as other propitious times. Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani was always formally invited to those meetings and Dr. Abbas Zein and Dr. Amin Ahmadzadih were the translators. The result of such meetings were briefly mentioned in the local newspapers, and the fame of the Faith slowly became known to the general public, which would attract many people to the Faith resulting, the acceptance of the Faith by many Europeans.

One of the Christian theologians by the name of Yogni Gabranov took part in the meeting of 25 & 26 of April 1925 accompanying Aqa Siyyid Mihdi. Himself an excellent in orator and quite knowledgeable, together with Aqa Siyyid Mihdi confronting Mr. Kalinofski who previously was one of the well-known Christian theologians. In the meeting he spoke against religion, but was pleasantly defeated. Miss Florence Elvin Shub, an American Baha'i Travel teacher was also present in that meeting, but no permission was granted her for a speech presentation.

In those meetings held in 19 & 20 October 1925 Mr. Yogni Gabranov was confronted by the materialism speech of Mr. Arkhanglenski who was before among the renowned Christian theologians before the change of the regime. There were some other materialists. He, with the help of Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani, gave the most satisfactory answers to their questions, which as a result, evoked much interest in the public to come and to know about the Baha'i Faith. The Baha'i message reached the ears of many people who became friends and defenders of the Faith and also its fame provoked much attention and attraction in the people of importance within the government.

Those present in the meetings became cognizant of how Aqa Siyyid Mihdi, would answer any written or spoken questions with eloquence, which would totally satisfy the questioner. His courage and erudition, his universal knowledge in literature and all kind of general information, his wisdom in knowing what kind of answer and when to give, would attract many to see with their own eyes the

ceaseless divine confirmations descending when in the most dangerous and important moments to be able to give convincing answers, showing so clearly the superiority of the New Divine Message over the ancient religious thoughts and the materialism.

After holding such meetings were over, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi made a trip to Moscow, where he met some of the important people with whom he talked about the Faith of God. He gave to those leaders of the Soviet government, the book on the brief history of the Baha'i Faith and its principles, which Mr. Kazim Kazimzadih, son of Haji Muhammad-Kazim of Isfahan, with the help of Aqa Siyyid Mihdi had recently compiled in Russian. He held introductory conversation with them on the tenet of the Baha'i Faith, to the extent that no trace of doubt remained in the minds of the leaders of Kremlin about this New Religion.

In Tashkent the capital of Turkmenistan he met with the learned people of the land and told them the importance of the New Faith of God.

THE CHANGE OF FATE BY THE NEW RUSSIAN REGIME

The previously mentioned renowned Christian erudite, Mr Yogni Gabranov, after his past experiences of the confrontational meetings with the materialists, which were conducted with the help of Aqa Siyyid Mihdi, became a close friend of the Faith. Time and again, he was asked by the Ministry of Culture, to leave his religious robe and accept a position of professorship in the Moscow and Leningrad universities, yet he declined their request, calling those kinds of positions as superfluous. He remained in one of the rooms of a remote Russian church located in a cemetery dedicating in writing, but finally he was forced to move to another place in Kirgizstan and no one heard of him anymore.

Another knowledgeable church leader of equal caliber as Mr. Gabranov in Ishqabad was Mr. Metropolitо Vdenski. The former being the follower of the Old Thoughts and the latter of the New Thoughts of the Russian Christian churches. These two divines both were of much respect within the Baha'i Community.

One of the doubtless influences of such previously mentioned meetings was the proclamation of the Baha'i Faith all around the vast territory of the Russia, which those who were present in the meetings, whatever they had seen and heard from these meetings would take it to their friends. For example, in the city of Auriol, many became Baha'is without any teacher ever gone there and they would

independently correspond with the Assembly of Ishq-abad asking for books and articles on the Faith. Later on the Teaching Committee sent Mr. Husayn Kcherlinski, who was one of the knowledgeable and sincere Baha'is of Ishq-abad to their city in order to deepen and encourage them in the Faith. This teacher met a great many people who were gathered in the National Garden of the city of Auriol and gave a comprehensive talk, which even attracted more people to know about the Faith. Slowly the fame of the Baha'i Faith was wide spread in other cities too and day by day more and more people were coming to know and appreciate the Baha'i message to the extent that those in power came to know the greatness and influence of the Cause of God.

Dr Amin indicates the following in his manuscript:

“In 1927 by the request and guiding of the beloved Guardian, the Baha'i delegates of Turkmenistan in Ishq-abad, around the Ridvan Festivals got together and elected their first National Spiritual Assembly, and all the affairs of the Faith were at the jurisdiction of the newly elected Institution, enabling it to appoint its arms to help to make the Faith to function properly. Their mandate was to protect the Cause of God, to proclaim its tenets and encouraging the believers to travel far and wide, establishing themselves in the vast country of the Russia. The beloved Guardian had already encouraged the friends to master the Russian language and start translating the Baha'i books and propagate them in all the Soviet Republics”.

The first unexpected matter after holding previously mentioned meetings, was the confiscation of the A'azam land and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which made the friends and the institutions very sad. It followed with the arrest of fourteen well known and sincere believers, the real servants of the Cause by the Soviet government and their subsequent confinement to seven months in prison. When all kind of interventions from the local Baha'i Community gave no result, a serious foreign intervention was started and continued. Telegraphs were sent to Iran to the person of Reza Shah, which finally the friends were released from prison, provided within ten days they would leave the land of Soviet Russia and go to Iran. Those who were exiled were:

1. Abbas Ahmadov Parsa'i
2. Aqa Husayn Hasanov
3. Baha'ad-Din Nabili
4. Ahmad Rahimov
5. Mirza Muhammad Thabit

6. Mirza Hasan Bushru'i
7. Ali-Aqa Sattar-Zadiv
8. Mirza Ja'afar Hadiov
9. Aqa Abbas Farajov
10. Aqa Mahmud Zadiv
11. Aqa Muhammad Sar-Chahi
12. Aqa Muhammad-Ali Nabili Sar-Chahi
13. Aqa Abdu'l-Karim Baghirov Yazdi
14. Aqa Mirza Ahmad Nabil-zadiv

These exiled friends prepared their simple luggage and on the morning of 20 of January 1930 presented themselves at the Office of Political Matters and all, were transported by the governmental car, left Ishq-abad for good and were handed at the common border of Bajgiran to the Government of Iran. They went to Mashhad.

These arrests had a negative consequence on the friends of Ishq-abad and trembled the foundations of their permanency in that area, which as a result, many of their relatives as well as some other friends also freely left Ishqabad and went to Iran.

The beloved Guardian after coming to know of the occurrences, asked the friends to act with wisdom and try their best in order not to arouse the animosity of the authorities. He wrote to them telling them that the recent calamities will have their positive influences and their result will be come to light in the in the future in the lands of the Soviets. There are merits in accepting such grave difficulties. He reiterated that there is Divine Wisdom hidden in such occurrences, which are not known to anyone except God. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the friends of God to be thankful in all times and be happy with His will.

During the September 1928, Miss Martha Root wrote a letter to the Holy Land with the following contents:

“We had a very difficult summer period, the conditions of Russia is getting ever worse. The Mashriqul-Adhkar has been seized and plumed. They are asking an enormous amount of money for its rental. If it is not rented, the government will possess it. The situation is quite dire. Many of the friends have left back to Iran. The Baha'i activities are forbidden. The Assemblies are being stopped functioning. Conditions are extremely difficult and punishment great...The

government, after passing the law of nationalizing the religious institutions, has dissolved all the Baha'i institutions until the total completion of their legislative laws. By forced contractual agreement, a yearly taxing system has been put into practice where an amount of 7500 Munat is payable and an amount of 500 Munat for insurance and an amount of 2000 Munat for the general expenses, was imposed on the small community of the Baha'is. This contract was to becoming into effect by the Municipality who was going to be the custodian of the building for 5 years, renewable by the mutual agreement. If the imposed taxes were not going to be paid, in a short period, the interest of the same was to exceed the contractual amount, which was going to be even a greater burden on the economic situation of the friends. The expenses of the maintenance of the building was calculated by the Municipal engineers, who had a wide range of expenses include into their estimate and would add ever growing amount into this budget as they dimmed fit".

This forced contract was done by nothing short than a total enmity. The Baha'is are wide-awake and cleverly aware that this is a preamble to possess all its institutions and total dissolutions of its community in that land. Therefore, before coming to this extent, many friends preferred to leave the country and going back to Iran or any other country, rather than staying and observing the atrocities brought to their community.

The beloved Guardian wrote to the Assembly of Ishq-abad reiterating that leaving of the friends towards Iran is very detrimental to the situation of the Cause of God. Better if they accept citizenship rather than vacating, and they should stop going back to Iran, (This statement, according to the Guardian was misunderstood by the friends of Ishqabad).

The Baha'i institutions Ishqabad as well as some individual Baha'is, tried hard by all different ways to encourage the friends to stay firm; they even went to the governmental offices to apply for citizenship, which would guarantee their stay in the country.

In 1929, through the Central Assembly of Iran, the beloved Guardian asked to bring this matter to the attention of the friends in Ishq-abad not to travel back to Iran, try to stay in their place, not to disperse and wait until the contaminated dust to be cleared and the sun of justice to shed its light.

On the first of January 1929, the beloved Guardian wrote to the friends of the West that the new Soviet policies are applicable to all the religious institutions and of course, the friends of God have no other alternative than to obey the laws, as, it is explicitly ordered by Baha'u'llah to obey the government, and whatever the government orders, they should obey it. The government possesses all the temples and institutions, which includes the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which has been loved by all the Baha'is of the world. The order of the government have been both verbally and in writing to abstain from any form of gathering, even a small assemblage by the Local Assembly is forbidden. They have even forbidden contribution to a charity fund and all other funds are prohibited. The governments has given itself auto-right to search and investigate into the documents of the Assemblies and their decisions, and thoroughly observe all their correspondences being they to or issued by the Assemblies. Publishing Baha'i magazines and books are to forbidden. They will expel the travel and local Baha'i teachers, as well as the members of the Assemblies from the country. Yet the followers of the Blessed Beauty, sad but with loving hearts, with unprecedented steadfastness, all united to in obedience to the ordinances of their Faith, are faithful to the government's laws. He also added that, the friends of God tried with all their power that maybe these laws would be waived, and because they were not able to get into any positive result, they accepted in obedience, but in their hearts they are aware that there is no power in the world that can extinguish the flame of their Faith, therefore, they left all the affairs of the Cause in the hands of the Almighty, as He alone is the Protector of His loved ones, as it has ever been His custom to do so...

The friends of God rented the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar with a very high rental.

Sometimes in early 1930, the beloved Guardian cabled the NSA of the US to act quickly and announce the international character of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. In another message, the Guardian reiterated that if the conditions for such an action was not found or they did not know how to raise their voice of protest in order to show and describe the international character of the Baha'i Faith, have the Local and National Assemblies to bring this matter to the attention of the authorities and to be careful not to make of this a political issue, otherwise, the remaining friends in that region, will be having endless difficulties. The raised voice should only be on the spiritual and human character, which the Baha'is are trying to bring the end results of these actions to the ears of the authorities of the nation, because, the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is an international enterprise. For

this Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, universal contributions have been made in order to make it possible to bring this building to its conclusion...

In spite of all the endeavors from every possible side, insistence in keeping the rights of the Baha'i World Faith, the Russian authorities, who considered the religions and especially the Baha'i Faith against their philosophy and principles, considered their activities are not in accordance with their policies, social matters, national benefits and governmental authorities, therefore, they acted by putting more and more pressure on the Baha'i institutions, and with all their power, rose against this wronged group.

As more the Soviet authorities came to realize the strong international foundations of the Baha'i Cause, its importance and its universality, its versatility and aliveness and its day by day growth, caught the attention of Lenin, who was the leader, he then, tried to strengthen the pressures on the Baha'is ever more. (These matters must have happened before the death of Lenin in 21 January 1924, which is somehow unlikely).

In 1930, a group of 14 prominent Baha'is, by false accusation of teaching 'against the social system of the Russian Soviet Socialist' and teaching 'belief and adoration of God' were deprived of their work, and imprisoned for a period of seven months, and finally with the general activities of the Baha'i International Community and the intervention of the government of the Shah of Iran, with the condition of their exit from the Soviet Russia within 15 days, they were put in liberty and in 22nd of January 1930, all of these Baha'is were exiled to Iran.

This governmental action brought a relative void in the Baha'i Community as well as a fear and uncertainty of their future, deeply hurt them, made them heartbroken and disappointed. This was and they knew, a prelude to yet another wave of difficulties and persecution against themselves. Therefore, some of the families joined the beloved exiled friends and some because of lack of certainty and assurance in their future, left the Russian territory towards Iran or other countries of their choice, shrinking the foundations of their well-established Community.

The beloved Guardian cabled the friends of Ishq-abad in the current issues to completely obey the governmental orders.

Not only all the hard work towards the safekeeping and protecting of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar did not give any good result, but also any assurance of individual or communal safety, which was coming under attack, was becoming strongly perilous.

The government abstained giving permission to the Baha'is to keep on staying in that Land and slowly, they gave it a socio-political character as a sign of total destruction of this Community in the Soviet Russia.

The year of 1933 marked 5 years of the nationalization of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and it was the time to renew the forced contract again. During this period, the prayer gatherings in an unsecure and under watchful eyes had made the friends very stressful. They did not have a tranquil mind, which is the main aspect of praying at His Threshold, this important element was missing in their midst. After so much effort done through the International Baha'i Community, the terms of the new contract for the rental of the House of Worship changed. The government had already planned to have the un-necessary maintenance expenses of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which rose to 20000 Munat for the small Baha'i Community to be covered by the friends. The matter was cabled to the Holy Land. Some other activities were also tried by the Foreign Ministry of the King's government of Iran through its corresponding embassy in Moscow and the matter was investigated which gave some relatively good results. The matter of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar remained still and to a certain degree, the Community was relieved from the payment of exuberant expenses.

In 1936, the Soviet Government started again with new activities by imposing with pressure payments of un-necessary expenses for the maintenance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and that of the Baha'i Center, which if they would not be met, according to the law, they would totally confiscate the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and all its dependencies. The NSA of Turkmenistan, observing the urgency and the importance of the matter within a short time, made an urgent appeal to all the friends residing in Turkmenistan and Caucasia for extraordinary help, and as per unprecedented and sacrificial response to the appeal, the cost of the expenses were met on time and the repairs were made to the premises, relieving the Community yet from another perilous danger.

The Baha'i schools being considered as a part of the general and educational institutions, they had also become nationalized. Lack of open and green space and sport facilities for both girls and boys schools as well as the kindergarten,

which were at the three corners of the A'azam land, became the excuse of considering some of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar's lands for this purpose, including them in the school areas, and the Mashriqu'l-Adkhar's space to be limited to its building and its immediate surroundings and its main access to become from a secondary street. They argued that the place of worship does not need gardens and surrounding beautiful green areas. All the churches and mosques are limited to the buildings only with no gardens with flowers and shrubs. This new decision of the authorities, again rose the protesting voices of the battered community, adding one more problem to those existing ones, yet this prompted them to act quickly, with might and power against this decision, until they convinced the authorities annul the recent decision, and the situation remained favorable as before and the beautiful Temple remained with no extra condition as their worshipping and sacred place. The only urging matter was the necessary repair as already planned. This gave a relative mental tranquility to the friends. Yet, the payments for the imposed taxes and insurance expenses were duly operative.

Nine years of nationalization of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar had passed and during all these years, the Spiritual Assembly and the Baha'i individuals were continuously engaged in defending the rights and the benefits of the Faith, by contacting and communicating the governmental authorities, and the guidance of the Baha'i World Center, to a certain degree the rights of the Baha'i Community were respected and restored, and the government kept its calm and silence. Yet, this calmness was the calmness before a mighty hurricane, it was the prelude to intensification of hard decisions after the death of Lenin which came shortly.

In the year 1925, Joseph Stalin sat on the throne of power. For bringing total and general order, as well as strengthening the pillars of his power and repelling the doubts from the minds of his associates started a plan of extermination, so that according to him, to establish the people's government in the Soviet Russia first, and then adhere to the external powers. Therefore in 1938, he started with cleaning up the army and the governmental departments, and next, the Russian society. The riches of the powerful were all confiscated and they either were hanged or exiled to Siberia. The unwanted ones were all hanged and those doubtful were all sent to exile to Siberia with the sentence of hard work. Nearly 20 million people were annihilated. The religious groups were under scrutiny and wrath; at the top of which was the Baha'i Faith. All the religions were annihilated and their leaders either were killed or exiled.

On the morning of 5th of February 1938, there appeared a great worry and uncertainty among the Baha'is and their center of which was the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. At the midnight of the previous night, the houses of all the Baha'is were searched by the harsh manners of the security officers of the government and all the books, writings, pictures and other objects were confiscated and all the prominent and the members of the Spiritual Assembly, be them men or women were arrested and sent to prison. The number of those who were first arrested 500, and soon the number raised to 600. The interrogation of these friends by the Soviet government officials was absolutely harsh and extremely rough, accusing them of subversive work against the government and to the benefit of other foreign countries. Pre-accusation for each of the Baha'is was already prepared and the declaration form was suppose to be signed, and in order to achieve this, they were subject to all kinds of pressure and torture, and unless these said forms were properly signed, the accused ones would go through lots of difficulties and injuries. Those who would deny the charges would several times be taken to dig their own graves with their own hands in the ground, and this kind of threat to death was a common act. Many after signing such a document were hanged, and others died due to injuries received. The information of the death of 22 of the friends' in the prison leaked out sometime later. And only 240 of the Baha'i prisoners on the 29th of October 1939, some alone and others together with their families were exiled to Siberia housed far from each other. Some were sent back to Iran. Many of the families, without any funds, were forced to leave Russia, which made them to wander around. Many of those who were exiled to Siberia passed away. A small group of them, after the WWII were released and headed to Ishq-abad and later on exiled to Iran. Many of the friends, young and old, due to the tortures received, were severely affected both mentally and emotionally.

The Baha'i institutions and the Community were totally annihilated. The lives and possessions of the friends were lost and confiscated by the government personnel, until nothing remained from that wonderful and progressive Baha'i Community. A mere small number of the friends, who became Russian citizen, after losing their family supporters, remained in that country and are still living there.

THE CUSTODIAN'S STORY

Haji Hasan Bakhsandegi, the custodian and the gardener of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar who was living in the vicinity of the Haziratu'l-Quds, was called in three

times for interrogation by the intelligence service. The first time taking the gardener with them, they thoroughly searched the Mashriqu'l-Adkhar and the Haziratu'l-Quds, going through all corners of the A'azam land, using their special sophisticated systems and took note of whatever pertained to the Faith. They prepared the list of all the pertinences and had him signed it, making him the custodian on behalf of the government, and then he was let go.

After some times, they called him again to the Intelligence office and after much discussion, they ordered him according to their previous meeting, to take all the possessions of the premises, leaving them at the entrance doors of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and Haziratu'l-Quds, then to lock and plumb the doors, taking the keys to the office, and then he would be working and residing as the gardener of the premises nominated by the government.

Mr. Bakhshandagi, snubbed their offer, which caused sever pressure on him and he was much threatened yet he was adamant of accepting their offer, calling himself a simple gardener. He insisted that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar pertained to the International Baha'i Community and he had no right to become an intruder. The threats went on for three days from the morning to the evening and during the night he would be sent home only to come back again the next day.

The threats did not work on the Custodian and he did not sign any promissory note and did not accept any responsibility as he was asked to. Mr. Bakhshandegi clearly explained that only the Spiritual Assembly is the Custodian and responsible for the highly regarded Temple, whose members are imprisoned by the government. No one else has any right or can do anything in this regard. Thus, he took away from himself absolutely any right of interfering in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar's affairs and did not become the plaything in the hands of those who were forcing him to do so, leaving all the responsibilities to their own hands. Finally, after many arguments, they agreed to nominate him as the caretaker of the gardens only working for the government until they find another solution.

When the third time that Mr. Bakhshandegi was called in by the intelligence officers, again, his wife prepared his suitcase like the previous times, with all the necessary items in case he is imprisoned, so that he would not remain without provisions and adequate clothing, as, she was totally hopeless of any favorable situation.

The officers insisted again on their previous offer with all kinds of threats and promises, found him adamant and non-cooperative with their plan, therefore they gave him an already prepared 48 hours visa to leave the country. As, there were no medium of transport, he gathered few items and together with his wife and two children, using a tractor, covering the distance from Ishq-abad to Bajgiran, the border town with Iran, and once at his own country, through the Iranian government, could finally could reach his town of Yazd.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the Haziratu'l-Quds and the gardens were remained without custodian. From that vibrant community, only few old men and women who had become Russian citizens, no one else had remained behind. None of which had the strength to take care of the premises. The government of Russia had possessed all the Baha'i real-estate and other properties, and exiling the last remnant of the community Mr. Hasan Bakhshandegi who was the grandson of the Hand of the Cause of God, Mulla Muhammad Rida Muhammad Abadi, and his wife Sughra khanum, the caretaker of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.

Shortly after, that great and respectable Temple became the place of art exhibition. That confiscated sacred spot, gave its place for nine years to every kind of arts and artists; up until the destiny changed and the powerful hands of the Omnipotent, once for all, cut short the grasping hands of the confiscators, from His ominous Temple, those ungodly people who were using that sacred spot for all kinds of ungodly affairs.

In an early morning day in the month of October 1948, nine years after the total confiscation of the Baha'i premises, a mighty earthquake shook the whole region of Ishq-abad and flattened the city. No records were left of the quantity of the people who lost their lives. From that great city, the center of business and industry, the only remaining building was the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, whose handsome and greceful dome had only cracks yet its two minarets were broken and ruined. As it was irreparable, the government with the use of dynamite, totally flattened the building, thus, all the physical and spiritual traces of the vibrant Baha'i community were no more.

There are yet remnants of Baha'is residing in that territory, such as grandchildren of Sughra khanum, the faithful caretaker of the Mashriqu'l-Adkhkar and some other friends, who are still living there and every now and then there come some news from them. The exact quantity of the remaining

friends is not known, but statistics will, for sure, be prepared in the future. Their brief story will be mentioned in another chapter.

THE FINAL FATE OF THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP

The prophecy of Abdu'l-Baha, Who said that the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar will quake the horizons, became a reality!

The beloved Guardian said that the coming of many tests and much difficulties, as well as the appearance of hardship in Turkmenistan and Caucasia, seizure and possession of the first Baha'i Temple in the City of Ishq (love), all are a prelude to the proclamation to officiate the Cause of the Almighty and the proof of independence and universality of the voice of the Faith of God.

In August 1963, the Universal House of Justice, announced the news of the demolition of the first Baha'i Temple to the Baha'is of the world, and asked from the highest authority of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev that after demolition of the building, the garden of the A'azam land to be converted into a public park for the benefit of all, and a memorandum to be installed in that place that this spot has been the place of the Temple of Baha'i World Faith. Yet, their letter was never answered. (Note: Dr Amin Bakhshandegi in his manuscript gives the dubious date of 1951, just three years after the earthquake, as the year in which the building of Mashriq'u'l-Adkhar was demolished and not 15 years later in 1963 as recorded earlier.)

Although the message of the Universal House of Justice remained un-answered, yet, the desire of that august Body in keeping the Baha'i way of doing things became a reality. After the demolition of the remains of the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar, the garden of the A'azam land, became a spacious public park and in a special and beautiful spot of that land, the huge statue of the Makhtum Quli Faraghi, the Turkmenistan's great philosopher and poet (1733 - 1790), who prophesied the coming of Baha'u'llah, next to a pool of water has been installed.

REMNANTS OF SOME OF THE BELIEVERS IN ISHQABAD

The Hand of the Cause of God, Shaykh Muhammad-Rida Muhammad-Abadi had a son by the name of Nuru'llah who was born in Yazd and was a prominent and a known Baha'i in town. After the notorious upheaval of Yazd in 1902, where his

father was taken to prison because of being an eminent Baha'i, the rest of the family decided to leave everything behind in Yazd and go to Ishqabad.

Jinab-i-Nuru'llah was a tall and slender, yet well-built man, moderate and with many spiritual qualities just like his father, he self-restrained and always thankful, resigned but always with strong faith, and he would say as no one ever knows the divine wisdom, therefore, at all times one should be thankful and happy with what God has for one. Even when he had a benign tumor in his mouth, which would prevent him of drinking and eating, he took it as the part of his fate. He lived 105 years, a long life indeed. Aqa Nuru'llah had two sons and three daughters of which one died when yet young. The second son, Nasru'llah was an erudite and knowledgeable young man who at the eve of his marriage, developed a respiratory ailment and passed away. He also was a musician and had willed his body to be taken to the cemetery while the music group played with all happiness. When he was put into the coffin after being washed by the hands of his father, Aqa Nuru'llah, he was dressed with his full marriage garments and the public orchestra was requested to accompany the procession all the way to the cemetery playing music. Aqa Nur'ullah never complained a word or shed any tear for this loss, it has been his fate and all should be happy with the Will of God. This indeed was a big lesson for the Baha'is and non-Baha'is alike.

Aqa Nuru'llah had fulfilled the desire of his late father, Hand of the Cause, being both active in the Faith's activities, especially those related to the House of Worship, where he was in those early days, as a supervisor of its activities and for this, he was very happy and thankful. Aqa Nuru'llah passed away in 1912 in Ishqabad and was buried in the Baha'i cemetery there.

Sughra khanum, the oldest daughter of Aqa Nuru'llah was also born in Yazd and had accompanied her father together with her husband to Ishqabad and when the building of the Haziratu'l-Quds completed, this couple were given two rooms at its vicinity where they became the custodians of the House of Worship. Her assignment was total cleaning as well as preparing the facilities of the House of Worship for dawn prayer sessions, the service which she happily performed for many years. Even when she was an old lady with white hair, was the confidant and refuge of the sad and concerned believers who would go to the House of Worship when the government had confiscated the building and rented it out again to the Baha'i Community. She would sometimes even remain inside of the House of Worship all night sometimes working and sometimes praying and when tired would sit on the chairs and go to sleep. One night she had a dream that

together with the believers of Ishqabad they were all walking on a road, where for some small hindrance she could not continue but was watching others to keep on going away distancing themselves from her. Once she woke up, she knew that she will be remaining behind when the rest of the friends would leave the Community.

This is what exactly happened, when her son-in-law, Aqa Hasan Bakhshandegi, the gardener and caretaker of premises was exiled from Ishqabad, he insisted that Sughra khanum accompany him and his daughter Ruha khanum, but she didn't want to leave the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar un-attended, therefore she remained behind and stayed at the house of her daughter, Fatimih-Sultan who together with her husband, Mr Majlisi, were exiled in Siberia. But Sughra khanum kept on going to see the House of Worship every morning at dawn with tearful eyes praying and sobbing, seeing its doors were locked and sealed. When her daughter and son-in-law returned from their banished place in Siberia, gathered the remaining of their belongings and left for Iran, but Sughra khanum remained in that same house of her daughter, renting out a portion of it and from the proceeds kept on with her life. She was around hundred years old when she passed away in 19487, the year before the earthquake and was buried in the same house as she was living in.

Sughra khanum's five children remained in Ishqabad for the time being, some went through much difficulties, her son was so badly beaten while in the prison that he died in captivity. Some went back to Iran, some dispersed in other regions of the Russia and slowly melted in that vast territory under the Soviet regime.

LIST OF THE BAHA'IS WHO WERE EXILED FROM ISHQ-ABAD TO YAZD

The following friends were exiled to the city of Yazd (as, many of the pioneers to Ishq-abad were from that city and they had to go back to the same place). Note that many names have no surnames or vice versa. It is supposed that the author, Dr. Amin had forgotten already some of the surnames:

1. Mr. Isma'il Zabihi
2. Mr. Jamshid Ra'iyati
3. Mr. Shahnavaaz
4. Mr. Feyzi Ra'iyat

5. Mr. Nosrat Mellat-Dust (could be Mrs.)
6. Mr. Valiyu'llah (no last name attached)
7. Mr. Enayata'u'llah Tajalli
8. Mr. Zabih'u'llah Ra'yyat
9. Mrs. Munavvar (no last name attached)
10. Mr. Zia'u'llah Tajalli
11. Mrs. Samar Khorramdel
12. Mr. Nosrat Ra'yyat (could be Mrs.)
13. Mr. Baha'ad-Din (no last name attached)
14. Mrs. Nayyirih (no last name attached)
15. Mrs. Edraki (no first name)
16. Mr. Edraki (no first name)
17. Mr. Muhammad Aqa
18. Mr. Zekrollah
19. Mr. Fereydun Khavari
20. Mr. Ata'u'llah Akbari
21. Mr. Mas'ud Parastaran
22. Mrs. Ruha Bakhshandegi
23. Mrs. Shogh-angiz
24. Mr. Ghodrat Gha'imi
25. Mr. Shu'au'llah Akbari
26. Mr. Fazl'ullah Esma'ili
27. Mr. Maghsud Muhammadi
28. Mrs. Tajalli
29. Mrs. Jalaliyyih
30. Mr. Amin'ullah Ra'yyat
31. Mr. Kholusi
32. Mr. Ali Sibilu-Khavari
33. Mr. Yusef Lal
34. Mr. Adel
35. Mr. Haji Hasan Bahkhshandegi
36. Mr. Jalal Kalran
37. Mr. Ustad Beman-Ali
38. Mr. Muhammad
39. Mrs. Ra'yyat

40. Mr. Abbas Shokri
41. Mr. Mirza Husayn
42. Mr. Zabih'u'llah
43. Mr. Mr. Nosrat'ullah
44. Mr. Karbila'i Yusef
45. Mr. Aqa Maqsud
46. Mrs. Khavari
47. Mrs. Rezvaniyyih
48. Mother to Beman-Ali
49. Mrs. Nane Si
50. Mrs. Alaviyeh khanum
51. Mr. Muhammad-Ebrahim Khorramdel
52. Mr. Akbar Peh Peh
53. Mrs. Parastaran
54. Mrs. Saltanat khanum
55. Mrs. Jalaliyyeh khanum
56. Mrs. Farah-laqa
57. Mrs. Maliheh Zabihi
58. Mr. Ghodrat Ra'iyat
59. Mr. Zia'u'llah
60. Mr. Aminu'llah Bakhshandegi (the author)
61. Mrs. Natiqih
62. Mrs. Jahan
63. Mrs. Ata'iyiyih
64. Mrs. Farzanih
65. Mrs. Qamar
66. Mrs. Malakih
67. Mr. Ata'ullah Bakhshandegi

The above list Baha'is is the name of those who in 1938 during the reign of Stalin, were taken to prison and then were exiled to Iran or to Siberia. Many of these friends passed away while still in prison or where they were exiled to, were obligated to perform hard work until they passed on. The number of the Baha'is of Ishq-abad was decimated. The plan was to destroy the Baha'i community of Ishq-abad so that there would be no recognition for them in the Socialist Community.

Most of them were men of the families that when they were taken to prison and exiled to their ultimate fate to Siberia, their un-protected families were exiled to Iran and then, due to their relationship to the City of Yazd, they ended to be exiled to that city, which mostly were housed into two abandoned Baha'is Schools, and later on they could rent houses in the Zoroastrian neighborhood of Maryam-abad and only after ten years, most of these friends were finally freed and they could travel to other cities of Iran, and especially to Tihran.

The readers are encouraged to read the book of 'Years of Silence' by Mr Alizad.

THE IMPACT OF THE NEW RELIGION IN TZARIST RUSSIA AND SOVIET RUSSIA FROM THE BEGINNIG OF THE BABI REVELATION

The Revelation of the Bab, like a new star shone in the horizon of the thoughts and minds of the world from the southern part of the blessed country of Iran and after travelling in the dark clouds of superstition and prejudice, attracted the minds and opened the eyes of those who were ready to see the new horizon in the northern land, where in a corner of it, it soon destined to set.

The Tzarist government of Russia soon became aware of the commotion of this Shining Star's episode in its neighborhood when the resistance of the Iranian government and the backward Islamic priesthood against the New Revelation was already in its zenith, and the matter had reached a considerable proportion, and becoming an important issue. The Russian consuls who were in the bordering cities soon made reports to the Central Government.

Prince Dalgoroukov, the Russian ambassador in Tihran in 16 February 1848 sent a report to the Ministry of Exterior of his country that a Siyyid called 'The Bab' from Isfahan, due to His activities against Islam, has become exiled and imprisoned to Mahku. Arrangements were made that He be transferred as far as possible away from the border.

In 5th of January 1849 in another report it is mentioned that 'the followers of the Bab are increasing in number and in Mazindaran a hundred of them have been slain. Prince Mihdi-Quli Mirza has been given the order to punish them, who with the help of Abbas-Quli khan Larijani have to work as soon as possible but they were incapable in confronting them'.

Prince Dimitri Dalgoroukov in February 1849 recounts the matter of the Shaykh Tabarsi fortress in the north and the gathering of the Babis, saying that this group is trying to disseminate the European Communism by confrontation. He mentions its danger and recommends this matter to be dealt with caution. He also says that the Bab has called Himself as the Twelfth Imam's deputy and is very stubborn in His claim. He writes to his representative in Tabriz that the matter of the Bab is becoming more important everyday, which should be paid more attention to. He indicated that he needs more information for his Minister, Mr. Siniavin.

In 22nd of February it is reported that the matter of Mazindaran has become very serious; about 200 of them are resisting the governmental troops. Four of the princes have been killed in this confrontation. The Babis with their swords are ready to give their lives with a call of 'Ya Sahibu'Zaman' when they start the attack. I have heard that Abbas-Quli khan has sent secretly a message to the Babis saying that he will not act according to the Royal decree and will not war with them, the only thing he wants is to put off the fire of war and stop the bloodshedding. Yet, he does not honor his promise and when the Babis stop warring, he orders the attack against them, where the Babis resist and as a result hundreds are killed and the Minister of War orders to reinstate more troops.

In 7th of March 1849 a telegraphic report reaches him that 800 of the strongmen of Zanjan have arisen disturbing the calm of the town, which is the cause of concern.

In 17 March is reported that the Chief of the Babis is a man from Boshruiyih, called Mulla Husayn, which has caused a great commotion in the governmental troops, he is controlling the Babis very successfully. In a short time, their number has arisen to 1500. They have stored food in order to be able to resist the governmental troops.

In 9th of April another telegraphic report arrives saying that Sulayman khan Afshar is being dispatched to the Fortress of Shaykh Tabarsi. As a result with the amicable agreement of the parties, the Babis have been invited to leave the Fortress but when they leave the Sulayman khan Afshar's troops attacks them all. This kind of triumph is worse than a defeat. They lacked honor in their words.

In the report of 25 of June 1849 of the Prince Dalgorokov it mentions that in Zanjan, the Babis are defending themselves against the atrocities of the governmental troops.

And in the report of 22 July of the same year Mr. Anit Cheko mentions that the troop sent to Zanjan, are killing and plundering the Babis.

In 26 of September's report (to the Central Government) it is reported that the Babis, with life in their hands attacking the governmental troops and Mulla Muhammad-Ali is trying to find an arbiter in order to stop this killing of the Babis.

In the 7th of November in the report says that General Brigadier Farrokh khan who was sent from Kirmashah to bring troops to help Beglerbeigi in Zanjan, has fallen victim to the hands of the Babis and those fanatics have put him on fire. The son of Aziz khan and his troops were annihilated. The eight years old son of Muhammad-Ali was fallen victim to the hands of the governmental troops and they killed and cut him in pieces.

Prince Dalgorokov in his report of 14 March 1950 writes that Zanjan is midway town between Tehran and Tabriz. The number of the protestors has reached to 2000 people who say that they have been fooled by the general unsatisfactory conditions.

In the report of 22 of June, it mentions that a serious killing is going on in Zanjan and in this episode 1500 of the troops have been killed and the remaining 20 Babis were killed and cut into pieces.

Finally the Ministry of Exterior of Russia reports that after six months of bloody siege, on the 7th of July 1850, the Zanjan problem has come to its end and the protestors were annihilated.

On the fifth of July 1850 Consul of the Tsarist Government, Anit Cheko, reports to Prince Dalgorokov that Siyyid Bab has been imprisoned in Tabriz. And on the ninth of July 1850 he reports to the Ministry of Exterior of the martyrdom of the Bab. He mentions the extraordinary occurrence of the fusillading of the Bab and the punishment of the Babis, which is happening in a torturous way. He mentions of the steadfastness of Muhammad-Ali (Anis) and reports that after their

martyrdom, their bodies were left at the outskirts of the town next to the moat where dogs devoured their bodies.

In the book of Dawn-Breakers it is being mentioned that the occasion of the Babis attacking the Nasirid-Din Shah in August 1853, Baha'u'llah left Afcheh and the next day He entered Zargandih, at the vicinity of Niyavaran and became the guest of Mirza Majid Ahi (His brother-in-law), who was secretary to the Russian Embassy. Nasirid-Din Shah immediately sent to take Baha'u'llah from the Russian Embassy, Who, he claimed to be accomplice in the attempt to kill him and should be delivered to the person of the Shah. Prince Dalgorokov prevented such a delivery to the hands of the emissaries and asked Baha'u'llah to go to the house of the Prime Minister. Prince wrote a letter to the Prime Minister and asked him to host Baha'u'llah on his behalf and try to keep this trust to the utmost and if anything happens to Him, he personally would be responsible before the Russian Embassy. While Baha'u'llah was about to leave Zargandih, the daughter of the Ambassador was so much worried about the dangers He was going to face that she start sobbing and turning to his father she said to him that 'O father, if you cannot protect this guest of yours, then what is the aim of this position and power you are being invested with? The Ambassador who very much loved his daughter was taken aback and promised her to try his best to protect Baha'u'llah, yet he was not able to do as he promised so.

The Russian Consulate was gauging the situation from all aspects and was well aware that the government has captured Baha'u'llah. He wrote a very strong letter to Mirza Aqa Khan Nuri, E'timadu-Dawlih the Prime Minister and asked him with the presence of the Russian emissary, to find out the facts about Baha'u'llah. All the findings inclusive of the questions and answers by the emissaries should be put into writing, then the final verdict on that important Personage is shown in writing. The Prime Minister, Mirza Aqa Khan Nuri promised the Russian emissary that soon he will embark on this matter and once it became clear, then, the Russian emissary and Hajibud-Dawlih, the government's emissary can go together to Siyah Chal (the Black Pit).

Prince Dalgorokov, the Russian Ambassador, tried by all means to free Baha'u'llah from the prison and prove His innocence.

Once the Ambassador found out about the banishment and the exile of Baha'u'llah as the Royal decree and understood the reason for such a decision, humbly requested Baha'u'llah to permit him to arrange for His transfer to Russia

under his government's protection. As much as the Russian Ambassador did this request sincerely, yet Baha'u'llah did not agree it and He preferred His banishment to Iraq.

Another Russian government's subject in Iran Bakulin Feodor Abramovich, a graduate from the university of Lazaroskaya, and in 1865 he was the secretary of dragoman in Astar-abad and Tabriz. He later on became secretary in Astar-abad, who passed away in 1879. In his papers there was some hand drawn pictures of the shot bodies of the Bab and Anis next to the moat of Tabriz, which was done by a French artist. His papers also contained some of Tahiri's literary works and some of his correspondence on the New Faith with Bom Carton, who also was doing some studies and research on the same matter in Khurasan. All these papers became the research sources of Professor Zokoski who was travelling in Iran in the years 1883 to 1885. He was also studying the New Revelation. He wrote an article about the Martyrs of Yazd. For this, he used the documents of the Russian Council of Astar-abad, Vladimir Ignotiov. His second article about the 'Cause of the Bab', he used the studies and the research works of Bakulin, mentioned previously.

The first book in the Tsarist Russia, which was written, about the Bab was done by Mirza Kazim Beg from the university of Saint Petersburg in the year 1865, who used as his source book, the book of Nasikhut-Tavarikh. This Russian Orientalist was born in Rasht in 22 July 1802. He was the son of the Darband's judge by the name of Muhammad-Ali, who left Islam and in 1821 by the efforts of a Scottish missionary in Astar-khan, became a Christian. He travelled to Omsk in 1825 in order to learn the Tatar language. He became the lecturer of the oriental languages in the university of San Petersburg from 1849 to 1860. He started the Oriental Language School, with the help of Muchi Linski in 1860 and he was in charge of this post for ten years till 1870.

Most of the Russian Orientalists between the years 1890 to 1910 most of them have used the Babi Writings in their papers about the Baha'i Faith. The most important among them are:

Baron Victor Rosen. He was born in Estonia in 1849. He was teaching at the universities such as San Petersburg. He became a full Professor from the mentioned University. He expanded his studies on the Oriental Lands and he became the founder of Royal Oriental Archeology Academy of the Russian Empire and became its Chief Editor of its publication. He kept this position from

1886 till the end of his life. He became acquainted with the Babi Religion during the period of 1876 to 1886. He also was familiar with the works of Kazim Beg, Count Do Gobinue as well as the work of Edward Brown. Baron Rosen encountered much difficulty when he was studying the Book of Certitude and the Tablet of Heykal. During the period of 1889 to 1892, he was able to publish some writings on the New Religion of which the most important is Compilation of the Works of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. In 1889 he published some of the Writings of the Bab. And in 1892 he published the translation of Baha'u'llah's Glad Tidings to which he wrote an introductory article.

The second most important Orientalist of Russia is Captain Alexander Tumanski. As he himself admits, the first time he became acquainted with the name of the Baha'i Faith, it was in a Universal Geography book, which he used to study in order to get admittance to the Military School on the section of the oriental languages. But in the winter of 1889 and 1890, he learned about the story of the martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani in Ishq-abad and the intercession of the Baha'is to wave the death sentence of the killer, and he became more interested to investigate this religion with a closer look and continue his studies in this regard. The following year, he took leave from his work in order to get in touch with the Baha'is and travelled to Ishq-abad and came to know Mirza Abdu'l-Karim Ardabili, Mirza Yusuf Rashti and Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna, from whom he got many information that he was interested in. Later on when he was presented to Mirza Abul-Fadl Gulpaygani, he came to know all about the tenets of the New Revelation.

This Russian military Officer remained for a few years in Ishq-abad and the Caucasia from the year 1890, where he also performed some duties in Iran. He was a resident of Tibilisi before the WWI, where he was teaching Arabic, while there, he published some books too. He passed away in 1st of December 1820 in Istanbul.

The most important books remained from Tumanski, which has been mentioned in the Royal Academy's list of publications are:

1. Translation of the Most Holy Book (Kitab-i-Aqdas) with a lengthy introduction of 48 pages, from Arabic into Russian in a total of 129 pages. This work contains some other translated Tablets, which were published in 1899.
2. Two Tablets from the Writings of the Blessed Bab, which were published in 1891.

3. Translation of the very last Tablet of Baha'u'llah (possibly the Tablet to the Son of the Wolf) into Russian, as well as translation of the Tablet of 'The Book Of My Covenant' (the Will and Testament of Baha'u'llah) in 1892. This work of Tumanski also contains the poems of Andalib on the occasion of the passing of Baha'u'llah. (All these are in Persian language, therefore, he might have been well acquainted with the Persian language too.
4. He also translated and published in 1893 the book called 'The New History', which was also known as 'The History of Manakji' (The Zoroastrian Parsi who came from India to see Nasirid-Din Shah to ease the conditions of the Zoroastrians in Iran).

Tumanski believed that after Kazim Beg, M. Gamuzov, head of Oriental Languages section of the Eastern Asia of the Ministry of Exterior, to be the first person that encouraged others to study and conscientiously research the New Religion.

The officers of Russia were particularly interested that the Asian Museum of the San Petersburg Academy as well as the Royal General Library of Russia, to have a well presented collections of Baha'i Books and Tablets.

EULOGY:

1. Far more was accomplished in Ashkabad than the building of a Temple: Through the construction of the ancillary institutions such as schools and a hospice, the Baha'is of Ashkabad developed the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to a degree never before attained, thereby giving the Baha'i world an example invaluable to the present and the future.
2. Momen: "...the statements of instructions and guidance from these two leaders – Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi – resolving the problems that arose in the course of the evolution of the Ashkabad Baha'i community to its high degree of social and institutional development will remain for all time as part of the pattern upon which all future Baha'i communities will grow and develop. In this sense, therefore, the Ashkabad Baha'i experience lives on and will continue to be reflected in the future development of the world Baha'i community."

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROMINENT BELIEVERS AND THE TRAVEL TEACHERS WHO VISITED ISHQABAD

The following short biographies of the prominent teachers of the Faith who travelled to Ishqabad has blessed that community beyond description. No wonder why the Community of Ishqabad was so prosperous achieving high success in all of their activities, which never again any community did reach to such a height of success.

Abdu'l-Baha during the WWI when most of His other activities were reduced, dedicated His time to write on the lives of almost seventy early believers who had served in a very special way the Cause of God. His book, *The Memorials of the Faithful* contains biographies penned by the Centre of the Covenant, Who only saw good of the faithful believers and no trace of negativity which is the character of human being, is seen in the stories of the believers.

AQA MIRZA MUHAMMAD-ALI AFNAN

It is only fair first to mention Mirza Muhammad-Ali Afnan, as he purchased first lands in Ishqabad, and desired that his lands become the land of Mashriqul-Adhkar. Baha'u'llah knowing of his wish chose the land of A'azam as the land for the Mashriqul-Adhkar of Ishqabad. The following eulogy is being extracted from the *Memorials of the Faithful*, by the pen of Abdu'l-Baha, pages 16 – 22. His story in the mentioned book is under number 5.

Mirza Muhammad-Ali, together with his brother Haji Mirza Muhammad-Taqi, the Vakilud-Dawlih, the builder of Mashriqul-Adhkar of Ishqabad, were the two sons of Haji Siyyid Muhammad, the maternal uncle of the Bab for whom the *Kitab-i Iqan* was revealed. Haji Siyyid Muhammad altogether had five children, two daughters and three sons. The other son's name was Haji Mirza Buzurg. There is not much mention of him in the history. His daughters were Khadijih Sultan Bagum and Bibijan Bagum.

On this illustrious personage writes:

"...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. He was a man who made progress day by day, who added, every day, to his certitude and faith, his luminous quality, his ardent love. He made extraordinary progress

during the few days that he spent in the Most Great Prison...After he had received bounties showered on him by Baha'u'llah, he was given leave to go, and he travelled to China...Later he went on to India where he died”.

Abdu'l-Baha explains that after the other Afnan decided to send his body to be buried in the holy city of Najaf, where the Imam-Ali is buried, the Muslims very much objected and finally the body was taken to Baghdad's outskirts to be buried in Ctesiphon, beside the palace of the Sasanian kings, 'laid down in a safe resting-place by the palace of Nawshirvan'.

Dear Master goes on saying: “And this was destiny, that after a lapse of thirteen hundred years, from the time when the throne city of Persia's ancient kings was trampled down, and no trace of it was left, except for rubble and hills of sand, and the very palace roof itself had cracked and split so that half of it toppled to the ground – this edifice should win back the kingly pomp and splendor of its former days. It is indeed a mighty arch.

Abdu'l-Baha's prediction for the future of this same spot is very interesting, He talks about the future restoration of the glory of Persia:

“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 Afnan's being buried here; and there is no doubt that a proud city will rise up on this site. I wrote many letters about it, until at last the holy dust could be laid to rest in this place...

He also identifies the burial place of Mirza Muhammad-Ali Afnan as the place where Baha'u'llah walked on:

“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 Baghdad had been in His company; that very place where the Most Great Name was wont to stroll. How did this come about? It was to Afnan'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.

And again, because of this very special Afnan, his burial place is a holy place and a House of Wroship should be built on there:

“I loved the Afnan 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-Adhkar 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 traveler’s hospice...

And see how Abdu’l-Baha ends describing that special soul:

“From earliest youth until he grew helpless and old, that sacred bough of the Holy Tree, with his smiling face, shone out like a lamp in the midst of all. Then he leapt and soared to undying glory, and plunged into the ocean of light. Upon him be the breathings of his Lord, the All Merciful. Upon him, lapped in the waters of grace and forgiveness, be the mercy and favor of God.”

HAJI MIRZA MUHAMMAD-TAQI AFNAN – VAKILU-‘D-DAWLIH (Deputy of the Government)

Although above the story of Jinab-i Afnan is written, but for the adornment of these pages, extracts from the book of Abdu’l-Baha, the Memorials of the Faithful, will be mentioned below. Of the twenty-four elders of this Dispensation, addition to the Letters of the Living, plus the Bab, which become 19, Jinab-i Afnan is considered as number 20. His story is under the number 47, pages 126 – 129:

It is to observe how the beloved Master describes this saintly personage:

“Among those souls that are righteous, that are luminous entities and Divine reflections, was Jinab-i-Muhammad-Taqi, the Afnan. His title was Vakilu’d-Dawlih. This eminent bough was an offshoot of the Holy Tree; in him an excellent character was allied to a noble lineage. His kinship was a true kinship. He was among those souls who, after one reading of the Book of Iqan, became believer, bewitched by the sweet savors of God, rejoicing at the recital of His verses. His agitation was such that he cried out, “Lord, Lord, here am I!” Joyously he left Persia and hurried away to Iraq. Because he was filled with longing love, he sped over the mountains and across the desert wastes, not pausing to rest until he came to Baghdad.

With the description of his character by the Master, it becomes obvious why it was His choice to select him at the age of 75, to leave everything behind and go to Ishqabad to build the very first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of the Faith of Baha'u'llah.

“He entered the presence of Baha'u'llah, and achieved acceptance in His sight. What holy ecstasy he had, what fervor, what detachment from the world! It was beyond description. His blessed face was so comely, so luminous that the friends in Iraq gave him a name: they called him “the Afnan of all delights.” He was truly a blessed soul, a man worthy to be revered. He never failed in his duty, from the beginning of life till his last breath. As his days began, he became enamored of the sweet savors of God, and as they closed, he rendered a supreme service to the Cause of God. His life was righteous, his speech agreeable, his deeds worthy. Never did he rail in servitude, in devotion, and he would set about a major undertaking with alacrity and joy. His life, his behavior, what he did, what he left undone, his dealings with others – were all a way of teaching the Faith, and served as an example, an admonishment to the rest.

“After he had achieved the honor, in Baghdad, of meeting Baha'u'llah, he returned to Persia, where he proceeded to teach the Faith with an eloquent tongue. And this is how to teach: with an eloquent tongue, a ready pen, a goodly character, pleasing words, and righteous ways and deeds. Even enemies bore witness to his high-mindedness and his spiritual qualities, and they would say: “There is none to compare with this man for his words and acts, his righteousness, trustworthiness, and strong faith; in all things he is unique; what a pity he is a Baha'i!...”

“...He was an embodiment of the good pleasure of Baha'u'llah; a dawning-point of the grace of the Greatest Name. Many and many a time, Baha'u'llah expressed to those about him His extreme satisfaction with the Afnan; and consequently, everyone was certain that he would in future initiate some highly important task.

“...He gave up his comfort, his business, his properties, estates, lands, hastened away to Ishqabad and set about building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar; this was a service of very great magnitude, for he thus became the first individual to erect a Baha'i House of Worship, the first builder of a House to unify man. With the believers in Ishqabad assisting him, he succeeded in carrying off the palm. For a long period in Ishqabad, he had no rest. Day and night, he urged the believers on. Then they too exerted their efforts, and made sacrifices above and beyond their power; and God's edifice arose, and word of it spread throughout East and West. The Afnan expended everything he possessed to rear this building,

except for trifling sum. This is the way to make sacrifice. This is what it means to be faithful.

“Afterward he journeyed to the Holy Land, and there beside the place where the chosen angels circle, in the shelter of the Shrine of the Bab, he passed his days, holy and pure...

“The Afnan was an uncommonly happy man. Whenever I was saddened, I would meet with him, and on the instant, joy would return again. Praise be God, at the last, close by the Shrine of the Bab, he hastened away in light to the Abha Realm; but the loss of him deeply grieved Abdu'l-Baha.

“His bright grave is in Haifa, beside the Haziratu'l-Quds, near Elijah's Cave...”

Jinab-i Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Afnan at the age of 85 passed away, this was during the Master's absence in 1911, when He was in His tour of the West.

It is recorded by Dr. Amin, that after he passed away, he first was buried in the house next to the Shrine of the Bab and later on Shoghi Effendi had his remains to be buried in the Baha'i cemetery. This matter seems contradict what Abdu'l-Baha has written in His book. The Cave of Elijah in Haifa is in front of the Baha'i cemetery. This matter is not recorded in any other source. Although the word Haziratu'l-Quds was referred to the Shrine of the Bab before 1909 and to the Pilgrim House too, yet, it seems that the closeness of the Haziratu'l-Quds to the Cave of Elijah is meant here.

JINAB- MUHAMMAD-I-QA'INI - NABIL-I-AKBAR

Jinab-i-Muhammad-i-Qa'ini, titled Nabil-i-Akbar was born in 1930 in the village of Nawfarast around Birjand and in 1953 he became Babi in Tihiran. Six years later, when he finished his religious studies in Najaf and Karbila, he went to Baghdad to visit Baha'u'llah, Who sent him to Iran to teach the Faith. He passed away in Bukhara in 1892.

Jinab-i-Nabil-i-Akbar was an erudite by all means. The two other erudite personages of the Faith, Jinab-i-Mriza Abu'l-Fadl and Jinab-i-Haji Mirza Haydar-Ali, where both were of high caliber travel teachers, while at his presence in meetings of Ishaqabad were totally submissive before him, listening to his discourses as a student would listen to his teacher. Jinab-i-Abu'l-Fadl would not speak before him. (Extracts from Dr Amin's manuscript)

Abdu'l-Baha in His book the Memorials of the Faithful, pens the story of this illustrious man (the number 1 in the list), page 1:

He writes:

“There was, in the city of Najaf, among the disciples of the widely known mujtahid, Shahykh Murtada (Morteza), a man without likeness or peer. His name was Aqa Muhammad-i-Qaini, and later on he would receive, from the Manifestation, the title of Nabil-i-Akbar. This eminent soul became the leading member of the mujtahid’s company of disciples. Singled out from among them all, he alone was given the rank of mujtahid – for the late Shaykh Murtada was never wont to confer this degree.

“He excelled not only in theology but in other branches of knowledge, such as the humanities, the philosophy of the Illuminati, the teachings of the mystics and of the Shaykhi School. He was a universal man, in himself alone a convincing proof. When his eyes were opened to the light of Divine guidance, and he breathed in the fragrances of Heaven, he became a flame of God. Then his heart leapt within him, and in an ecstasy of joy and love, he roared out like leviathan in the deep.

“With praises showered upon him, he received his new rank from the mujtahid. He then left Najaf and came to Baghdad, and here he was honored with meeting Baha’u’llah. Here he beheld the light that blazed on Sinai in the Holy Tree. Soon he was in such a state that he could rest neither day nor night.

“One day, on the floor of the outer apartment reserved for the men, the honored Nabil was reverently kneeling in the presence of Baha’u’llah. At that moment Haji Mirza Hasan-Amu, a trusted associate of the mujtahids of Karbila, came in with Zaynu’l-Abidin Khan, the Farkhru’d-Dawlih. Observing how humbly and deferentially Nabil was kneeling there, the Haji was astonished.

“Sir, he murmured, what are you doing in this place?”

Nabil answered, “I come here for the same reason you did”

“The two visitors could not recover from their surprise, for it was widely known that his personage was unique among mujtahids and was the most favored disciple of the renowned Shaykh Murtada.

“Later Nabil-i-Akbar left for Persia and went on to Khurasan. The Amir of Qa’in – Mir Alam Khan – showed him every courtesy at first, and greatly valued his company. So marked was this that people felt the Amir was captivated by him, and indeed he was spellbound at the scholar’s eloquence, knowledge, and accomplishments. One can judge, from this, what honors were accorded to Nabil by the rest, fro “men follow the faith of their kings”.

“Nabil spent some time thus esteemed and in high favor, but the love he had for God was past all concealing. It burst from his heart, flamed out and consumed its coverings.

A thousand ways I tried
My love to hide –
But how could I, upon that blazing pyre
Not catch fire!

He brought light to the Qa'in area and converted a great number of people. And when he had become known far and wide by this new name, the clergy, envious and malevolent, arose, and informed against him, sending their calumnies on to Tihiran, so that Nasiri'd-Din Shah rose up in wrath. Terrified of the Shah, the Amir attacked Nabil with all his might. Soon the whole city was in an uproar, and the populace, lashed to fury, turned upon him.

“That enraptured lover of God never gave way, but withstood them all. At last, however, they drove him out – drove out the man who saw what they did not - and he went up to Tihiran, where he was a fugitive, and homeless.

“Here, his enemies struck at him again. He was pursued by the watchmen; guards looked everywhere for him, asking after him in every street and alley, hunting him down to catch and torture him. Hiding, he would pass by them like the sigh of the oppressed, and rise to the hills; or again, like tears of the wronged, he would slip down into the valleys. He could no longer wear the turban denoting his rank; he disguised himself, putting on a layman's hat, so that they would fail to recognize him and would let him be.

“In secret, with all his powers he kept on spreading the Faith and setting forth its proofs, and was a guiding lamp to many souls. He was exposed to danger at all times, always vigilant and on his guard. The Government never gave up its search for him, nor did the people cease from discussing his case.

“He left, then, for Bukhara and Ishqabad, continuously teaching the Faith in those regions. Like a candle, he was using up his life; but in spite of his sufferings he was never dispirited, rather his joy and ardor increased with every passing day. He was eloquent of speech; he was a skilled physician, a remedy for every ill, a balm to every sore. He would guide the Illuminati by their own philosophical principles, and with the mystics he would prove the Divine Advent in terms of “inspiration” and the “celestial vision.” He would convince the Shaykhi leaders by quoting by very words of their late Founders, Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim, and would convert Islamic theologians with texts from the Qur'an and traditions from the Imams, who guide mankind aright. Thus he was an instant medicine to the ailing, and a rich bestowal to the poor.

“He became penniless in Bukhara and a prey to many troubles, until at the last far from his homeland, he died, hastening away to the Kingdom where no poverty exists.

“Nabil-i-Akbar was the author of a masterly essay demonstrating the truth of the Cause, but the friends do not have it in hand at the present time. I hope that it will come to light, and will serve as an admonition to the learned. It is true that in this swiftly passing world he was the target of countless woes; and yet, all those generations of powerful clerics, those shaykhs like Murtada and Mirza Habibu’llah and Ayatu’llah-i-Khurasani and Mulla Asadu’llah-i-Mazandarani – all of them will disappear without a trace. They will leave no name behind them, no sign, no fruit. No word will be passed down from any of them; no man will tell of them again. But because he stood steadfast in this holy Faith, because he guided souls and served this Cause and spread its fame, that star, Nabil, will shine forever from the horizon of abiding light.

“It is clear that whatever glory is gained outside the Cause of God turns to abasement at the end; and ease and comfort not met with on the path of God are finally but care and sorrow; and all such wealth is penury, and nothing more.

“A sign of guidance, he was, an emblem of the fear of God. For this Faith, he laid down his life, and in dying, triumphed. He passed by the world and its rewards; he closed his eyes to rank and wealth; he loosed himself from all such chains and fetters, and put every worldly thought aside. Of wide learning, at one a mujtahid, a philosopher, a mystic, and gifted with intuitive sight, he was also an accomplished man of letters and an orator without a peer. He had a great and universal mind.

“Praise be to God, at the end he was made the recipient of heavenly grace. Upon him be the glory of God, the All-Glorious. May God shed the brightness of the Abha Kingdom upon his resting-place. May God welcome him into the Paradise of reunion, and shelter him forever in the realm of the righteous, submerged in an ocean of lights.”

In the book of Misabih-i-Hedayat, volume one, authored by Azizu’llah Sulaymani, he has gathered the story of Jinab-i-Nabil-i-Akbar and states that he was captured in Sabzivar by the governor and later on was released. At his return to the place where he was residing, a carevansera, he recounted his story to his nephew, Aqa Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa’ini – himself an erudite man. They left in haste and during the night from an uncommon path, they reached to Quchan, where they met the powerful governor, who welcomed them with high respect. Then, they were able to buy two donkeys and get themselves to the border of Bajgiran, where neither of them had a passing document. The nephew asked

Jinab-i-Nabil as to how they would cross the border if they do not have the passing document Nabil says that they demount the donkeys. He would rely on God reciting a prayer he knew from the blessed Bab, which he would say in such occasions and we just continue walking. When they were passing from the front of the custom office, the head of the office who standing outside, said hello to them and offered them to come in and drink tea. They excused themselves saying that they were in rush, thanked him for his offer and kept on walking. The head of the Custom did not ask for any document from them. Later on they reached on the Russian custom office. There too, the officers were standing at the office doors and no one asked them any document. When they were in a distant from the officers, then they rode again their donkeys and continued their way to Ishqabad.

In Ishqabad, they were welcomed by the Baha'is and after finding themselves a meager lodging, they started their deepening the friends of Ishqabad. The Baha'is of there, greatly benefited from Jinab-i-Nabil's classes, although due to their poverty and lack of means, they were living in misery, yet would never mention their need to anyone.

Jinab-i-Abu'l-Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani has written in his great book of Fara'id about Jinab-i-Nabil that in 1891 when he entered the city of Ishqabad, it happened that Jnab-i-Abu'l-Fadl was also residing there. A certain Mulla Muhammad, the judge of the city, who had heard much of the fame of Jinab-i-Nabil, very much wanted to meet him, until one night, when both were invited in the house of a certain wealthy man of the city, who had prepared a gathering of knowledgeable and ignorant of the city, both Muslims and Christians. The new Islamic judge who had recently arrived from Mashhad was also present. In his face one could see the degree of his animosity, jealousy and prejudice. As soon as he entered, turned his nervous face towards Jinab-i-Nabil and Mirza Abu'l-Fadl telling them that give me some reasonable proofs of this new Faith that you people have brought to this city, I don't need Qur'anic and traditional proofs.

Both Jinab-i-Nabil and Mirza Abu'l-Fadl were astonished by the question of this man who considers himself one of the most erudite people of Islam and does not accept any Qur'anic proof, which Qur'an suppose to be the divider between truth and falsehood. They soon understood that this man's plan is to vainly argue. Therefore, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl turns to the new Judge and tells him that Mr. Tumansky a Christian is also present in the meeting and he denies the truth of Islam, would it be fair if the Judge first tried to bring the truth of Islam by the

means of reason to Mr. Tumanski and once this is done, then, certainly with much stronger reason the truth of the Baha'i Faith would be presented to him.

The Judge becomes startled by this answer, and as he had no proof to present, he excused himself and this answer saved the face of the meeting and of the host who wanted to have a friendly meeting and not a meeting of vain arguments, etc.

Shortly after, together with Jinab-i-Nabil, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl they travel to Bukhara to meet the Jinab-i-Mirza Mahmoud Afnan and lodge at his place, where he met with great erudite of all that region, guiding them in the path of Truth, where all became astonished at the ocean of his knowledge and speech. But shortly after, he became ill and passed away, depriving a world from his unbounded knowledge, only few days after the passing of Baha'u'llah.

Abdu'l-Baha in a Tablet to the Baha'is of Ishqabad, praising those who close their eyes to all the material good of this world and go through so much troubles and difficulties for the sake of serving the Cause, these are those who are being remembered in the Kingdom of Most High, these are the ever glorified stars of the horizon of purity. Even they (the Concourse On High) circumambulate around those who are faithful in this world.

Then Abdu'l-Baha in His Tablet indicates that because of what mentioned earlier, every year on the anniversary of the declaration of the Bab (23rd of May), a group of friends in the unit equivalent to the Most Great Name (nine) should be chosen and with utmost spirituality go to Bukhara and on behalf of Abdu'l-Baha visit the sanctified grave of Aqa Muhammad Qa'ini Nabil-i-Akbar. This act will attract the divine confirmations. Then the Master says that it should be clear that no one except the Divine can ever bring about the needs of His creatures, or anyone except the Blessed Beauty has penetrating influence on the reality of the created things. But, He says, praying at the graveside of the believers of God, who are close to His Threshold, because God has special favor to that person, of course confirmations of God will descend. Here the mystery of praying at the visiting of a graveside through the soul of that person, becomes clear in this holy Tablet.

Then, the Master indicates that if the gathering of the friends could not be possible on the anniversary of the declaration of the Bab, then, on the anniversary of the His martyrdom (9th of July), friends should embark on that visitation trip.

Over twenty years the friends used to go every year to the graveside of the illustrious Nabil-i-Akbar. This practice stopped when Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini, the nephew of Jinab-i-Nabil, at his last visit to the Holy Land, got the verbal order from the beloved Master to transfer the remains from Bukhara to Ishqabad. Transferring of the remains of Jinab-i-Nabil were done by Shaykh Ahmad Oskou'i almost two years after the ascension of Abdu'l-Baha in 1923. The remains were transferred to the Baha'i cemetery of Ishqabad. There, of course was a wisdom in this transfer, which at first was unknown to the friends, but when by the order of the government, the cemetery in Bukhara was totally demolished.

THE PASSING OF AQA MUHAMMAD QA'INI, NABIL-I AKBAR

Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions in his manuscript the story of Jinab-i Nabil-i Akbar, but his story is being mentioned in some other sources, yet here, only the period that he was in Ishqabad and Bukhara is relevant.

Jinab-i Nabil in 1980 together with his nephew Shaykh Muhammad-Ali went to Ishqabad and for a short period he remained in this city and then he moved to Bukhara and there he stayed with at the Haji Mirza Mahmud Afnan. Just before the news of the ascension of Baha'u'llah arrived, he became unwell, but was nothing serious. One of the attendants of the house mentioned that when Haji Mahmud was ready to have lunch, Jinab-i Nabil was in another room resting. He went to inquire after his health and he answered as a normal person. After the lunch he returned to see how he feels, it seemed that he was sleeping. When observed again, it became clear that Jinab-i Nabil has passed on. All were astonished and desired such a death for ourselves. Around this time, the news of the passing of Baha'u'llah arrived.

At the outskirts of the city gate of Sallakh-khane a piece of land was purchased which became the burial place of Jinab-i Nabil. This became the honor of Bukhara to have housed such an eminent personage in its bosom.

Abdu'l-Baha revealed a lengthy Tablet of Visitation in his honor in Arabic where the Master testifies that Jinab-i Nabil has believed in God and in His signs and confessed in His unity, drank from the cup of recognition from the graceful hands of the Cupbearer, and who walked on the straight pathway (to God), who guided people to the Revelation of the Sun of All horizons...who served his Lord from the beginning to the end and bore afflictions and the most severe suffering in His path...happy is he who when at His presence drunk from the cup of His eternally bestowing hands, who have sunk in the ocean of His richness and has reposed

next to the mercy of the Most Great Lord. Abdu'l-Baha prays that may He also bestow such bounties to His believers...

He, in a Tablet address to the Spiritual Assembly of Ishqabad instructs that every year at the anniversary of the passing of Jinab-i Nabil, the Spiritual Assembly (and a group of friends) should travel to his graveside and recite the Tablet of Visitation on that spot.

The beloved Master also revealed a mighty and lengthy prayer for Jinab-i Nabil, again in Arabic, where He addresses God asking Him to listen to His cries from the depths of His heart and listen to the groaning of His soul from this great calamity that has fallen upon Him that has made Him heartbroken and sad that has made His heart to burn, and then asks God if He (the Master) has any other refuges to go to except His Lord, and if there is anyone else that could help Him, Who is the sole Curer, His only Glory and Succorer in the time of His loneliness, His only friend when He is in fright, Who listens to His prayers at dawns, pleads for patience and to calm His heart from such a calamity which has torn His body in pieces. He remembers the days when He would listen to the melody of the voice of that bright star who was His Nabil-i Akbar. Then Abdu'l-Baha acknowledges that God created Nabil from the essence of His love by the hands of His mercy and gave him of His beauty and gave him of the knowledge of His most accomplished sciences and crafts and then sent him to take His knowledge to His servant on the earth, where every erudite in the world would confess to his high knowledge in every Divine sciences and mathematics and to his arguments, which were the emanation of the bounties of his Lord...

JINAB-I-ABU'L-FADL GULPAYGANI (Extracted from Dr Amin's manuscript)

Mirza Abu'l-Fadl (Abu'l-Fada'il) was born in 1844 in the township of Gulpaygan in a family of science and knowledge. His father, Muhammad-Rida, was a wellknown Islamic priest. He learned his basic Persian and Arabic at home and then started his higher education in Islamic jurisprudence he went to Isfahan and in order to bring his education into perfection, he went to Iraq when he was only 28 years old. After the death of his father in 1872, he was deprived of the inheritance therefore he went to Tihran and became the head of Hakim Hashem school, where soon he became famous in the circle of the erudite. He came to know Aqa Abdu'l-Karim Mahut-furush and slowly the foundation of his superstitions cracked. Soon he came to know more the Baha'i Teachers, which brought him down from the zenith of pride to the lowliness of humility. When he confronted in religious discussion with Jinab-i-Nabil-i-Akbar, astonishingly he

confessed that no one ever has the power to withstand his knowledge. While still resisting, the Tablet of Ra'is was read to him; he trembled and became thoughtful, yet, he put his acceptance condition to the fulfillment of the prophecies in that Tablet. Soon Sultan Abdu'l-Aziz was toppled down and the greater Adrianopolis was lost to the Ottomans. And only then, he became serious and soon he was known as a Babi, until in 1876, when he ardently prayed for confirmation and his was reborn in that year! He wrote a letter to Baha'u'llah, still in Akka, and addressed Him his Lord, Whose voice he has heard and confessed his faith to Him and then he pleaded to be forgiven of all his sins committed thereof.

Mirza Abu'l-Fadl without being able to contain himself, started to disseminate the fragrances of the new Revelation and therefore, the Islamic priests became his sworn enemies and he was imprisoned. After his release, he became the secretary of Manakji Sahib – the Zoroastrian emissary from India to Iran for the betterment of the lives of his co-religionists in Iran. He was constantly under surveillance and would be arrested time and again. In 1882 together with some other eminent believers were again arrested and imprisoned for almost two years. As soon as he was released, he started his travel teaching activities, in Qum, Kashan and Isfahan. He visited Hamidan and Kirmanshah as well as to Tabriz, infinitely serving and teaching the beloved Cause and everywhere being among Muslims of Christians, he proved to them the truth of the new Revelation. In 1888 he went to Yazd and spent sometimes there teaching the Faith and then soon moved to Ishqabad, where some months later, Jinab-i-Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani was martyred, where he defended the Faith thoroughly, as it was mentioned in the story of the martyr. He was a truly defender of the Faith and the believers to which the Pen of the Most High testified to his sincerity, his steadfastness and his services to His Cause.

When the doors of freedom to the Faith was wide open in Ishqabad, after the martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl dedicated his whole time to teach the Faith and travelled to Samarqand where through him the very first Afghan Dr Ata'u'llah Davar became Baha'i.

When he entered Ishqabad to renew his visa permit, there he met again Jinab-i-Nabil-i-Akbar in 1891, whom he had highest respect and would never utter a word in his presence. The two became a team to teach the Faith and together travelled far and wide for this purpose until a year later that Jinab-i-Nabil passed away in 1892 in Bukhara. Then, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl resided in Ishqabad up until early 1894, where he was permitted to go for pilgrimage. As he delayed to go to

the Holy Land, Abdu'l-Baha sent his kin, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani to Ishqabad in 1893, and soon Mirza Abu'l-Fadl left for Akka, the year he resided there in the same year of 1894. He drunk from the fountain of knowledge of Abdu'l-Baha for about ten months, when he was sent to Egypt and rendered invaluable services in that Centre of the Islamic world. After about five years, he was sent by Abdu'l-Baha to Europe and from Paris he was sent to the US where he travelled for three years deepening the friends of the West, preparing them to receive the beauty of the Centre of the Covenant.

Returning from the West, he went again to Egypt and then to Lebanon. When he returned again to Egypt. That was the culmination of his travels and in 20th of January 1914 he passed on to the Abha Kingdom in Cairo. The news of his passing greatly saddened Abdu'l-Baha, Who called him an illumined personage, who was rare from every point of view and perfect in everything. He was totally detached and the embodiment of steadfastness in the Cause of God, who had no attachment to nothing. From the day he became a believer to the day he passed on, he was always in the service of the Cause. Taught the Faith and wrote treatises and books in the proof of the Faith. He was a thorough erudite, he knew about every people and culture, every sect of any religion and he was Abdu'l-Baha's partner in the servitude of the Holy Threshold. Whenever Abdu'l-Baha was sad, he was His comforter. He was whom the dear Master had total confidence in him. Whoever would write anything against the Faith it would be referred to Mirza Abu'l-Fadl to answer. He was the embodiment of humility. All Abdu'l-Baha tried to get him someone to assist him, he would never accept. When he would be visited at his home, personally would serve the visitors the tea he personally had prepared, trying to accommodate everyone and making each one happy. Never the word 'I' was ever heard from his lips that 'I did' or 'I wrote', but he would say, 'humbly it was brought to the attention of the friends'. He would never pronounce a word relating to his vast knowledge. He really was utter nothingness and in the Holy Threshold he would sacrifice himself. This is the fate, what could be done!

Mirza Abu'l-Fadl has written many books such as 'Faslu'l-Khatib', Fara'id, Dororu'l-Bahiyiyih, Hujaju'l-Bahaiyyih, Barda'r-Ruddud, Kashfu'l-Ghata, Burhan-i-Lam'i, Resaliy-i-Ayyubiyiyih and Majmu'atu'l Rasa'il. After his passing, his house in Egypt was broken into and some of his works were stolen. Whatever remained were passed to Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini to be used in Ishqabad. While there, by the request of the Assembly, Mr. Partovi took a list of all the works of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl. Later on at the instructions of Abdu'l-Baha, all these works were

returned to the Holy Land to be kept at the Archives. But unfortunately delay in taking the instructions, the Russian revolution confiscated and destroyed all his works. What a loss! It must have been quite few years since Abdu'l-Baha issued such an instruction till the time of the Bolsheviks unscrupulous actions.

JINAB-I SHAYKH MUHAMMAD-ALI QAINI

One of the erudite travel teacher of the Cause was Jinab-i-Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini, the nephew of Jinab-i-Nabil, who spent most of his life in Ishqabad promoting the beloved Faith. He was a very dignified person and possessed an attractive way of speech. He also had a good voice to chant the holy Writings.

After the funeral of his uncle in Bukhara, he returned to Ishqabad and then went to Tihiran to meet with the family who has lost their greatest and most honorable member of the family. From Tihiran, by the instructions of the Center of Covenant, he went to India. He then asked permission for pilgrimage and after being in His presence, he was instructed to go to Ishqabad and become the schoolteacher for the Baha'i children. After a year, upon receiving Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet, he went to Tihiran, letting the Assembly know of the movement. He got his family and all moved to Ishabad, resigning from the Tarbiyat School, where he was busy teaching for a while. In 1906 he got established in Ishqabad with his family beside him, continued his children classes as well as classes for the adults, and every now and then, he would travel teach as per the institutions' instructions.

When the unfinished book of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, the Kashfu'l-Ghata, upon the death of its author needed to be finished by the instructions of the Master, together with Jinab-i-Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani they travelled to Tihiran and by 1915, they could finish the book and return to Ishqabad.

In 1918 he was instructed to go to India, for explicit task that he had to perform. From there, he visited Abdu'l-Baha in Haifa and got all new instructions of uniting the friends, and then returned to Ishqabad, starting with his meeting the friends encouraging them in all aspects of the instructions received by the beloved Master. He had to be patient, as the unity matters need to be given some time to mature. He never failed in any given service. Until he got ill, and he was diagnosed as having cancer. The physicians recommended him to go to Tashkent. After going through an operation, he was released and returned to Ishqabad, but soon, the illness returned and this time claimed his life, leaving his body behind, and soared to the world beyond. He was buried in the Baha'i cemetery next to the grave of his illustrious uncle.

In January 1919 Abdu'l-Baha revealed a Tablet in his honor, addressing him as 'O thou true teacher, sincere guide in the path of the Cause of God'. He recounts as to his difficult trip to Tihran and his steadfastness in the tests; remembering his extreme poverty, but accomplishing the great service he was requested to perform, that Abdu'l-Baha will never forget it and whenever He remembers that service, it becomes the cause of His happiness. Then the beloved Master thanks the Blessed Beauty for having such a servant, who has no other wish of his own, except performing His will, where he would give his life in His path and in His love. Truly, He says, he has lighted the candle of the illustrious Nabil and being as honorable. Then He says that he should no be worried because of extreme difficulties, as these are in the path of God, and therefore, it is difficult, otherwise it was not sweet. By going through difficulties, the face of Baha becomes illumined, He says. Abdu'l-Baha then reminds Aqa Muhammad-Ali that because of the recent revolutions, all the people are enveloped with difficulties, especially the friends of Turkistan who have always been in great danger, but thanks God they are fearless and are the company of the people of the Concourse on High. He then pleads God to have the difficulties go away and the time for tranquility and rest arrive. He sends His heartfelt greetings. After this Tablet, then He reveals at its continuation a prayer, reciting it on his behalf.

On the 7th of June of 1919, just few months after the previous Tablet, Abdu'l-Baha, upon receiving his letter, answered him, acknowledging the extreme difficulties that he has gone through, but thanking God for his patience and thankfulness, He assures him that such patience has greatest results and would be eternal. In this Tablet Abdu'l-Baha acknowledges the receipt of the copy of the book, which Aqa Sheykh Muhammad-Ali has sent Him. He indicates that He had written two long Tablets to each one, him and Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani. He instructs that the other copies of the books should remain in Ishaqabad until the second notice. Then Abdu'l-Baha speaks of the Bolshevism revolution, which has been mentioned in his letter to Him and agrees that these are the fulfillment of the Writings of Baha'u'llah and refers him to the book of Ishraqat – The Effulgence. Thanking God for having spared the City of Ishq from this despised sect. He invites the friends of God to be steadfast in the troubles, which have been devastating for all, and referring to the WWI, which the friends of God were spared from all kinds of difficulties and dangers attacking other; this has been because of the teachings of Baha'u'llah that all the believers adhered to, therefore, it becomes obvious that under the teachings of the Blessed Beauty, the friends are protected; this indicates that we all have to adhere to His teachings and not to defray to the extent of hair's size, thus, not to get out of the middle way and

not to enter into the contentious matters, as some of the believers did and very bad result they received.

Two days later, on the 9th of July, Abdu'l-Baha again reveals another lengthy Tablet and a prayer to Aqa Shaykh Muhammad-Ali in Arabic, except for the very last paragraph, which is in Persian, where He address the recipient and says that He is receiving the news one after another that those areas are having tremendous capacity and some people have received the fragrances from the spiritual rose-garden. During the war, it was difficult and impossible to travel to those areas but now that the fire of that war has been extinguished and the wise people have come to their senses, if it were possible for him, to travel to Tashkent, Khuqand and Samarqand to teach the Faith, indeed it would be very pleasing. Also, He says, from India, they are constantly writing and asking for travel teacher, and as much as He thinks, no one is better than that dear spiritual friend (Aqa Shaykh Muhammad-Ali). If, He says, there are no hindrances or difficulties for him, then he is permitted to go to the Holy Land and from there he could go to India, in order to give the same fragrant as is being given in Turkistan, but conditions to the 'if there is no hindrance', and assures him that he should not be worried about his family, He will take care of their affairs, nevertheless, it is up to him and his own will and decision.

These Tablets show the caliber of a person Aqa Shaykh Muhammad-Ali was and the confidence that the beloved Master had on him.

AQA MIRZA HUSAYN ZANJANI (Extracted from the manuscript of Dr Amin, who had extracted the story from the book of Misabih-i-Hidayat, vol. One)

This illustrious personage was famous because of his dignity and keeper of high morals as he was an example to the friends. He was faithful and respectful. From the time he accepted the Faith to the last minute of his life he was serving going through many difficulties and hardships.

He became a believer when he was taught the Faith by Jinab-i-Mulla Sadiq the martyr in Baku. Later on to get more information he travelled to Qazvin and had many meetings and discussions with Baha'i erudite until he was confirmed in the new found Faith, then he returned to Zanjan.

After a while he received a Tablet from the Blessed Beauty, asking him to move out of Zanjan, for which he sold all his belonging and together with his family moved to Ishqabad and resided there, and started his services in that city.

After the ascension of Baha'u'llah, Jinab-i-Varqa brought him a Tablet from Abdu'l-Baha instructing him to go back to Zanjan and to disseminate the message of God and be a comforter to the remaining of the martyr families. Yet, one could feel that there was another message in the Tablet, which indicated the coming of an upheaval in that region.

Around nine months after his arrest and imprisonment in Siyah-Chal, a certain Aqa Hasan, son of Haji Iman, moved from Tihran to Zanjan and took with him Liqa'iyiyih, the wife of Jinab-i-Varqa, who was his sister, his own wife, Kulthum and his children, Fadlu'llah and Zuhuriyyih as well as the entire Mirza Husyan Zanjani's family to Ishqabad and moves to the house of the daughter of Mirza Husayn in the township of Firuzeh, close to Ishqabad. Soon after this sudden movement, the daughter of Mirza Husayn falls into a fatal grief, because of uncertainty and lack of news from her father's arrest and his imprisonment she soon dies when she was only 22 years old; his other daughter Tayyibih, after 40 days also passes away. His son Jamal too, after the loss of the two sisters, perishes. In brief, in one year Mirza Husyan lost three of his beloved children.

Mirza Husayn Zanjani, after 16 months imprisonment in Siyah-Chal was released. He went back to Zanjan and gathered his belonging and moved to Ishqabad, where he found a Tablet in his name giving him permission to go for pilgrimage. Through Tibilisi, together with Jinab-i-Aqa Khalilu'llah they went to the Holy Land and recounted the stories of Siyah-Chal as well as the arrest of Jinab-i-Varqa and Ruhu'llah extensively. They also, at the request of Greatest Holy Leaf, recounted the martyrdom of the twin shining lights, King and Beloved of Martyrs.

After the pilgrimage, he returned to Ishqabad and continued his services. While there, the remaining two sons, Jamal contracted tuberculosis and passed away and Kamal got lost and no trace of him was ever found again. Yet, Mirza Husayn never moved his lips in complaint. In Ishqabad he was constantly thanking the Blessed Beauty as he was serving the Faith and teaching His Cause. His only complaint was that why he was not he worthy of becoming a martyr together with Jinab-i-Varqa and Jinab-i-Ruhu'llah.

The Assembly organized for him to become a travel teacher around the townships of Ishqabad. In 1923 he was asked to go to Chahar-Juy, which had a distance of 24 hours by train. This town was located next to the Jeyhun River. There, he was the guest of a Baha'i called Aqa-Quli. Both started their teaching activities. The inhabitants of the town brought to his meeting the high Akhund, the Islamic priest to have the discussion. This priest was a believer in the oral traditions of Islam and would equalize them to the verses of Qur'an. Mirza Husayn was trying to convince him that not all the oral traditions are valid. There are those that are not correct ones, but the priest was adamant. Until Mirza Husayn asked the priest if he believes in the tradition that says from the seeds of Fatimih, the daughter of Muhammad, there would be twelve Imams. He affirmed the tradition. Then Mirza Husayn said, counting the numbers, from Imam Hasan to the Qa'im, the last Imam are eleven, where is the twelfth one? The priest could not answer this question (in fact Imam-Ali, Fatimih's husband is the first Imam, who was not from the seed of Fatimih!). Mirza Husayn told him, go to the Bazaar tomorrow and announce that one of the Imams is missing, if someone knows about him, should tell the priest. This matter became very embarrassing to the priest therefore he instigated and asked few of his Persian Muslims in secret to kill Mirza Husayn. Few nights after that incident, some fanatic Iranians rushed to the house he was residing and attacked him and his host with knives and daggers. When his body was taken back to Ishqabad, he was still alive and he was transferred to the hospital, but due to his old age and deep wounds, he could not recover and after few days he died, in fact he became a martyr as he always wished so.

The friends of Ishqabad, as if their dear father has passed away made a befitting funeral and later on a memorial gathering for him. His wife Khadijih khanum was still alive when her husband passed away.

JINAB-I-AQA MASHHADI ABDU'L QARABAGHI (Extract from Dr. Amin's manuscript)

Abdu'l-Baha asked Aqa Siyyid Asad'ullah Qumi to go to Qarabagh, which is a small town close to Ganjih (previously part of the Azerbaijan Province of Iran, now in the country of Azerbaijan), and instructed him not to move out of the town until he teaches the Faith at least to one person.

Aqa Siyyid Asadu'llah travels twice to Berda', which is considered as a part of Qarabagh and found the impossibility of teaching the Faith in such a town. With profound sadness, he decided to return and as hopeless as he was, he could not contain his tears of failure in the obedience of his Master. Tears were flowing

from his eyes over his white beard. As the street was devoid of people, he could sob loudly, without knowing that from the other side of the street, from a small shop, someone was watching him. The man, owner of the shop came to him and asked him the reason for his shedding tears, yet the question was like adding more oil to the fire, making Aqa Asadu'llah to even cry harder.

The person who came to Aqa Asadu'llah was Mashhadi Abdu'l-i-Qarabaghi. Aqa Asadu'llah recounted to the visitor of his unfulfilled task and the message he suppose to deliver to at least one person. Mashhadi Abdu'l became very interested, seeing an old man, with such a dedication and conviction wants to pass such a message. They conversed for a bit longer and Mashhadi Abdu'l became a believer, saying why he did not openly discuss with him the very first day. He promised to go to the market place right then and there to proclaim the message to the multitude of the people so that all the people of Berda' become believers to this new Message. As much as Aqa Asadu'llah tried to prevent him from this action, but to not avail. Yet they agreed that Mashhadi Abdu'l to stay with Aqa Asadu'llah for a period of two days and nights in order to get to know all the details and proofs of the new Cause. On the third day, Aqa Asadu'llah left him with some Writings and said goodbye to him and again told him that it is not wise to proclaim the Faith publicly at this stage.

Mashhadi Abdu'l on the first Saturday which was an open bazaar rushed to the square and climbed over the pulpit which was a permanent item in the middle of the square from where the news would be announced to the public, and few times cried loudly to get the attention of the people, calling them 'O people'. When people gathered around the pulpit all silently.

Mashhadi Abdu'l was well known figure in town. He was educated and a very good standing Muslim. They all thought that there is news from Najaf or Karbala that Mashhadi Abdu'l wants to announce it. First Mashhadi Abdu'l confessed his belief in God and that there is no other God than He, also he testified to His Prophet Muhammad as His Messenger, then he again testified with loud voice to the Guardianship of Imam-Ali. Then he recited by chanting a long poetry in Turkish language, where all the Imams and their qualities are well mentioned. When all the people were all ears to hear his final message, Mashhadi Abdu'l cried out that 'Glad-tidings O people glad-tidings that the Qa'im has manifested Himself in Shiraz. As soon as he wanted to repeat the same news, he fainted. When he opened his eyes, he found out that he is laying over a bed in a room and next to him on a chair his friend Alish, was sitting and watching him. As he wanted to move, he found out that there is a pain enveloping all his body, his

mussels were not able to move him, no power in his body. He saw his body wrapped in a sheet, then suddenly he remembered the bazaar square and the pulpit, he also remembered the advice of Aqa Siyyid Asadu'llah. He thought to himself that Aqa Siyyid Asadu'llah was right and he wrongly considered these people worthy of receiving this new Divine Message.

He wanted to remedy the situation, therefore he asked Alish of what happened, where is he and why is he there? Alish told him that the place was the fortress of Imam-Quli-Big-Li, and he was there because the mob after hitting him thought that he was dead, left him in the middle of square, then his relatives brought him to the fortress. Alish asked him if he was out of his mind announcing the coming of Qa'im in Shiraz. Mashhadi Abdu'l denied of having ever said such words, these are calumnies attached to his name. Everyone had thought that he has become a madman. He was taken to Berda' at about two kilometers from Qarabagh for medical treatment. Sometimes passed and people forgot about this incident.

Mashhadi Abdu'l was always looking for a person to whom he can deliver the Message. Until he found Shirin, the son of Haji Sharif who had a shop close to his, who was eager to hear more about what Mashhadi Abdu'l had to say. Soon Shirin became an ardent believer. The two started to teach the Faith until the number reached to ten.

The priests of town finding out about the new activities under their nose, found a certain Hasan Big-i-Husayn-Bigov and told him about Mashhadi Abud'l's subversive work as a Babi, asking him to go and kill him. Hasan Big upon hearing this matter immediately took off to Mashhadi Abdu'l's shop and dagger in hand harshly asked him to tell him what is it that he is telling the people and taking them out of their religion. Mashhadi Abdu'l calmly talked to Hasan Big. It took him till mid-day before he also became a believer. This time, Hasan Big told his teacher that in that Saturday in the square he did not have the courage of telling the people the whole story, now this is his duty to perform. He went to the bazaar with his dagger in hand and started addressing the people by saying that everybody should know that Mashhadi Abdu'l is a Babi, Shirin is a Babi, and he went on to count all the number of the Babis of the town and said that he himself is also a Babi. Now, anyone would dare to do any harm to the Babis, his dagger would take care of that person! By this way the Cause of God was proclaimed in Qarabagh and the freedom of the believers became guaranteed!

There was a certain Dadash Amu, a well-known gambler. He had a built himself in the best locality of the town a prominent gambling house. Before he could finish the building of his gambling house, he became a believer and offered his place as the Haziratu'l-Quds. A gambling house was converted to a centre of the Baha'i activities!

Abdu'l-Baha sent a Tablet to Mashhadi Abdu'l and asked him to move to Ishqabad to teach the Faith. Upon reaching Ishqabad, he opened himself a shop together with another believer and he was also constantly teaching the Faith to those interested ones, until the time the Assembly of Ishqabad asked Mashhadi Abdu'l to go to the villages of Irvan and Caucasia teaching the Faith to many interested people. He did so and he successfully delivered the Message of Baha'u'llah to all those areas and as a result, many accepted the Faith, before he returned to Ishaqabad.

In short, this illustrious man, since he accepted the Faith, never stopped teaching even for a moment. He served the Cause of God to his utmost ability. The two sons of his best friend Alish, after the passing of their father became believers of which one of them, Mulla Husayn, became the secretary of the Assembly of Berda', who, by the Soviet government was banished to Siberia and perished there. The other prominent person who became a believer through Mashhadi Abdu'l was Jinab-i- Mir Haydar Nakhjavani, (Not related to Mr. Ali Nakhjavani) who was deputy director in one of the oil companies of Baku, who served the Faith greatly.

Jinab-i-Mashhadi Abdu'l had written in Turkish language a book proving the Faith yet, his manuscript should have been left with someone, which so far is not being found. The holy Tablets, which have been addressed him are also not found. It is hoped that in future all these could be found, although it is well known that the Soviets, after confiscating all the literature of the Baha'is, were destroyed. These might be part of those valuable perished items.

Jinab-i-Mashhadi Abdu'l remained in Ishqabad until he passed away sometimes in the period of the WWI and was buried in the Baha'i cemetery of the city of Ishq. He left behind two sons and one daughter.

USTAD BEMAN-ALI BANNA YAZDI (Extract from Dr. Amin's manuscript)

Jinab-i-Ustad Beman-Ali, was one of the outstanding believers of this dearly loved Faith, who became a Baha'i through the efforts of Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna. Beman-Ali was a son of a banker and successful merchants of Yazd. Because his children used to die one after another, when the last one was born, they called him Beman-Ali, (stay living Ali), that by the grace of this name, this child would survive. As he lived, he, the only child, became more and more dear to the family. During his childhood and early youth age, he did not like to study and counter to the will of his parents, he was much attracted to the builders, where he would spend hours just to see them working in their shops, and no one would prevent him from his liking. Later on, when he grew older, he suggested that he wanted to become a master builder. He was mentioned how difficult the profession was, long hours, heat and cold, yet, that was what he chose as his future profession, where soon he became master in his profession.

At the age of 14, he said goodbye to his parents and parted to go to work. His mother gave him breast milk once more and kissed him goodbye. Later on he heard that the city of Ishqabad is being built, therefore, he went there to help building the city.

Ustad Beman-Ali, while in Ishqabad got to know Ustad Ali-Akbar, because of his deep religious sentiments, one night goes to the house of Ustad and wakes him up asking him to guide him towards the truth. Ustad makes him comfortable and stays awake explaining to him the truth of the Faith. That same night, Beman-Ali becomes a new creation. He became so attracted to the tenet of the Faith that from the first moment started teaching the Faith. He had a special attraction towards the reading of the holy Writings and would forget himself totally.

When the Russian government recognized the Baha'i Faith as an independent religion, after the martyrdom of Mirza Muhammad-Rida the martyr, the Spiritual Assembly appointed the Teaching Committee of fifteen members, where Aqa Beman-Ali was one of the most ardent members.

Aqa Beman-Ali's rest of the story was said earlier. He wrote some concerning matters on a piece of paper addressing to Muslims in general regarding their expectations and their fulfillments thereof and one early morning went to the leading mosque of the city and glued it to the main door. Unfortunately that was the time when the multitude was leaving the prayer session and was on the way out. By seeing the flier on the door, Aqa Beman-Ali was attacked severely and if it were not for some of the Baha'is just passing by thus, rescuing him, he would

have been killed then and there! This also brought the intervention of the government who was not happy by stirring up the calm and protected condition of their city, thus, wrote to the Assembly asking for explanation. The Assembly apologized for the unilateral action of one member and assured the government of the repetition of such an action will not happen again in future.

Aqa Beman-Ali was questioned as to his unilateral decision of writing such a flier by the Teaching Committee, which led to him being fined to some amount of cash or to resign from the Committee, who gladly paid the fine but did not pay attention to their condemnation! He told the Committee members that they were right to condemn him, because they haven't felt the sweetness of the holy Writings as he has. If all would deeply read the Writings, all would act as he did!

Aqa Beman-Ali travelled far and wide teaching the Faith. He even after being exiled back to Iran did not like anything else to do except teaching the Faith. He returned to Yazd, his homeland. He started a very good relationship with the Zoroastrians of Yazd. He was an old man who did not desire anything, lived simple and with little, yet, he was a valiant defender of the Faith, without fear he would walk in town and teach the Faith openly in such a way that no one ever dared to attack him.

He passed away in Yazd and was buried in the Baha'i cemetery of Mihdi-Abad.

JINAB-I MIRZA HUSAYN MU'ALLIM- YAZDI

Jinab-i-Mirza Husyan was born in Yazd. His father had cloth-making factory. He learned to read and write Persian and Arabic by going to very rudimentary schools of the town. His father loved him very much and taught him of his cloth-making business, where he through this, learned a profession, but his love was more in knowledge learning, therefore, he was sent to the religious city of Isfahan where he learned much about Islam and later on in order to perfect his profession, he went to Iraq's Najaf and Karbila cities. While there he learned about the new Revelation. According to his belief, he was compelled to investigate for himself the truth. He went to Tihran and with little success, which made him to travel to Mashhad to learn more. There his search after the Truth gave optimum result. He decided to go back to Yazd to teach the Faith and in the village of Menj he created a school, where he, at the same time which was making his living, was engaging in the work of teaching the people, where quite few people accepted the Faith as a result.

While there, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani received a letter from Ustad Ali-Akbar from Ishqabad asking for a teacher. Aqa Siyyid Mihdi talked to Jinab-i-Mirza Husayn, who immediately accepted the instructions and embarked for Ishqabad. It took him two months to reach there in the year of 1894. First he stayed with Ustad Ali-Akbar and later on moved on the land of A'zam, where a small school for the boys was being built.

Later on Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani also arrived to Ishqabad and they both founded a real school for boys. Soon after, the Assembly of Ishqabad asked Aqa Siyyid Mihdi to go to Marv to start with a school in that city, and when all the family were contracted malaria, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi had to go back to Ishqabad. After he got cured, the work of the school was enhanced, especially when the beloved Master instructed the community to go for formal academic school, the curriculum of the government was adopted in full, adding to it, all the Baha'i principles and moral education. Later on such a school was also prepared for the girls.

Jinab-i-Mirza Husayn was the founder of these schools. When Jinab-i-Haji Abu'l-Hasan Ardikani, the deputy of Huquq passed through Tashkent and found out that they need a Baha'i teacher to teach the friends there about the tenets of the Faith. When he arrived to Ishqabad, Jinab-i-Haji Husyan became the candidate and was sent to Tashkent. While there, he also associated with the high caliber people and taught them the Faith. The editor of the Al-Islah magazine, the eminent erudite, Mir Salaha'd-Din became his good friend and as a result in every issue, an article about the Faith in Uzbek language was being published. After two years, Mirza Husayn returned to Ishqabad and continued to teach individuals at their homes.

In 1918 he went to Marv to replace Jinab-i-Aqa Siyyid Mihdi, to teach Arabic. He also made a special visit to Bukhara to visit the resting place of Jinab-i-Nabil Akbar in 1923.

Jinab-i-Mirza Husayn in 1928 passed away in Ishqabad, after a rich life of service in Turkistan area, leading many people to the new Faith.

JINAB-I-SHAYKH HEYDAR-I-MU'ALLIM

Jinab-i-Shaykh Heydar was born in Edinburg, which is one of the most important cities of Tataristan. He was from a well-rooted and religious family, where he

was privileged to have special tutors from his childhood to learn Persian, Turkish and Tatars languages, and later on he studied Arabic.

From the beginning, Shaykh Heydar was inclined to learn ancient sciences and religious and logical studies. When he came to the age when he could decide for his future, with plenty of gold coins he took off to Bukhara and perfected his studies in literature and in jurisprudence no one could know more than him. He came to know the search path of the Wise and Gnostics, yet he was not finding what he was seeking and searching for within the general and formal sciences. Therefore, he went to Tihran in order to learn the new sciences, enjoying whatever he could add to his great knowledge, until he became known among the science lovers, as the highest erudite. He then embarked to know the cities of Iran. He passed through Mazandiran's city of Sari. There lived Jinab-i-Aqa Mirza Husyan Va'iz Qazvini, known as the Pillar of God, a Baha'i of high caliber. As soon as Jinab-i-Va'iz heard of the coming of this erudite man to his city, decided to give find him and give him the copy of the Book of Certitude, thus, giving him the new Divine Message. He carried the book with him until at the first encounter, he presented it to Jinab-i-Shaykh Heydar, who started to study the book immediately and became so intoxicated with its contents that the passing of time was not of any concern to him. When he realized the chanting of the 'call to prayer' from the mosque, then he was almost finishing the book. He read the book three times in three days and found out that its Writer was of divine origin. Wholeheartedly he wanted to investigate more and learn about this new Revelation, where in a short time, he became an ardent believer and at once started to teach the Faith, which caused turbulence among the priests. The episode was reported to Tihran's Assembly, where he was called telegraphically to proceed to the city and became a teacher at Tarbiyat School.

Jinab-i-Shaykh Heydar's acceptance of the Faith was coincidental with the passing of Baha'u'llah, 1892 and the commencement of the period of the Center of the Covenant Abdu'l-Baha. His life was dedicated to teaching the Baha'i children from the beginning to the end. After few year, he was chosen to teach the Royal family's children and the household of Muzaffarid-Din Shah, where he was able to convert one of the princesses to the Faith, as well as some other members of the Royal Family.

During this time, Jinab-i-Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini, who by the instructions of the beloved Master was going to Ishqabad, passed through Tihran. The Assembly of Ishqabad had already authorized him to find yet another well

prepared teacher for their community, who would be acceptable by the Assembly of Thiran. Jinab-i-Shaykh Muhammad-Ali from the teachers of the Tarbiyat School chose this illustrious personage and took him along to Ishqabad, where he became a permanent teacher for a period of almost thirty years. He even got married in Ishqabad and had four daughters of which one died in young age and the rest three were exiled to Iran during the early Soviet period.

In 1936, Jinab-i-Shaykh Heydar passed away at the age of 72 and was buried in the Baha'i cemetery of Ishqabad.

JINAB-I-SIYYID MIHDI GULPAYGANI

Aqa Siyyid Mihdi was born on 21 October 1963 in the township of Gulpaygan of Arak, in priesthood Islamic family, where his father Siyyid Abu'l-Qasim was the prayer leader of the township's mosque, regarded a high position.

Aqa Siyyid Mihdi, was sent to school to learn the basics of literature and Islamic studies in his locality and then off to Isfahan to get his degrees in jurisprudence and Islamic principles. He then travelled to Sultan-Abad to learn metaphysics and occult sciences.

While he was in Isfahan, he was connected to the Baha'is and met Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, his kin and learned much about the logic of the Revelation. Then he met with Jinab-i-Haji Mirza Heydar-Ali who opened a new door of understanding to him and became convinced that he should investigate the new Revelation. He was given some books written on the proof of the Faith yet, it was until he came face to face with the original Writings of Baha'u'llah that revolutionized him and he wholeheartedly accepted the Faith in such a way that he became totally intoxicated with the new Revelation, which made him to go on pilgrimage to see Baha'u'llah in Akka, but while yet in Baghdad, he heard of His ascension. Six months later, when he could come out of the acceptance of this tragic news, he could continue his travels until reaching the presence of the beloved Master, Abdu'l-Baha Who profoundly impressed him.

After staying for few months at His presence, by His instructions, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi replaced his kin, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl in Ishqabad and in 1893 as an active member of the Baha'i Faith in that city, where he became the schoolteacher thus helping the community to grow. Aqa Siyyid Mihdi got married in Ishqabad when

he was 33. In order to learn Russian language, he started to give Persian language lessons to the military officers and himself learning their language. When the government needed an editor for its Persian language magazine, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi was the best candidate.

Aqa Siyyid Mihdi was an outstanding teacher of the Faith and the most erudite adversaries were not able to stand his arguments, and he was considered the knowledgeable person of town.

He could hardly make his living and used to live usually in austerity due to his numerous family members, yet happy with the service he was rendering to the Faith, especially when he was called to go to Tihran together with Aqa Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qaini by the Master's instructions in order to finalize the unfinished book of Kashfu'l-Ghata of Jinab-i-Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, which took them then months to finish the task with the help of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in Tihran. Soon after his return, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi was sent to Marv to handle the school there and he only returned to Ishqabad when the decision of producing a magazine of Kurshid-e Khavar (The Sun of the Esat), was dawned to the community and Aqa Siyyid Mihdi was asked to be its manager and editor, which was later on confiscated by the Soviets and that was after he passed away.

Friends really got to know him and his degree of deep divine knowledge as well as other branches of social sciences, after the Russian revolution, where he served with great courage in all corners of the vast land, preparing the youth to defend the Faith courageously. During the day he used to receive the friends at the Office of the Assembly to get to discuss their problems to be taken up further. He had not a moment to spare if not spent in the teaching work. He had to manage an excellent meeting for the Europeans to enlighten them on the spiritual matters as well as on the Faith. Although he was quite familiar with the Russian language, yet his talks and discourses were all translated from Persian by Dr. Aminu'llah Ahmad-zadih and they would follow with long hours discussions on the scientific and philosophical matters, which many of these meetings in the later years used to be held at the meeting hall of the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar, where up to 500 people would take part. Many of the Europeans (Russians) accepted the Faith. Religious confrontational meetings with the State representatives used to be defended most successfully by Aqa Siyyid Mihdi, where the Baha'is were specifically invited to attend and Dr Abbas Zein used to translator for the Baha'is. After the end of the meeting, a period of questions and answers would follow for long hours with the materialists of the Soviet

government, where all being thoroughly answered by Aqa Siyyid Mihdi. Where the fame of the Faith was conquering all the territories, the Socialist government was in a great test, as, there was no question that was not answered to the satisfaction of everyone from the government side or from the attendants. Proofs presented were the binding words.

Aqa Siyyid Mihdi travelled to Moscow and met with those in the highest positions and presented to each one books and booklets for furthering their knowledge in the Baha'i Faith. He also participated in the meetings alleged to the great Russian writer, Leo Nikolaivch Tolstoy and made presented discourses. After this, he returned to Ishqabad. Indeed he was a great man, a great defender of the Faith. He was well received in the high circles, yet he was always very humble in spite of his high scientific knowledge. He was never afraid of anything or anyone when it came to present the Faith with all dignity to the great and important people. He would never argue with anyone. He was a high literal man, an accomplished poet. Humorous at a time and he knew when what to say and how to say it. He was a good chess player.

In 22 January 1928, after a short sickness he passed away at the age of 66, seeking to continue the rest of his services from the Kingdom On High. He was buried in the Baha'i cemetery of Ishqabad.

Many of his essays could be found in the copies of the Sun of the East magazine. He wrote the book of Baha'ism and Socialism. He also wrote books on the Moral Education of children and youth. He wrote four volumes on the principles of the Persian language. He left behind the collection of his poetries, which might be found with some families.

Aqa Siyyid Mihdi married twice, from his first marriage he had six children, four daughters Sa'idih, Tayyibih, Qudsiyyih and Rezvaniyyih, and two sons, Tarazu'llah, born in 1910 who at the age of 28 was arrested by the Soviets in 1938 and was imprisoned and passed away by hemorrhage in the prison, probably by excess of torture. His last son was Rezvanu'llah, born in 1911. From his second wife Bibi khanum, there was only one daughter by the name of Munavvar, who passed away in 1963.

He was recipient of Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha where He address Aqa Siyyid Mihdi as 'O thou the remnant of that illustrious personage'. Dated 4th of January 1919, the beloved Master answer his letter after four years, where it has been staying in

Port Said all these years due to the war. In the Tablet Abdu'l-Baha highly appreciates the work he has done together with other friends in collecting the writings of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl and completing his book of Kashfu'l-Ghata. In the Tablet it is being mentioned that although the work was tedious and lengthy, yet, it bore fantastic fruits. Like any other work, He mentions, at the beginning it looks difficult, yet at the end when the results are seen, all the difficulties dissipate. Abdu'l-Baha mentions that it is very important that all the writings of late Mirza Abu'l-Fadl are gathered and sent to the Holy Land, even to the last page, because they were the writing of such an eminent person. He says in the Tablet that once the book is published and disseminated, it would bring great success to the Faith.

In another rather lengthy Tablet dated 4 July 1919, Abdu'l-Baha addressing Aqa Siyyid Mihdi with the opening of 'O thou the remnant of Abu'l-Fadail', He reminds him of the previous Tablet whose answer He did not receive. In this Tablet Abdu'l-Baha quotes Baha'u'llah as "Newspaper is the mirror of the Truth", and He wishes that the magazine of Sun of the East also mirrors the True Sun. He acknowledges the receipt of a bundle of the magazine, which He will read them all soon. He points at one of the articles in the magazine where it is being addressed to the high officials, having forgotten the down trodden and the poor, although Abdu'l-Baha highly praises the contents of the article, yet He reminds Aqa Siyyid Mihdi that the tone of the article is a somehow strong and if smoother would be better. He mentions that the magazine should be the charter of truth and of wellbeing, where only a sign would suffice reporting the great complaints.

He refers to the matter of writing refutation against the atheists and the punishment of the pre-youth of Iran by the negligent is although very good, yet quoting Voltair and Rossouw and the like in the magazine, will give the concept of religious weakness, as, they cannot judge properly and because the quotations are very indecent, it would bring misunderstanding to the ignorant, where the quote by itself is the proof of fatuity. When such quotations enter an article, the dignity of religion is in jeopardy. Abdu'l-Baha mentions what Voltair has mentioned in his book concerning how Satan took Christ showing the whole world to Him, etc. and then sheds light onto the real meaning of the whole Bible's episode. He mentions that observe how Voltair's comments weakens the pillars of belief of the ignorant. Abdu'l-Baha mentions how He destroyed in the US the foundations of the atheist and all that was done with respect and proofs.

At the end Abdu'l-Baha requests all the copies of the Magazine to be always sent to Him.

JINAB-I-HAJI MIRZA HEYDAR-ALI ISFAHANI (THE ANGEL OF CARMEL)

The one believer who could be put on the top of the list of the servants Baha'u'llah, who did serve Him and suffered in His path, was Jinab-i-Haji Mirza Heydar-Ali.

He was born into a family of merchants in Isfahan. His father was Mirza Husyan-i-Tajir, the merchant. When he was a child, he was sent to Kerman to be at the service of Haji Muhammad Karim Kahn, the Shaykhi leader, where he stayed there until the age of maturity, when he started to realize that there is no difference in his way of life as he claimed to be with any other ordinary person. Like any other individual, he fears, he hides, he wishes, etc. This observation loosened his faith in him and returned to Isfahan. Yet he kept on reading the Shaykhi leaders' books and learned that the coming of the Promised One is nigh. Having faith in the writings of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim, the Shaykhi leaders, made him to travel for three years and find out for himself when and by who such a claim to be materialized until he reached to his quest again in Isfahan where he staunch became a believer.

In his travels to Yazd, he befriended Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna and Ustad Muhammad-Rida Banna, as three traveling companions to teach the Faith until they reach Ishqabad, where the two Ustads would be working for Haji Wakilud'Dawlih Afnan, building a carevanserai and other buildings and Haji to travel teach. They wrote a letter to Baha'u'llah from Yazd and offered Him their proposal and left the city. They left Yazd and travelled until they reached Faran and remained there to receive the instructions from Baha'u'llah. After a short while, the response arrived and the Blessed Beauty had not agreed for Haji to go the Ishqabad in that time, but the other two companions were encouraged to go.

Haji returned to Yazd and remained with Jinab-i-Vakilud'Dawlih, active in teaching wherever there was a need. He was in Yazd when he heard of the passing of the Blessed Beauty, which made him extremely sad and it was only for the Tablets of the beloved Master and reading the Tablet of the Will of Baha'u'llah that revived him and with a new spirit rose again to serve. Soon he learned that the birds of night – the Covenant breakers – have become active and are stealing the faith of the believers everywhere. Therefore, he travelled to Qazvin, Zanjan, Mashhad and its environs, Ishqabad, Baku, Nakhjavan, Ganjih and

Tibilisi and spent as much time as possible in each place, teaching the believers in the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and deepen them in their love for Abdu'l-Baha. Not to believe in anyone's words, unless they were sanctioned by Abdu'l-Baha. Once he was satisfied with this task, he travelled to the Holy Land.

After some time staying in the presence of Abdu'l-Baha, he took off again to visit and deepen the friends in most of the regions and travel teaching. He went to Ishqabad as well as other cities of Turkistan. He was in Ishqabad that the news of Covenant breaking of Jamal-i-Burujerdy in Tihran and of the Khalil-i-Khalil in Azerbaijan became manifest, which prompt him to travel to Iran and help the friends to remain steadfast in the Covenant, getting the friends in meetings and deepening them in their love for the Faith and to the Center of the Covenant. Then he travelled other cities, rounding his trips and ending again in Ishqabad. After staying for a while he travelled again to the Holy Land where by the instructions of Abdu'l-Baha, he remained in Haifa until he passed away in 28 August 1920.

AQA SIYYID ASADU'LLAH QUMI

Aqa Siyyid Asadullah was born in a pious family of Siyyid Isma'il Saffar in Qum, following his parents' dedication to their faith. While young, he learned literacy in his town. Later on he was sent to learn shoemaking at the shop of his elder brothers.

The Faith's fame was scattered in Qom when Nasirid-Din Shah was attacked by few Babis with the intention of killing him and as consequence, all the Babis were under the spotlight and many untruthful matters and calumnies were told against them.

Siyyid Asad'u'llah heard of all these, yet he was busy with his shoemaking business. He decided to make a trip to Hamadan and then to Arak before he returned to Qom. Then he travelled to Tihran and heard many stories and observed many related matters, even he heard of the martyrdom of Tahirih and searched for her poetries where he memorized them and used to mumble them constantly. When he became tired of his environment in Qom, he travelled to Tabriz and opened a shoemaking shop in that city and he became quite successful.

One night he observed the falling stars phenomena and thought to himself that this is one of the signs of the coming of the Promised One. Then he heard about the martyrdom of Jinab-i-Badi, which put him in deep thought and lead him to do a thorough research. Found some friends who would tell him about the New

Revelation and he became a believer and was freed from the valley of wonderment, getting into the point of certitude.

Soon he started decidedly to defuse the Holy Fragrances. When in Tihran, he was arrested and put to the Siah-Chal, the Black Pit underground dungeon together with Jinab-i-Mulla Ali-Akbar Shahmirzadi and Jinab-i-Mulla Muhammad-Rida Muhammad-Abadi, where he remained there for 22 months before he was released and decided to go the Holy Land when he had nothing with him, which made the trip very difficult for him before he reached to Beirut and met Jinab-i-Afnan-i-Kabir, who was residing there at the moment. Jinab-i-Ibn-i-Abhar joined him and together travelled to Acre and met Baha'u'llah face to face and was present when the Blessed Beauty was revealing Holy Tablet, listening to His melodious voice of Revelation. Baha'u'llah made him to transcribe His Writings, and therefore, he remained in Akka for a while where he also served Jinab-i-Nabil-i-A'zam.

While in Akka, he also became the teacher of the children of the household. He was the attendant of the Blessed Beauty when the ascension occurred. He remained serving Abdu'l-Baha and at His instruction travelled far and wide teaching the Faith. He even accompanied Him to His travels to the West and it was there that he was honored representing the Muslim background believers of Iran at the cornerstone celebration of the House of Worship of the West by the instructions of Abdu'l-Baha.

When he returned back, Jinab-i-Siyyid Asadu'llah was asked to go to Turkmenistan to teach the Faith to all strata of the society even travelling inside of Russia for teaching the Faith and in Kazan he met the relatives of the Emperor and was accompanied by them to go to Moscow and Petrograd where he met Isabella Grinoskaya the author of the famous play on the Bab.

Jinab-i-Siyyid Asadu'llah was very attractive as per his spirit and love emanating from his face, always smiling and his smile was contagious to others. He lived long and became one of the most famous teachers of the Faith. He travelled to all corners of Iran. He was as a moving geography, who knew all the names of the cities and towns, even the distances between them. He even travelled to half of the Ottoman's Empire and part of India, the whole Turkmenistan and European Russia. He came to know Europe and the United States. He passed away in 1919, two years before the passing of Abdu'l-Baha, taking with him a rich life of service and teaching the Faith.

AQA MULLA ABDU'L-AZIM - AMINU'L-ULAMA OF ARDABIL

This renown martyr was born in Ardabil, which is one of the cities of Azerbaijan, close to the famous Mount Sabalan, having a wonderful moderate climate and sweet waters, yet, inspite of all, the inhabitants' mentality is low and dark, their moral quite decadent and full of superstition.

His birth name was Mulla Abdu'l-Azim. After going through the normal basic education, to further his education he went to Iraq, where his father was. After the passing of his father and him getting finished his education, the government title of Aminu'l-Ulama (The Trustee of the Learned) was passed to him as well as the honor of leading the Friday Prayer of the town to him. While in Ardabil, he was living with highest honors as the judge of the town. Until some of the believers decided to go and meet him, teaching him the new Message. Three of the most honorable believers, Aqa Mirza Rahman, Aqa Iskandar and Aqa Khan Aghlan, titled as Mukhtar Nizam went to see him taking some of the Writings and books on the Faith with them for him. This was the beginning of the WWI in 1914, where Germany was conquering other countries. Mulla Abdu'l-Azim clearly indicated to their guests that if Germany is being defeated, then I will become Baha'i. After sometimes when Mulla Abdu'l-Azim was at the office of Mukhtar Nizam, the latter handed the former the newspaper, where at the top was written 'Germany was defeated', the news which made his to perspire. Mukhtar Nizam told him, what else do you want to happen now? Mulla Abdu'l-Azim had put down a promise and now could not break it. He was convinced of the truth by reason, yet his heart was not there yet and he was with much doubt. Then he decided to go the Mashhad for pilgrimage and he chose to go through Ishqabad. He remained three days in the city and for sightseeing he went to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and then continued his trip to Mashhad, performing the rites of pilgrimage in that city, he returned to Ardabil. Soon he was called for the position of the judge for the Ardabil's army and for this he had to go to Qazvin. As soon as he entered Qazvin he became sick, where Jinab-i-Mirza Musa Khan, the medic attended him and only by seeing the spiritual countenance of Aqa Mirza Musa, his faith in the new Revelation was confirmed and he came to total certitude.

During the days of Naw-Ruz in the Mosque of Ardabil, two of the leading clerics, Qavamu's-Sadat and Shaykh Ya'qub, were announcing the audience that they were convinced that Mulla Abdu'l-Azim-i-Aminu'l-Ulama has become a Baha'i therefore, he should be exiled from Ardabil and instigate the people to kill him. One of the clerics by the name of Mirza Ali-Akbar gathers together his followers and they plot how to kill this man. After deciding on their plan, they call a certain

shopkeeper by the name of Aqa Bala and tell him that he has to go to the house of Mulla Abdu'l-Azim and kill him with a dagger. First Aqa Bala rejects the duty, but when he is being bribed with the promise of a thousand Tuman, he accepts the offer and goes to the erudite man's house. Once lead in, he gets close to Mulla Abud'l-Azim and pushes the dagger in his stomach the way that his intestines fall out and in couple of days he passes away. The killer was arrested by the head of the town's army head, who was coming to visit Mulla Abdu'l-Azim.

Jinab-i-Aminu'l-Ulama should have been quite active in the Faith to become known by his other colleagues as a Baha'i. And it was quite unusual for a man of his category to become confirmed in his heart and in his faith by only seeing the countenance of a spiritual Baha'i.

JINAB-I-MIRZA MIHDI, AKHAVANU'S-SAFA

Aqa Mirza Mihdi was the youngest son of Aqa Muhammad-Baqir who was born in a suburb of Yazd. He heard about the Faith from Aqa Ali, son of Haji Abdur-Rasul and embarked on his research and through his own brothers, the Akhavanu's-Safa (The Pleasant Brothers), he accepted the Faith while he was still young. As soon as he entered the new Faith, he started to deepen himself in its precepts, went to Mirza Muhammad-Ibrahim who later became a martyr. It was agreed that Mirza Mihdi would meet the teacher at early dawns until he became an experienced teacher of the Faith. During the uprising of the mob against the Baha'is in Yazd by the instigation of the clergy in 1903, his older brother became a martyr and the whole family went through much hardship.

As soon as Mirza Mihdi felt some relief, went to Tihran and attended the classes of Jinab-i-Sadru's-Sudur who prepared him even further in the field of teachings and started to travel teach around Iran. In 1907 he was permitted to go to the Holy Land attending the presence of the beloved Master. Then he went to travel teach to Turkmenistan and Russia. He served in the capacity of travel teacher for almost 13 years.

Besides the teaching trips Mirza Mihdi made around the land of Iran, he also went to Caucasia and Turkmenistan, visiting all the cities where the Baha'is resided, to Tashkent, the furthestmost to the east and to Takhtih-Bazar to the border of Afghanistan, where his visits were sources of inspiration to the remote believers. Later on he returned to Iran. Dear Master Abdu'l-Baha in a Tablet addressed to him praised him for of his trips and called him 'the source of

faithfulness, who is being accepted at the Threshold of the All-Mighty, the lowly servant of the Threshold of Baha and the humble guard in the path of rightfulness'. According to Mirza Mihdi, his trips took seven months and six days in the Russian land and Turkmenistan.

Mirza Mihdi Akhavanu's-Safa was in his mid forties when in a visit to the city of Isfahan, he became sick and the acquired medicine did adverse job and soon after he passed away. His remains were interred next to the graves of the King and Beloved of Martyrs, where the grave of Mirza Asadu'llah-Vazir of Isfahan, a devout believer who was instrumental in moving the sacred remains of the Bab from Isfahan to Baghdad, the area which is called Takht-e Foulad.

In one of His Tablet Abdu'l-Baha addressing his brethren elevates him to the stage of martyr. He mentions that of his martyrdom, He became very sad, that illustrious personage is a martyr, because in the path of God he was always under tremendous threat and finally while he was teaching the Faith rushed to the Kingdom of the Most High. The Master mentions that his whole being was quite useful and he was free from all kinds of attachments; his value would become known in the future.

In another Tablet He praises Mirza Mihdi saying that he spent the whole of his life to the proclamation of the Faith where he did not repose for a moment. He went from city to city and from a village to another. He was detached and an attracted soul who with a pure heart and an eloquent tongue and patient in difficulties would guide the people, therefore that single soul was very dear and of a high regard not only to Abdu'l-Baha, but to the Concourse On High. His true value is not known today and soon it will become manifest. Then the beloved Master thanks the friends who helped to prepare him a befitting funeral whose news made Him very thankful at the Threshold of the Blessed Beauty, hoping that the ascension of that pure soul in that land would be admonishing the people.

JINAB-I SHAYK ALI-AKBAR QUCHANI The martyr

Jinab-i-Quchani was one of the most erudite priests who became a believer in the blessed Cause. He is valued as second only to the Nabil-i-Akbar, the erudite of Qa'in. He had a universal Islamic knowledge and an extremely eloquent tongue.

During his stay in Ishq-abad, Aqa Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani became very close to him and had high regards for him. They were very good friends and often would visit each other. When the news of his martyrdom reached Ishq-abad, it made his soul mate very sad and often he said that after the ascension of the Blessed Beauty, the death of Jinab-i-Quchani made him extremely sad.

Jinab-i-Shaykh Ali-Akbar was born around 1871 in Ja'far-Abad of Quchan in a family of merchants. For twenty-five years he studied in the religious schools of Mashhad, Sabzivar, Tihiran and finally in Najaf and Karbila where his fame became universal as the foremost erudite personage.

Apparently Jinab-i-Shaykh heard of the Faith in Quchan and later on in Tihiran by meeting some Baha'is he becomes a believer.

When there was a high caliber meeting in Ishq-abad at the house of Mirza Mahmoud Afnan, the son of Jinab-i-Vakilud-Dawlih, for the welcoming of Prince Abu'l-Hasan Mirza (the only Qajar prince who became an ardent believer during the time of Abdu'l-Baha and was highly regarded by Him). In that meeting, many of the Baha'i erudite people were also present including Jinab-i-Quchani. When Prince the main speaker was answering the questions of the present participants, Jinab-i-Shaykh asked permission from the Prince to enhance the word 'question', where he spoke for one full hour. The erudite Prince asked the meeting to introduce this man and when it was done, he affirmed that he has heard of Jinab-i-Shaykh's fame while he was in Najaf and Karbila, who was quite famous among the knowledgeable priests.

Jinab-i-Quchani in a letter to a Baha'i friend – Nasru'llah Rastigar – writes and explains how a certain night while he was in his hometown of Quchan, the enemies of the Faith attacked his home and drove him out. Fleeing with much difficulties, he reached the border of Turkmenistan where he stayed with a friend for few days before they decided to go to another town – Darreh Gaz, where they busied themselves with teaching of the Faith to the inhabitants of that town; but soon the politicians and the ignorant religious fanatics made life difficult to them, which made them to cross to Ishq-abad. He thanks God for having had his share in the difficulties, persecutions and exile of the friends from their hometowns and going through imprisonment too.

Jinab-i-Shaykh after sometime residing in Ishq-abad and engaging in the important teaching work and dedicating to the deepening the friends in the

tenets of the Faith embarked to the Holy Land, going to the presence of the beloved Master and after quenching his insatiable thirst of associating with the Centre of the Covenant, he took off again and by the way of Baku and Ishq-abad returned to Quchan. While still in Baku, he wrote a letter to Abdu'l-Baha and asked for martyrdom, where he received an answer, instructing him to a lengthy teaching trip where he would finally meet his heart's desire.

In the spring of 1915 Jinab-i-Shaykh while in Mashhad thought to take a carriage to go to Quchan and in the meanwhile he went to the shoe market to buy himself a pair of shoes. Soon, the clergy of the town recognized him as famous as he was, and it was decided on the spot to have eliminated, but they could not issue a fatwa against him, being much greater than all other clergies. They devised a plan calling the softhearted ignorant mob into a meeting, where they could incite them by injecting the fanatic venom into their veins. From among the mob, soon three men were volunteered to please the Islam of the clergy by killing the head of the Baha'is of the town who were trying to destroy their Islam. These three fanatics were Mulla 'Abid of Mashhad who was serving at the Shrine of Imam-Rida, Karbila'i Ali Khayyat -the tailor- also from Mashhad and Husayn Susu, an assistant to a cloth-merchant who was from Azerbaijan. These three thinking that by taking this grave task they would be helping Islam, were observing Jinab-i-Shaykh until he left the shoe shop, where Karbila'i Ali approached him and put the revolver into the mouth of Jinab-i-Shaykh and pulled the trigger. The servant of Jinab-i-Shaykh immediately deserted him. Husayn Susu also approached and pulled the trigger of his own revolver pointing at stomach of Jinab-i-Shaykh, where together shot six bullets into his body. Jinab-i-Quchani fell to the ground and pulled his robe around him. The third culprit, Mulla 'Abid was observing him from a distance over the roof to see if the six bullets did not kill him, he would also shoot him from a hole of the roof. When he saw Jinab-i-Quchani on the ground, he left the scene. Many people were gathering around the body and each one was commenting something. In the meanwhile the news were taken to the Baha'is that according to the fatwa of a certain clergy -Akhund Aqazadih- the lifeless body of the martyr was going to be taken to the Shrine's yard and be burned. In the meanwhile police also heard of the shooting and rushed to the scene, yet, the populace was so much that it made it much difficult for the police to come to the body, where it remained on place until afternoon, until the gate keeper of the close-by inn took the body inside, stealing the ring from the dead body's finger. At a later stage, police carried the body to the morgue and closed the door. At night the body was washed and buried him in the Luqman cemetery.

Thus, he reached his heart's desire as it was promised to him by the Center of the Covenant.

JINABI MIRZA HEYDAR-ALI OSKU'I

He was born in 1866 in Sahand of Mantiq, one of the villages of Osku in the province of Mazandiran, next to the Caspian Sea. His father was Karbila'i Hasan. While yet in his childhood, the family moved to Osku, where Mirza Heydar-Ali went to school and became literate and proficient in calligraphy.

He came to know a certain Karbila'i Abbas, while quite young, from whom he learned how to search for truth and soon, after going through an ascetic life, he became a believer. Soon he was able to teach the Faith to his two brothers as well as his father. Finding courage in teaching, he became a successful teacher by showing the path of Truth to many people in his hometown. Finding out about this sudden success of the New Faith the clergy started to create a general uprising against the Faith. In 1885 when the clamor of the clergy became intense Jinab-i-Mirza as the most prominent person in the new Community, consulted and for the protection of the Faith and those new believers decided to leave his town and go to Ishqabad, where he opened a shop and started his business as a cloth merchant.

Due to his excellent conduct, Jinab-i-Mirza Heydar-Ali became a famous merchant and quite prosperous at the same time very active in teaching the Faith to many seekers and guiding them to the New Faith. He was in Ishqabad when Jina-i-Haji Muhammad-Rida was martyred.

Jinab-i-Mirza Heydar-Ali was in correspondence with Baha'u'llah from Whom he received four Tablets. And when an epidemic disease of cholera swept through the region killing many people, he embarked for the Holy Land and just after the ascension of Baha'u'llah he reached the Akka in 1892. At the presence of Abdu'l-Baha he remained as the transcriber of Tablets for a year. Those who had good calligraphy were privileged to render such a service while staying in the Holy Land.

While at the presence of Abdu'l-Baha, Jinab-i-Mirza became quite deepened in the Faith, he also could see and hear for himself phenomena not experienced by others. He was instructed by the beloved Master to go back to Osku and teach the

Faith, therefore, he left the Holy Land together with Jinab-i-Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani who was also at His presence was instructed to go to Ishqabad as well as some other believers each with a specific instruction to go and teach the Faith.

Jinab-i-Mirza Heydar-Ali once back in Osku, started immediately his teaching activities and thus could bring a group of people to the Faith. He also continued with his business in Osku. In 1895/6 the matter of Covenant breaking was spreading fast in different communities. Mirza Heydar-Ali stood up in defense of the Covenant in full force and could save many lives before they fell in the offensive trap of the breakers of the Covenant. He also could get to the community of Ali-Allahi –the branch of Shi'i Muslims that believe the Imam Ali was closer to God than Muhammad- and could bring quite a number of them to the Faith. He wrote to the Community of Ishqabad and requested them to send a proper teacher to go to Irvan in Caucasia (Today Armenia). Mashhadi Abdu'l was sent there to teach, where he became quite successful in his endeavor in guiding many Ali-Alahi people in Irvan. Mirza Heydar-Ali travelled time and again to Caucasia for the teaching of the Faith, where he always was very successful. He could teach the Consul of Iran in Trabzon in Turkey and a certain Armenian priest too. His tour also lead him to Zonuz and Marand while travelling several times over the territories of Caucasia and Azerbaijan becoming successful in bringing to the Faith notable people of capacity. He even went to the Court of the Shah and met the prince who later became the king, Muhammad-Ali Mirza, teaching him the Faith and he became a friend of the Faith defending the Baha'is. Later on in Armenia, he was able to meet the Armenian philosopher Bayejov and taught him the Faith too.

Even as far as 1919, Jinab-i-Heydar-Ali was actively teaching the Faith and running his business too. The Local Assembly of Tabriz asked him to exclusively engage himself to teaching of the Faith travelling as far as possible. He travelled to Qazvin, Rasht, made a long trip to Hamadan, Malayir, Borujerd and its environs. Much of the time he became arrested and went through much difficulties, yet, relentless, he kept on teaching the Faith acquiring great successes everywhere. He even accompanied Miss Martha Root in her trip to her research areas where the immortal Tahirih has been travelling. Jinab-i-Oskui brought into the Faith many Jewish adherents.

He was present when the war between the Muslims and Christians of Armenia took place for three solid days in Baku, where all the believers were spared by

the power of God. While in Miyando-Ab, by the instigation of the enemies he was imprisoned and then sent to Tabriz, yet the Russian Consul came to his rescue.

Jinab-i-Mirza Heydar-Ali Oskui during his lifetime has been the recipient of four Holy Tablets from the Person of the Manifestion – Baha'u'llah, 54 Tablets from the Center of the Covenant - Abdu'l-Baha, and ten letters from the beloved Guardian, as well as three letters in the handwriting of the Greatest Holy Leaf, having such a fruitful and glorious life. He was 89 when he passed away in 1951.

JINAB-I-HUSAYN BIG KUCHERLINSKI

Husayn Big was born in the town of Yulakh in Qara-Bagh of Caucasia. He studied At the Gymnasium School in Vlody of Caucasia, and studied medicine for two years in Petrograd but the WWI became a hindered and stopped studying. His uncle Fereydun Big Kucherlinski was one of the most re-known literary people who had written the History of the Literature and Poetry of Turkish speaking population of Caucasia. As Husayn was born in such a respectable family, therefore, his uncle paid a special attention to his nephew, taking him along when he was visiting people of knowledge and open-minded. Husayn Big was without prejudice and possessed refined character and pure sentiments, and loved the humanity. He was a bookworm almost in every branch. He liked to study the religions and their literature. In the meanwhile he came across the Adventists movements who were expecting the return of Christ. It was then when he met his namesake Mirza Husayn Zanjani who guided him towards the goal of his life, revolutionizing his heart and he became a believer. Then he started to deepen his knowledge in the mysteries of the Holy Books where soon he achieved high degrees of understanding and arrived to total certitude. He met many Baha'is and became an active member of the Community.

In 1925 as per the invitation of the Local Assembly of Ishqabad, he travelled to that city and became Russian language teacher in the Baha'i schools, where soon he became very popular and loved by all. He was very patient and a correct person in general, having a pure heart with no trace of ill feeling towards anyone. His speech was simple and with no rush; he was detached from whatever others were attached to. Material means was mirage for him; he had no addiction and would avoid any animal based food – kind of vegan. He was totally a resigned person and submissive to the Will of God. He was contented and a happy person. His hobby was to translate and write articles or books.

As per the instruction of the Assembly in 1927, Husyan Big travelled around the Russian territory. In Ural he stayed teaching the Faith by giving talks and speeches, where many became believers and Baha'i administration could be organized. After fulfilling the order of the Assembly, he returned to Ishqabad and married Qudsiyyih khanum the daughter of Mirza Husyan Mu'Allem Yazdi, also a school teacher and quite knowledgeable in the Faith. She could help in the research work and other studies of her husband, and soon, both almost empty handed but with a heart full of love for the Faith and each other, became pioneers in Caucasia, travel teaching in different towns and cities, meeting the Baha'is and non-Baha'is, encouraging and deepening them and after a year and a half in 1932, they returned to Ishqabad, where still there were some remnant of the great Baha'is organization in the city. They both became engaged as schoolteachers again, but soon the government closed down the Baha'i schools and because of their Faith, they were both prohibited to stand for such a post in any other school.

Passing a hard life, Jinab-i-Husayn Big was arrested in 1938 and imprisoned with no right to meet anyone. Later on he was exiled to Siberia with no right of having correspondence with anyone. Qudsiyyih khanum remained back in Ishqabad steadfastly and with difficulty, raising her four children staunch in the Faith all during the WWII.

In 1944, the relatives of Jinab-i-Husayn Big with much difficulties could find out through the governmental agencies that this highly esteemed personage in 1940, two years after his imprisonment and exile, was yet further exiled to Dalny and Ostok as prisoner with hard labor and in 5th of August 1942 he had passed away in his exiled post. And in 1961, his daughters followed this matter until they were able to obtain from the Supreme Court of the government in 21st March 1961 – Naw-Ruz, the document indicating his innocence of being arrested imprisoned and consequently exiled.

Husayn-Big's first wife who had their four children, together with her older daughter, Hafizah khanum were killed in 1948 earthquake of Ishqabad. The other three children were named Maria, Rizvaniyeh and Shoghi (known as Shurik). The same fate followed the second wife, who also passed away in that earthquake.

Mirza Husayn-Big Kucherlinksy had written some books in Russian language. None of them were published and for now, these are lost and not found yet. He

wrote the History of the Faith, whose handwritten copy was confiscated by the government. He wrote on the meaning of the verse of 'Mystery of the Reversal'. This book was written in Persian. The other book he wrote was on the Christian Heralds who were expecting the second coming of Christ, in Russian, which was translated into Persian by Mr Fadlu'llah Shahidi. This very valuable book which had solid Baha'i arguments is for now lost and its standing is not known.

JINAB-I-HASAN FUADY (BOSHRU'I)

Jinab-I Fuady was born around 1899 in Boshruiyeh, which is a town of Khurashan, where both his father Husayn and grandfather Mulla Abdu'l-Rahim were of renowned good standing clerical family.

Mulla Abdu'l-Rahim by his pure heart came to realize the proximity of the New Revelation, as he used to tell all around him that if you hear a New Call, do not keep on be a follower and do not reject the Call without having done your investigation, and be sure that if the Caller's Cause soon got obliterated, that by itself is the sign of its falsehood, but if the Call became universal and resisted before its enemies, then be sure that it is the Truth, then good for the person who listened to the Call of Truth and rushed towards it and offer up the his soul for it. This was the admonition of Mulla Abdu'l-Rahim to his son, Husayn. As soon as the Call of God was raised from Shiraz, he came to realize the Truth and became a believer.

The mother of Jinab-i-Fuady was Sultan khanum who was the daughter of Muhammad-Isma'il, a well-known Mujtahid of Bushruiyeh, who during the time of the Blessed Beauty became a believer and Baha'u'llah gave him the title of Dhabih – Sacrifice.

Jinab-i-Fuady when he was seven years old accompanied his mother and some other believers from his hometown to Ishqabad and became one of the students of the Baha'i school there. He was a studious and much loved pupil. As all the lessons were conducted in Persian and Russian was thought only one hour per day, therefore, Jinab-i-Fuady decided to study Russian as much as he could. Although the family was poor, yet, he strived hard until he mastered the language. At the age of 14, he finished the school and started working as a teacher in the same school. After sometimes he went to Takht Bazar, a town where his uncle was living. There he continued his studies and at the same time engaged in teaching at the school to earn his living. He accompanied his uncle in the firesides where groups of materialists sent by the central government to all

the cities of Turkmenistan to conduct large debate meetings with their religious counterparts in order to diminish the effect of religion on the generality of the population. While in Ishqabad in 1921 such debate meetings were quite concurred, Jinab-i-Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani would stand to all the materialists' arguments and would defeat them all. In the same date when in Marv such meetings were also going on, Jinab-i-Fuady, a youth of 23 years old would do the same and all by himself would confront the materialist's arguments against the religions and their Founders. Soon he became famous as a young erudite to the people in general, and his fame passed the borders of Marv to other cities. The very next year, the Community of Ishqabad invited him to become the director of their schools. In Ishqabad too, he not only he fulfilled his new duties, but he engaged to deepen the youth of the community. He also started to translate arriving articles for the Khurshid-e Khavar magazine, from Persian and Turkish into Russian for the knowledge of the Russian government. The same task was previously given to Messrs Ali-Akbar Furutan, Sururu'llah Fouzi and Aminu'llah Ahmadzadih.

When such a mentioned meetings started again in 1924 in Ishqabad, Jinab-i-Fuady also entered the debate and defended in full the matters of necessity for a Creator, His Messengers and their teachings, where the materialist were defeated again.

Jinab-i-Fuady stayed in Ishqabad until 1927, where he actively taught the Faith as a wonderful and knowledgeable teacher, and after marrying Huviiyyih khanum, daughter of Jinab-i-Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini, together moved to Tashkent to continue his higher education in the Oriental Languages, where at the University, he was much regarded and respected as a knowledgeable and erudite person. Once his history professor for a final examination asked him if he has prepared himself well for the final test. He mentioned the title of all the extra books that he has studied besides the university text. Then the professor asked him a question about one of the ancient king of Iran. Jinab-i-Fuady answers his response from one of the Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha, which has not been mentioned in any of the history books. The answer highly astonishes the professor and acknowledges its correctness, but asks him about its source, and when Jinab-i-Fuady mentions the source from then on the professor reveres him and the Baha'i even more.

Soon after achieving high station in the society and the communities of Turkmenistan, Jinab-i-Fuady became ill by a black scar that appeared at the back

of his neck, which at first didn't seem to be important, but after he went to Tihiran to be attended to, he passed away at the young age of 37 in 1936.

Jinab-i-Fuady was among the first 14 well-known Baha'is of Turkmenistan that were arrested in 1929 and consequently were exiled to Iran. These believers individually wrote their stories to Shoghi Effendi and his secretary acknowledged the receipt and on behalf of the beloved Guardian wrote back in one message dated 25 February 1930, telling them how the Guardian was saddened by hearing their plight and assured them of being with them in spirit all the time. He reminded them that soon they would be reaping the fruits of their sacrifices and services to the beloved Faith. At the same time he admonished them that the friends in Ishqabad should restrain from any kind of demonstration in order to prevent further animosity.

The group of the exiles was:

- Abbas Ahmadov Parsa'i
- Husayn Hasanov
- Baha'ad-Din Nabili
- Ahmad Rahimov
- Ahmad Nabilzadeh
- Muhammad Sabet
- Hasan Boshru'i (Fuady)
- Ali Sattarzadeh
- Ja'far Hadiov Shirazi
- Abbas Farajov
- Aqa Mahmoudzadeh
- Muhammad Sar-Chahi
- Muhammad-Ali Nabili Sar-Chahi
- Abdu'l-Karim Baqirov Yazdi

MIRZA MAHMOUD FURUGHI KNOWN AS FAZIL-I FURUGHI

Furugh meaning 'brightness' is the Baha'i name for the village of Dugh-abad – village of churned sour milk - is one of the villages of Torbat-e Heyderiyyih in Khurasan. Jinab-i-Mirza Mahmoud was a very dignify man and he would always use a clerical garb. He had such an attractive way of speech that gathered around

him people who cared to read the Holy Words and talk about the story of the early believers.

When he decided to go on pilgrimage, he chose the Ishqabad path, where he was very welcomed and in his honor many magnificent meetings were arranged and the local friends benefited from his presence. He encouraged all to the steadfastness in the Faith and become worthy of the love the Faith. Then he rushed to the presence of the Blessed Beauty as a lowly servant. When he returned to Torbat, the governor ordered his arrest and arranged for dialog with the clergy and because of their obvious failure, he was exiled to Mashhad and there he was imprisoned. And when he wrote to the Nasirid-Din Shah, then the Shah ordered his release and once again he started his habitual teaching trips. Once again Jinab-i-Furughi as per clerical influence was exiled and this time to Kalat, yet the governor of Kalat came to be highly attracted to him and again continued his spiritual task of teaching the Faith to wherever he would go.

When he heard of the ascension of his Lord, it affected him deeply and for that he fasted three days and nights until he dreamt of Baha'u'llah, which gave him new life again and he was revived in his duties. Once again by the influence of the clergy, he was exiled to Bajgiran, the border of Iran with Turkmenistan. He passed the border to Ishqabad where he was more than welcome and engaged himself in both teaching and deepening the believers. Then he embarked again for the Holy Land and this time he was honored to be at the presence of the Centre of the Covenant Abdu'l-Baha Who had high regards for him.

When he returned to Tihran, once again he was arrested and imprisoned. The Prince Nayibu'l-Saltanih met him and he staunchly defended the Faith at his presence and for this, he was released. He was then encouraged to organize his firesides. Once the Covenant breaker Jamal Burujerdi who at that time was still regarded as the foremost Baha'i pronounced a improper wording mentioning the Blessed Beauty, where Jinab-i-Furughi a great defender of the Faith and with full authority confronted him in such a way that Jamal apologized profusely and begged to be pardoned.

The beloved Master had instructed him to teach the believers everywhere in Iran the salutation of 'Allah'u'Abha', which was new to the friends and thus, it became overall Baha'i way of greeting each other. Once again this time from Tihran, he went to Ishqabad and continued his deepening meetings and always encouraging the friends to be steadfast in the path of the Faith, and for the third time, he took

off towards the Holy Land and stayed with Abdu'l-Baha for a short while and as per His instructions, he went back to Iran and this time he had to go to Yazd in order to confront the clergy of that city who had had open hand to inflict innumerable sorrows upon the believers. Even though Jinab-i-Afnan admonished him to postpone his duty for a while, yet, he did not listen and he went to meet the governor Jilalu'l-Dawlih at his home where the highest clergy of the city, Siyyid Ali Ha'iri was called to meet him, and in that meeting with the presence of the governor he answered to the questions of the clergy, with such a zeal and enthusiasm that poor clergy had to prefer silence and utter defeat.

Triumphantly, Jinab-i-Furughi went to Khurasan to his hometown Furugh, where he was bitterly bitten that he had to flee his native land together with some other believers during the dark of the night going towards Sabzivar and he ended again in Ishqabad, where he was always welcomed. There he was engaged again in travel teaching and conducting deepening meetings for the friends. And when time became ripe again, he left for Iran travel teaching in most of the cities. While in Mashhad the clergy became alarmed again and this time decided to kill him. A certain priest volunteered and followed him where he could finish the job once for all. Yet, the shots fired at him did not kill Jinab-i-Furughi, but only injured him, but for this he was proud of. After he was recovered Jinab-i-Mirza Mahmoud asked the government for justice and as soon as the culprit learned fled the town.

Once again Jinab-i-Furughi returned to his hometown of Furugh, where all the time he was subject to much difficulties by the mob and the clergy. He remained there until in 1912 he took off together with his son Muhammad Mukhlesi, to go to Neyshapur, Sabzivar, Quchan and Ishqabad staying in each city and town for quite a period of time engaging himself with the most important tasks of teaching the Faith and deepening the friends. He was in Ishqabad when he got his permission to go on pilgrimage again, this time it was after the WWI and highly enjoyed his stay with the beloved of hearts, Abdu'l-Baha. And on his return he went back to Khurasan's town and ultimately to his hometown where he was always subject to dire persecution. It was then when he heard of the passing of the beloved Master, which it deeply affected him.

The birds of night, the Covenant-breakers, upon the passing of Abdu'l-Baha, started to come out of their nests and start their activities again. He went to the presence of the beloved Guardian and was instructed to continue his activities in the fields of teaching and deepening, and when for the last time he went back to his hometown in Furugh, one of his relatives poisoned him and thus, his noble

soul flew to the Kingdom on High in 1928 and his remains were entered in Furugh. The beloved Guardian wrote in his message to him and called him 'the lion of the den of the love of God'. He was looking forward receiving Jinab-i-Furughi's personal letters. Shoghi Effendi assures him of his constant prayers in the Holy Shrines and would visit those Shrines on his behalf. The Guardian always had him present in all occasions.

JINAB-I AQA AZIZU'LLAH JAZZAB KHURASANI

Jinab-I Jazzab was from those Jews of Khurasan that had recently accepted the Faith of Islam and these were called as 'the New Ones'. They were in the area of Eid-gah of Mashhad, where Jinab-i-Jazzab used to help in the business of his brother. He who had learned how to read and write while he was still young, one day among his brother's papers he found a Tablet of Baha'u'llah where He admonishes that 'be from the people of fire but do not be from those who commit hypocrisy...' then he also found some Baha'i poems. Consequent to these, he had a true personal dream where he heard the voice of On High 'Blessed is He who is the best of the Creators!' This voice revolutionized his soul and heart, yet he remained a Jew as always, until such a day that he together with his brother went to Istanbul for business, which took four months in length. There he met an Iranian who was the father of Badi, the youthful martyr who took the Tablet of Baha'u'llah to Nasirid-Din Shah, with whom he had long discussions and asked him many questions until he was convinced that the New Message is what he really has been waiting for, thus he accepted the Faith.

Jinab-i-Jazzab was present in Mashhad when the Father of Badi was martyred and he having a Kurdish garb was able to rescue the lifeless body from the hands of those enemies who wanted to annihilate it. Sometimes later he got permission to go the presence of Baha'u'llah to the Holy Land. On his return to Mashhad, Jinab-i-Jazzab was accused as having left Islam as new as he has been in that Faith. This accusation prepared the ground for teaching the New Faith to the Islamized Jews after which a number of his Islamized Jews accepted the Faith.

Their business was transferred to Trukistan and the brothers settled in Bukhara accepting the Russian citizenship and thus, he was freed from more persecutions. Jina-i-Jazzab was honored to go the presence of Baha'u'llah three times and in the last time in 1891, he was instructed to introduce the Faith to the Jewish King-banker, Rothschild and he fulfilled with his divine duties. Jinab-i-Jazzab also went to Odesa to meet with the renowned Russian philosopher, Leo N. Tolstoy, where

with much difficulties finally he reached his destination and asking permission through the guards, who were keeping their prisoner under house arrest, and was able to introduce the Faith to him, thus fulfilling with the beloved Master's instructions in 1902.

Jinab-i-Jazzab, always preferred the important teaching work to his business to such an extent that his house was the hob of all kinds of meetings relating to the Faith and many teachers would be staying with him, together conducting marvelous teaching activities. And when his business started to decline, and his assets were confiscated, empty handed, Jinab-i-Jazzab left for Iran where he was happy with the Divine Will having him poor to the end of his life in Mashhad, where at the age of 94 in 1934 he steadfastly passed to the Kingdom of God.

MIRZA MUNIR NABIL-ZADIH

Jinab-i-Mirza Munir is the descendent of Haji Shaykh Muhammad-i-Qazvini, who was Shaykhi by denomination and a quite famous businessman. Haji became a believer to the Bab as soon as he heard of the New Revelation and went all the way to Mahku to His presence. On his return he was arrested and accused as a Babi was imprisoned and finally in 1861 he passed away.

Jinab-i-Haji had four children, Shaykh Kazim-i-Samandar, father of the Hand of the Cause Tarazu'llah Samandari and all the Samandari Clan. Shaykh Ahmad, Sakineh khanum and Haji Shaykh Muhammad Ali entitled as Nabil-ibn-i-Nabil, who had gone to Ishqabad to serve the Faith, the task, which he excelled and was known as the 'servant of the friends' –Khadimu'l-Ahheba and he passed away in 1947.

Jinab-i-Mirza Munir was the second son of Shaykh Muhammad-Ali and he was born in 1871 in Qazvin whose name was given to him by the Blessed Beauty in one of His Tablets to his father. He learned to read and write in his birthplace. When 18, he helped his uncle Shaykh Ahmad in his business in the city of Rasht. During the day he would spend his time also in furthering his education while during the evenings he would exclusively spend his time in teaching the Faith in firesides and other deepening gatherings. Mirza Munir accepted every kind of slandering and went through much difficulties and due to the lack of respect of the people, he took his business to Lahijan and shortly afterwards he became an ambulant businessman wherever he would go, he would find the opportunity to teach the Faith.

After the ascension of Baha'u'llah, broken hearted Mirza Munir went to Baku and Tibilisi to teach the Faith, where together with Jinab-i-Ahmadov Milani went to

meet the Shaykh Abdus-Salam, the Hujjatu'l-Islam Tiflisi the foremost eminent erudite in Islam of the city where they discussed Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's book, the Fara'id who was invited to write an essay on the truthfulness of the Faith in order to compensate what he has lost in not doing so by that time. Then he went to Ganjih and then returned to Qazvin, where he heard that in Rasht the leaders of Islam and Christianity had united their efforts against the Faith. The governor had joined the group and had ordered to banish all the Baha'is from the town, yet they remained steadfast where soon the governor died and difficulties diminished, especially when the Constitutionalists rose to fight for freeing Iran from the pangs of dictatorship.

Mirza Munir travelled to Ishqabad in 1904 by the invitation of Jinab-i-Afnan, Vakilu'd-Dawlih the builder of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and stayed at his place, which was on the A'zam land close to the Temple. Mirza Munir started his activities both in teaching at the school as well as conducting deepening classes for the children and the youth as well as the Baha'i women of the Ishqabad Community. Through his teaching activities, he was able to lead many to the Faith and also he embarked to travel far and wide to all the cities of Turkistan, such as Qahqaha, Artiq, Marv, Bayram-Ali, Takhti-Bazar, Chahar-Juy, Kakan, Bukhara, Tashkent, Samarqand, Ureh-Tappih, Andijan, Marghalan, Khuqand and Khojand, and in all these places he tried to communicate with the local tribes such as the Turkaman, Tajik, Uzbek, Kazak, Lezgi and Gorji and to each tribe he somehow taught the Faith where all were happy with him and the teachings of the Faith given to them.

In 1911 he received a telegraph from the Holy Land to go there, where through Ishqabad he went to Ramalah about six kilometer from Iskandariyyah of Egypt where the beloved Master was then residing and was His guest for three months. At His presence, he asked for martyrdom, yet he was admonished to bear with all kinds of hardship and continue in teaching the Faith and the matter of tearing the veil of ignorance from the faces of the people as well as teaching the women was highly emphasized to him. He was encouraged to go to Tashkent and teach the Faith there, as no Baha'i was yet living there and he was told that Tashkent will become the centre of Turkistan, where the map of that area and in fact all the world will change. Beloved Master promised Mirza Munir that he would see the ancient civilization of Egypt and their sciences. He was given key to the matter of teaching, which was to love the seeker. Later on through the Holy Land where he was to visit Haifa and Akka, the both Holy Shrines he went through Izmir to Istanbul, Odesa, Kharkov and finally to Tashkent and immediately he started his

teaching activities where soon between the newcomers and pioneers the Faith was established there with 16 people and then, he started to travel teach again. Day and night he was engaged in teaching and wherever possible he would deepen the women and children in the Faith. He went through many difficulties until the Russian revolution happened and by the instructions of Abdu'l-Baha, he went to Iran, where in Mashhad he could meet the prominent people as well as the high clergy. He was able to teach the Faith to a certain clergy titled Babru'l-Ulama –Tiger of the clergy, which resulted in calming the uprising of the people against the Faith.

He was asked to go to Shiraz, yet first he had to see his family and sort out their affairs and then to embark to where he was asked to go. Mirza Munir decided to visit most of the believers in all the towns he was travelling through and give them the news of the Holy Land and of his visit to the beloved Master, thus, he went from Mashhad to Sabzivar, to Sah-rud, to Damghan, to Simnan, to Tihiran, to Qazvin, to Qom, to Kashan, to Isfahan, to Abadih and finally he reached his destination in Shiraz in 1921, where he was able to talk to the majority of the friends and refreshing their nostrils with the fragrances of the Holy Land. Everywhere he went he was also able to teach the Faith. In Nayriz he encouraged and strengthened the friends and in Sarvistan where the friends welcomed him and he could spend some quality time with them. Altogether it took him two years going from a place to the next engaging in his sacred task of strengthening and encouraging them to steadfastness and deepening them in the tenets of the Faith. He returned to Tihiran and then went to Qazvin and it was there when he heard of the passing of Abdu'l-Baha, which made him infinitely sad. He was instructed by the beloved the Greatest Holy Leaf to proceed to Hamadan and then to Khurasan and in 1922 he went back to Ishqabad and engaged himself in teaching at the Boy's and Girl's schools for a year before he went to Rasht where he remained for four years, serving the Faith in that city while going through many troubles and hardships.

In 1927 he was instructed by the beloved Guardian to take the 'Persian sweet to the parrots of India'. He immediately took off and through Qazvin, Hamadan, Kermanshah he went to Baghdad, visiting the Most Holy House of Baha'u'llah and then the Garden of Ridvan and then by ship he went from Basrih to Karachi and then to Bombay. He was considered by the beloved Guardian as one of the highly accomplished servants of God. After fulfilling his duties, by land he went through Baluchistan to Zahidan and through Kerman he went to Tihiran and from there he went to Gilan. In 1928 he relocated to Kerman where he was able to perform great services, where he remained there and formed his family there until he became old and ill yet constantly he was under the guidance of the beloved

Guardian serving as he would propose. Yet soon he was too ill and old to move around and he went to Tihran where he could see his friends and relatives saying goodbye to each and every one of them until in April 1949 at the age of 78 he passed away in Tihran. He truly was one of the rare teachers and servants of the Blessed Beauty where all his life was dedicated to the promotion of His Faith. His family in Kerman is among the noblest and most dedicated of the friends of God.

JINAB-I-MIRZA MUHAMMAD SABET (THABET)

Jinab-i-Sabet was an accomplished man and was blessed with the power of speech, who had complete command on both Turkish and Persian languages and he was always the first to take any step for the development of the community.

Jinab-i-Sabet was born in 1880 in Zavariq village of Maragheh. His father Abdu's-Samad deep inside was a believer as he had met Jinab-i-Varqa the martyr as well as Jinab-i-Nabil-i-Akbar of Qa'in and had benefited from their speeches in relation with the Faith. The people of the town of Maraghih had high regards for Abdu's-Samad. He passed away in 1898.

Mirza Muhammad was literate and furthered his education in Arabic and Islamic traditional sciences and he also was eager to learn more astrology and chemistry.

While in Tibilisi of Gerogia he met his long time friend, Mirza Ghulam-Husayn Maraghe'i and they became good friends again. This latter friend was about to embark a trip to Mashhad and chose to go through Ishqabad and while returning, he was told about the Faith by a certain Covenant-breaker. Mirza Ghulam-Husayn decided to do a thorough search and studied the Faith and soon became an ardent believer and regretted of his wasted previous time and rose to compensate the lost time and thus he told about this newly found Faith to Mirza Muhammad-i-Sabet. As soon as the latter heard the name of Babi, became very much disturbed and openly showed his dislike of this name, yet his friend did not leave him alone and kept on talking to him, where Mirza Muhammad had no choice but to listen and express his fair and conscientious answers. Once this friend asked him in order to further his knowledge, embark on a foot trip for three hours to go to the village of Bakukeh and on the way, he pushed on Mirza Muhammad to look deep into his conscience and try to be fair, until such a time that Mirza Muhammad had no more excuse to express.

When once he was in Baku, the friends invited him to a fireside, and after two consecutive nights of talking to Mulla Muhammad-Ali Badkubé'i he asked for Writings of Baha'ullah to be read to him, the Tablet of Haykal was read to him, which made him totally convinced and suddenly became in-love with the new Message of God, intoxicated, he took the Faith as his new way of life since 1902 and forgot his past practices once for all. He started teaching the Faith immediately and for this reason, he lost his private school and went through many difficulties where he was bitten by the mob and banished from his town. While in Baku, he was tested by the traps of the Covenant-breakers, yet he remained unperturbed and steadfast in the Faith and the Covenant. Then he became a travel teacher before he returned to Iran, where he prepared himself for a trip to the Holy Land together with another believer by the name of Dervish Haji Siyyid Mahmoud Baraghani. They took off from Khuy on late April 1905, travelling for 57 days and they reached Akka to get the presence of Abdu'l-Baha. They stayed with Him for 20 days and when they were given permission to leave, he was broken-hearted, but the Master assured him of His love and encouraged him to be steadfast in the Faith and go to teach the Faith and told him that service to the humankind is more meritorious than remaining in the Holy Land. He listened to the beloved Master Who told him that he should not be afraid of calamities that might hurl over him, which is the most precious crown of the chosen ones of God. He assured him that whenever he remains with no remedy, just turn his face to the Blessed Beauty and never ask anything from anyone except from God and try to please Him alone and no one else; don't go after the riches, He admonished him and do not differentiate between the believers except for their service, good manners, their readiness to serve and their knowledge in the Faith, and then prayed for him and left him in the Hands of God. These words of the beloved Master totally revolutionized his thoughts and he found out that there are three things in the development of the Faith, first teaching the Faith to everyone, second, development of the women just like the men, and the third, deepening the generality of the friends by giving them the knowledge of the Blessed Beauty.

Jinab-i-Sabet returned to Baku in the same year of 1905 and established himself an ongoing fireside meetings and at the same time would travel teach and for almost five years he remained actively with his teaching and expanding the Faith, thus, bringing numerous people to the Faith of Baha'u'llah. In 1909 he embarked to the city of Ishqabad where he would be a formal schoolteacher and also travel teacher and he was the first person who arranged deepening classes for women of the Community, and for this he was accused of irrelevant matters, which he could have left the classes, yet he was fulfilling the desire of Abdu'l-Baha to

educate and deepen the women of the community. He became the schools' director but resigned and travelled to Samarqand and there he got married, yet he continued his services to the Cause and as his Lord had instructed him; he became a travel teacher without any attachment and condition; travelled to Marv and Yoltan then to Takhtih-Bazar, returning to Ishqabad and back again to Samarqand.

In 1911 by the invitation of Ustad Abdu'l-Karim Baqirov he made a trip to Chahar-Juy and guided many of its people who were engaged in all kinds of prohibitions until its Assembly was organized. A year later in 1912 he took his family and moved to Ishqabad where he together with his wife started a travel-teaching project, moving from place to place for almost six years until 1918 that together settled in Ishqabad again. His wife contracted tuberculosis and passed away and Jinab-i-Sabet remained alone with his three years old daughter. There, he came to know Gawhar-Taj khanum, a widow lady travel teacher and they got married and travelled together to Tashkent and Samarqand, until 1921 when both were called back to Ishqabad to take the directorship of the Baha'i schools. Later on they became teachers for the public schools. In 1923 they travelled to Moscow and Caucasia and their environs, where they engaged in teaching activities. They remained in Ganjih for a year where they were fully dedicated in teaching and deepening the friends.

In autumn 1924 they settled again in Ishqabad yet they never left their travel teaching activities and in 1928, due to their affiliation to the Faith, they resigned from being teachers at the public schools. The LSA appointed him to coordinate the Kindergarten's activities where together with his wife, were able to render valuable services to the Cause. In 1929, Jinab-i-Mirza Muhammad Sabet was elected to the membership of the Assembly and he had to twice his activities for the Faith, and soon he together with 13 more active Baha'is were arrested by the Government and was imprisoned for a period of seven months. There almost was no hope for his release, but by the tremendous effort of the local friends as well as pressures asserted from Iran through the government and many cables sent to the authorities, he was released conditioned to leave the territory in ten days time, and they were banished to Iran where an official Iranian automobile at the border of Bajgiran received him on the 20th of January 1930. In Mashhad they met with the Persian authorities and explained their conditions. The government of Iran in Mashhad offered a job to each one of them. Jinab-i-Sabet did not accept governmental job in stead, he organized a fireside gatherings and for six months he was engaged totally in teaching the people of Mashhad and later he together

with his wife, left for Rafsandjan and Kerman through Tihran, Isfahan and Yazd. They also travelled to Shiraz and its environs. He wrote a petition to the beloved Guardian and was instructed to strengthen the friends and be engaged in their deepening especially in the Baha'i Administration coming to know how the Administration is the source of the development of the Faith. In contact with the community, he made them to recognize who was lukewarm or insincere in the Faith and had them to be driven out of the community. He was also asked to help those weak but sincere in the Faith, which need encouragement.

Jinab-i-Sabet was specifically asked to work on the steadfastness of the friends in all the communities in order to keep the dignity of the Faith intact. He was travel teaching for protection of the Faith and conducting meetings everywhere to deepen the friends, especially in Isfahan and Shiraz and their environs such as Sultan-Abad.

After ten months of constant travelling Jinab-i-Sabet got sick with epistaxis or nose bleeding where his kidneys stopped functioning and he was rushed to Tihran, where he was hospitalized and after three days he passed on to the Kingdom On High in April 1933 at the age of 53.

Jinab-i-Sabet had ten literary work of which the most important was the translation of the Book of Certitude into Turkish language. He also translated the Master's talks as well as the book of Fira'id of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl and the translation of two volumes of poetries of Jinab-i-Na'im into Turkish.

JINAB-I-AZIZ'ULLAH SULAYMANI (HISTORIAN)

Jinab-i-Aziz'ullah is the eighth and last child of Ustad Sulayman Ardikani who was 65 years old and Maryam-Sultan who was 40 when Aziz'ullah was born in 1902. He was of a small stature but of an extraordinary intelligence and memory. He was born in a village of Sabzivar of Khurasan, as his parents had flee from Ardikan of Yazd to Sabzivar and had a small farm with a ghanat (series of wells connected underground for running water) and was making a small living. After few years, he sold his farm and moved to Sabzivar, where Aziz'ullah did his rapid schooling excelling in all the matters. He was seven when his parents moved to Ishqabad and settled there. Sulayman, the father became the caretaker of the Mashriqul-Adkhar and Aziz'ullah furthered his schooling at the Baha'i school there, where he learned both science and religion together. During the vacations, by the instructions of his father, he started to memorize the Holy Writings, he

also was engaging himself in calligraphy thus, he was helping his God given power of memory. He excelled in calligraphy and used to write pieces as well as Holy Tablets for the Baha'i friends. He used to write the Kitab-i-Aqdas in fine calligraphy in a week only working five hours for each copy and would give it to the inquirer. Thus, he memorized the entire Kitab-i-Aqdas.

Jinab-i-Azizu'llah liked history and anecdotes from his childhood and for this, his mother was the best, who would be the best teacher for her son and for this, Aziz'ullah knew many stories by heart and his God given capacity was developing towards history.

After five years, he finished the school but it became impossible for him to continue his studies at the public school. At that time, his father had become old and the young Aziz'ullah had become an accomplished and highly intelligent youth, therefore, he started studying philosophy and metaphysics during his working hours at the business while he was only 14. He studied deeply the tenets of the Faith and became proficient in both Persian and Arabic languages as well as in the sciences of philosophy and history. Soon he started his own business, where his material condition well improved, but Aziz'ullah did not like complacency, which always made him to move for acquiring more knowledge.

After the passing of Abdu'l-Baha in 1921, Aziz'ullah who was 19 years old, together with his partner they volunteered to embark for a teaching project. From Ishqabad, they went to Tazih-Shahr at the coast of the Caspian Sea, taking a ship to the Bandar-i-Jaz a port on the Iranian soil, from where they obtained donkeys and continued their trip to Sari, Barfurush, Shahmirzad, Sangsar, Semnan, Tihiran, Qazvin, Rasht, then to the port of Anzali they went towards Baku and from there they returned to Tazih-Shahr and proceeded to Ishqabad. The whole trip took 11 months, where the two friends according to the necessities of the locations, spent some time in each one, teaching and deepening the local friends. Jinab-i-Aziz'ullah in his memoirs has recounted this period as 'Bitter and Sweet era'. During this period Jinab-i-Aziz'ullah could both teach the Faith and write articles and books. He liked this period of his life to the extent that he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to the same purpose.

After this trip, he made another trip together with Jinab-i-Abbas Alavi, the foremost teacher of the Faith for a period of a year and seven months, but when he returned to Ishqabad, the life condition in his hometown due to the Russian revolution had changed, therefore, he tried to engage himself to whatever possible in order to make a living, also he became a school teacher for a while,

until such a time that the government confiscated the Baha'i schools and forcing him to leave Ishqabad forever together with his mother in 1930 and moving to Mashhad and Sabzivar working in a Bank as an accountant. Then moved to Tihran and together with some of his friends started a business, which did not go well, but the service and teaching of the Faith was quite encouraging.

As per the instructions of the National Assembly of Iran, he established the first grade of Higher Teaching where he became the teacher for Arabic and Persian Literature, Logic and History; the other teachers were Jinab-i-A.H. Eshraq-Khavari, Jinab-i-A.A. Furutan and Jinab-i-Ahmad Yazdani. Jinab-i-Suleymani embarked on the project of preparing special booklets for the class, which together they were published as 'the Compilation on Logic and Wisdom'.

Jinab-i-Suleymani spent the rest of his life in compiling the history of the eminent Baha'is, as a result, he published nine volumes of 'Misabih-i-Hidayat' –the Lights of Guidance'. In 1948 he moved to Azerbaijan where he established classes for higher education on the Faith, as well as organizing prominent firesides where he would deliver unbeatable and challenging speeches in the proof of the Faith.

Jinab-i-Suleymani could make his pilgrimage in 1955 where he also could meet the beloved Guardian. Six years later, in 1961, by the instructions of the National Assembly of Iran, he moved to Tihran as his base place and from there, he became a travel teacher to almost all the cities and towns, conducting deepening classes. In 1975 he was invited to the Holy Land to do research in various matters of the Faith for the Universal House of Justice thus, perfecting even more his deep studies in the Faith.

After the Iranian revolution, his house was confiscated in Tihran and he moved to Gonbad-i-Qabus in Khurasan, living as a hermit, lonely in a place and he would not go out to the public. Two years before his passing, Jinab-i-Sulemani had a stroke, which took him to his death at the age of 82, in 1984 in Gonbad, where he was living with his daughter Dr Shamsi Suleymani. His body was the last one to be buried the Baha'i cemetery, after which the government confiscated it.

Jinab-i-Suleymani was the grandson of an early believer in Baghdad called, Shatir –Baker- who was entitled by Baha'u'llah as 'the Baker of God', Who revealed some Tablets for Him. Jinab-i-Suleymani was the foremost philosopher in the Baha'i Cause and his expertise was in reading the writings of the Bab. Besides his nine published volumes as mentioned earlier and the unpublished tenth volume

due to the Iranian revolution, he also authored his book on Logic, called 'the Logic of Suleymani', also wrote proof epistles to any book written against the Faith.

JINAB-I-SIYYID ABBAS ALAVI KHURASANI

In 1922 in Mashhad, the holiest city of Iran and the place of internment of the Shi'is eight Imam – Imam Rida – two of the foremost clergies accepted the Faith, the news, which brought much joy and at the same time astonishment to the Baha'i community of Mashhad in particular and of Iran in general, and a news that brought much consternation and unhappiness to the public Muslim puzzling them to no bounds! Many seekers' path or research was paved and many who were lukewarm and somehow on the negative side, became awakened. These two clergies were Siyyid Rida and Siyyid Abbas Alavi.

Siyyid Abbas Alavi was born in 1893 in Dastjird. One of his acquaintances wrote to him and awakened his interest in searching the Faith, when requested, he was sent the book of Fara'id of Jinab-i-Mirza Abu'l-Fadl. This book was studied together with Siyyid Rida at the Navvab Seminary School in Mashhad and he came to realize the power of the proof of the Faith, where the mere column of their beliefs trembled so violently that they took refuge in the inner Shrine of Imam-Rida and prayed everyday and every night they studied the book of Fara'id, discussing it together. They asked for more such books and some Writings of Baha'u'llah, all were handed to them. Slowly but effectively the veils went taken away from their hearts and all superstition faded away, showing the Sun of Reality shining on their faces until they read the Tablets to the Kings from Baha'u'llah, where they were totally convinced of the truth of this Faith, which revolutionized their inner beings, yielding their wills to the Will of God and thus, they passed through the famous Bridge, which took them to the Straight Path, leading them to the Abha Paradise. They lost everything, their prestige, their belongings, their friends and soon the enemies plotted for their annihilation searching for them, where made them to flee their hometown going to Ishqabad, arriving there in the same year of 1922, soon his wife joined him there too.

Jinab-i-Alavi in Ishqabad became the teacher of the school children and at the same time organized firesides inviting the Muslims to search for Truth. Jinab-i-Alavi together with Jinab-i-Suleymani took some teaching trips together. The wife of Jinab-i-Alavi also joined the Faith, remaining in Ishqabad.

Jinab-i-Alavi after joining the Faith embarked on memorizing as much holy Tablets as he could, as these were his tools in his teaching trips and firesides, in Quchan and Neyshapur, where he lead many to the Faith by taking the veil of ignorance away from their hearts. He also travelled to Dastjird, his hometown and organized fireside meetings, leading many to the Faith, until he returned to Ishqabad, where his speeches and talks would give real warmth to the meetings of the friends and the seekers especially during the cold winter times.

Jinab-i-Alavi, the foremost teacher of the Faith remained in Ishqabad for a period of eight years and deepened and taught the friends very much. In 1930 he moved to Tihiran together with his family, but while in Mashhad, he was called by the clergy with many of whom he had maintained high-level correspondence to meet them for dialog. He was quite a valiant man and was not afraid of nothing and no one, although the friends there were quite worried for his life, yet Jinab-i-Alavi, entered all the pre-arranged meetings and discussed the Faith deeply and with total conviction with them to the point that all declared their defeat, but the jealousy of the clergy had no bound; they plotted for him to be killed, and this made him to continue to his trip to Tihiran.

The most important subject for Jinab-i-Alavi was teaching the Faith. He had a powerful voice and in his way of teaching, he would repeat the important point so many times that the listener would thoroughly understand his point. He was very sincere and very staunch in the Faith.

Jinab-i-Alavi accompanied Miss Martha Root on her visit to Iran, to Azerbaijan and showed her all the holy places in the cities of that region. In 1960 he could see with his own eyes at the dedication of the House of Worship in Kampala, Uganda the greatness of the Faith, and only two weeks later he had a stroke and passed away in Tihiran.

THE BAHA'I CEMETERY OF ISHQABAD

From the beginning of immigrating, the pioneers decided to acquire a piece of land at the outskirts of the city for the use of burying the corpses of their love ones. For this a big piece of land was acquired and as the beloved souls passed on, their bodies adorned that piece of land.

When Haji Mirza Muhammad-Rida became martyr, his body was the first to be buried in that piece of land.

Another prominent that has been buried there is the remains of the scholar of the Faith, Jinab-i-Muhammad Qa'ini, Nabil Akbar who passed away in Bukhara and for almost 20 years the members of the Assembly of Ishqabad and other believers, by the instructions of the beloved Master at the anniversary of his passing, would travel there and visit his grave, reciting the Tablet of Visitation revealed for him by Abdu'l-Baha.

His nephew, Shaykh Muhammad-Ali Qa'ini, is the other prominent scholar of the Faith whose body is also been buried in that cemetery.

The body of the eminent scholar of the Faith, Jinab-i-Siyyid Mihdi Gulpaygani, the nephew of the renowned scholar Jina-i-Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani is also being buried in that cemetery,

Jinab-i-Mirza Hasani Zanjani, the eminent travel teacher, who in Char-ju, as per the instructions of the high clergy of the town became wounded and was brought to Ishqabad to be hospitalized, but soon after he passed away, also his body was one of the adorning lights of the cemetery.

During all those early years, up until 1938, the cemetery housed almost 200 bodies of the believers of Ishqabad, then after the said date, its use was abandoned just because the friends were exiled and no more than a handful friends remained prior to the 1948 earthquake, which by that time, even the bricks that were showing the boundaries of the graves were stolen and taken away by the people.

By 1986 from that big cemetery and the graves, only few belonging to the most eminent Baha'is were identifiable, although these were also totally abandoned and with no proper care.

MAKHTUM-QULI FIRAGHI

Once the Soviets demolished the remaining of the House of Worship in Ishqabad, they agreed to convert the land as per request of the Universal House of Justice into a park although they never answered to the letter of the House of Justice. On the spot once the Temple was erected, they made a enormous pool and installed the statue of Makhtum-Quli Firaghi, the poet and the National hero of Turkmen on that spot.

Makhtum-Quli was a Persian by birth, as he was born –possibly around 1733- near Gonbad-e-Qabus in the Province of Khurasan –today Golestan- place called

‘Turkemen Sahra’ or Turkmen Steppes’, where he also received his primary education in Persian and Arabic languages. His father Dawlat-Muhammad Azadi was a leading scholar at his time and his son Makhtum-Quli was also brought up in the literary circles, especially in the Shi’i religious schools yet, his interest was mostly on poetry, which was quite scarce among the Turkmen tribal groups in the 18th century. He developed his own realistic style of writing, which later on became very popular and thus, he became the ‘most cherished Turkmen poets of all time’. Although he was quite knowledgeable in Persian, yet, he preferred to write his poetries in Turkish language. He is known and revered as ‘the founder of Turkmen poetry, literature and language’.

Makhtum-Quli Firaghi is being remembered as a ‘holy man’ among the Turkmen tribes, where his poetries are used as proverbs in all those societies. It is said that Makhtum-Quli dreamed of Omar Khayyam, the famous Persian poet, who bestowed upon him the gift of becoming a poet. When his village was raided by their foes, his belongings and manuscripts of his poetry were stolen and later on thrown into a river, which left him with much tears and lamentation. He wrote:

*“Making my dear life lost to all that’s good
An evil fate wrought awesome sacrilege
Hurling the books I’d written to the flood,
To leave me bookless with my grief and rage!”*

Dr Bakhshandegi in his manuscript on the History of Ishqabad mentions that Makhtum-Quli has had some poetry where he predicts the coming of Baha’u’llah. The translation of that specific poetry is as follow:

*One day from the west a personage of importance will appear
His face luminous like moon, upto elbows in blood will appear
Behold Mirza Husayn Who is corresponding with God
The earth is trembling, as the angel of resurrection will appear
On the surface of the earth no more moon will ever be
As from the sunset, the very sun will appear
Gog and Magog say they are devouring each other
Killing one and its place a thousand will appear
Makhtum-Quli says, alas alas, it is the day of resurrection
O Lord of justice, the best work only at difficulty will appear*

'Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Soviet policy regarding anything written in the Arabic script as religious, led to the destruction of many of these manuscripts'.

Makhtum-Quli is said that practiced Sufism from Nakhshbandi group. He would travel and meet people and would pray for them.

Finally, Makhtum-Quli was buried in Aktokay village in northeastern Iran, the Iranian government has built a mausoleum on his grave.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

There are some good books and articles on the Baha'i history of Ishqabad. Some articles have been published but no books, except the 'Years of Silence' by Asad'ullah Alizad, is being published where it gives a vivid description of the time when the friends of Ishqabad were dispersed and exiled.

The following is the list of the sources found for the benefit of this study.

1. The History of Ishqabad by Ustad Ali-Akbar Banna Yazdi. This is a handwritten manuscript in Persian, where he recounts the short history of those early believers who went to Ishqabad for various reasons, but mostly those who fled the persecution by the hands of the clergy and the mob incited by the clergy, especially from the city of Yazd. Ustad Ali-Akbar mentions some 125 early incomers to the City of Ishqabad, their movements, their travels to the Holy Land getting to the presence of the Blessed Beauty and Abdu'l-Baha. He also mentions some of the Holy Tablets that have been revealed to their honor, being some in Arabic and some in Persian. Some of the stories of these early comers are quite moving and not recorded anywhere else, as, they have narrated them directly to Ustad and he has penned them down.
2. The Short History of Ishqabad, a typed manuscript in Persian, written by Dr. Aminu'llah Bakhshandegi, whose grandfather was the last custodian of the land of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of Ishqabad and his grandmother was the last custodian of the building of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, who preferred to stay and not accompany her husband back to Iran, in spite of all the persecutions she had to bear. Dr. Bakhshandegi himself was born in

Ishqabad and had vivid memories of the city and its environs. In this manuscript, Dr. Bakhshandegi has recorded series of untold meetings held with the high-ranking officials of the Bolshevik government when these tried every means possible to destroy the concept of religion from the minds of the people who they conquered. In this book, the early history of acquiring the A'azam land where ultimately the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was built is also being recorded.

3. The Rise of the Baha'i Community of Ishqabad is an article thoroughly studied and well written and well documented by Anthony Lee, which was published in the Canadian Baha'i Studies vol....
4. The Baha'i Community of Ashkabad; its Social Basis and Importance in Baha'i History, is a well studied and chronologically written rather a long article by Dr. Moojan Momen, available in the Internet.
5. An article in Persian written by Faruq Izadinia and published in the magazine of Andalib.
6. Appendix Two of the book ... Ashkabad, the City of Love
7. Summary of a talk given by Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh in March 1977.
8. Some articles extracted from the Baha'i World volumes
9. A chapter of the Babi and Baha'i Religions by Dr. Momen
10. The Internet has some informative short essays as well as some pictures related to the study.