



cogent characterization of some of the Western pilgrims who were also present at that time. The reader can feel something of the wonderment often experienced by pilgrims during the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and catch flashes of the spiritual vistas that may open on such a journey.

While for many the physical journey of pilgrimage remains an arduous and sacrificial one, *One Life, One Memory* reminds us of the complex realities of undertaking such a voyage in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s time, and of the distinctive nature of pilgrimage at a moment in history when the Faith had individual figures of authority. The Asdaq family’s journey took place immediately before World War I and shortly before the end of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s historic journey to the West. The reader experiences the tense anticipation of the pilgrims and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s household as they await His return. After being away from Haifa for three years and three months while traveling throughout Egypt, Europe, the United States and Canada, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s energy was at first severely depleted. Nonetheless, the book reveals, He extended numerous touching acts of kindness, not only to the pilgrims, but also to Rúhá’s esteemed grandmother, who had been too physically infirm to make the journey.

In addition to the vignettes—often suffused with gentle humor—which convey insights into the workaday lives of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Bahiyyih Khánum, there are glimpses into the youth of Shoghi Effendi, a period of his life about which we have very few written accounts. These glimpses describe elements of Shoghi Effendi’s physical appearance, demeanor and manner, and spiritual qualities. Two examples are as follows:

We stayed three days in Beirut and met with the believers. On the third day we returned to the ship. At sunset we saw a large rowing boat approach us. Present was Shoghi Effendi and a group of young Bahá’í students in Beirut, who had come to visit us, which was a tremendous honour for us. A chair was placed for Shoghi Effendi while the others remained seated on the carpet. He said, “Today was a holiday and we were able to meet you.” He then began a sweet discourse in which he repeated several times, “How blessed you are to soon be entering Haifa and visiting the Holy Shrines. How blessed you are to be visiting the Greatest Holy Leaf.” He inquired about the state of Iran and the progress of the Cause, and my father replied with utmost humility and respect. He said, “As you know, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is in Ramleh, Alexandria, and has not yet returned.”

Shoghi Effendi was sixteen years old at that time. He had a delicate and handsome face with large penetrating eyes which seemed to read the depths of one’s heart. We served him tea and Persian sweets, and after bidding us a warm farewell he said, “Soon the school holidays shall begin and I shall be seeing you in Haifa.” They waved goodbye as their boat pulled away while we remained on the deck totally absorbed by the scene. Soon after, the boat disappeared from our sight. My mother withdrew from the guardrails, let out a deep sigh and said, “Children, you are my witness, those eyes are not ordinary eyes. I saw in those eyes a sign which I am unable to describe.”

(21–22)

The school holidays began and the children of the household returned from Beirut. Shoghi Effendi also returned to Haifa to spend the holidays. When the Greatest Holy Leaf took Shoghi Effendi in her arms her eyes lit up with joy. I realized that the love was reciprocated. Shoghi Effendi looked very frail and weak. The Greatest Holy Leaf inquired, “Why are you so weak? See how the other youth are fit and wholesome.” He replied, “They are able to spend more money and can eat better food.” The behaviour and quality of this young man was very different from the rest. His friends would play and joke around, but he would rarely take part. He would either be reading a book or a newspaper. His chair would be close to that of the Greatest Holy Leaf and he would spend many of his free hours in this room listening to her, totally absorbed by her fascinating talk. Shoghi Effendi possessed a handsome face, sad and elegant with a sweet, heart-warming and spontaneous smile which on occasion would turn into reverberating laughter. (33)

The photograph on the book’s cover of the author with two of her sisters, her little nephew, and some of her fellow pilgrims, taken during that time, is one notable example of the details that enrich this memoir. The photo is the subject of a tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that is also reproduced in the book. This reflects how often His writings were addressed to individuals and penned in response to their letters, queries, or developments in their lives. Further, it shows the remarkable closeness between the Centre of the Covenant and individual Bahá’ís during that period in the history of the Faith.

In being introduced to the Asdaq family, we gain an understanding of a prominent family in Bahá’í history that is little known to English readers. Ibn-i-Asdaq, Rúhá’s father, was one of only four Hands of the Cause appointed by Bahá’u’lláh. Rúhá’s grandfather, Ismu’lláhu’l-Asdaq, had recognized both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and is understood to be the first believer in Iran to suffer torture and severe beating for his faith. Rúhá’s grandmother, Aqá Ján Sháhansháh Bagum, (who was the granddaughter of Fath-‘Alí Sháh, the former Sháh of Iran), had received “the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in numerous Tablets”. Rúhá herself rendered outstanding pioneer services to the Faith for decades both in her native Iran and, with her three adult children, in Denmark. Thus, through the concise, warm-hearted introduction to this book written by Lameah Khodadoost, Rúhá’s eldest daughter, the family’s pilgrimage story is placed into the broader context of Rúhá’s spiritual heritage and later life.

A brief but fascinating endnote tells the story of Rúhá’s father’s would-be assassin, who would go on to become the family’s trusted servant and garnered the appellation of “the brave man” or “the champion” from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Another endnote illustrates the idea that one can still be living while achieving the station of martyrdom:

In 1297 (1880) Ibn-i-Asdaq, who was 30 years old, begged Bahá’u’lláh for

attainment of martyrdom and was honoured by the following Tablet:

Today, the greatest of all deeds is service to the Cause. Souls that are well-assured should with utmost discretion teach the Faith, ... this martyrdom is not confined to the destruction of life and the shedding of blood. A person enjoying the bounty of life may yet be recorded as a martyr in the Book of the Sovereign Lord. (Translated at the Bahá'í World Centre)

Thus the glorious station of martyrdom was bestowed upon him and his father, Ismu'lláhu'l-Asdaq. Thereafter, my father had the title of 'Martyr—son of a martyr'. The Centre of the Covenant called us the martyr's daughters. (46)

In recent years, Bahá'í authors such as Janet A. Khan, Kathryn Jewett Hogenson, and Earl Redman have referenced *One Life, One Memory* in their research and writing. This book is sure to be increasingly read and cited. It is rich with intimate and diverse accounts such as: the child-rearing practices utilized in the family of one of the earliest Hands of the Cause; how 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Greatest Holy Leaf loved poems and beautiful melodies; an astonishing dream of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which re-assured Rúhá in her later years; and how reverence and strict obedience to the Covenant can shape and guide one's daily activities and mark out one's destiny. This little book, full of love, offers outstanding examples of the insights that can be gained from authentic first-person Bahá'í accounts.

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