

A FLAME OF FIRE

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There are two Tablets each bearing the name of Ahmad: one in Persian and the other in Arabic. The latter is the one used throughout the Baha'i world, which the beloved Guardian characterized as being imbued with a special potency.

The Persian Tablet is quite a long one and is written to Ahmad of Kashan. Haji Mirza Jani, who was the first one to embrace the Bab's Faith in Kashan, in whose house the Bab sojourned some days and who was finally martyred in Tihran, had three brothers. One was never moved by his brother's faith, no matter how much the latter endeavoured to teach him. He remained a Muslim and died as such. The second was called Ismail, entitled by Baha'u'llah Dhabih (sacrificed) and also Anis (companion); the third one who went to Baghdad was called Ahmad. He remained with the Ancient Beauty and had the honor to be amongst those who were chosen by Him as one of the companions in His exile to Istanbul. But unfortunately in the storms of tests and trials this Ahmad departed from the right path and sided with Azal. He then caused much suffering for the Blessed Beauty, His family and friends. In order to warn this man against such evil deeds and the detrimental consequences for the nascent Faith, Baha'u'llah sent him this long Persian Tablet full of exhortations, elucidations of the divine power and advice as to how a true seeker should act and behave. Ahmad remained heedless, unmoved and unchanged, but when he found out that he could no more live in Turkey, he returned to Iraq where he found his old associates and resumed his iniquitous life with them. One of his worst habits was to insult people and curse them in the most bitter and vile language. In one of his disputes with his evil friends, he lashed them with his sharp tongue and the victims, to get rid of him, killed him one night.

Selections from this Persian Tablet appear in the Gleanings.

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Ahmad Begins His Search

As to the Ahmad in whose honour the well-known Tablet is revealed, he was born in Yazd (circa 1805) to a very noble and rich family. His father and uncles were the chieftains of the town, but Ahmad even at the age of fourteen showed a great inclination towards mysticism and endeavoured to find new paths to truth. When he was fifteen, he had already started his investigations during which he heard from some of the people that there are saints or holy men who know special prayers which if read and repeated so many times and in accordance with certain rituals would definitely enable the reader to behold the countenance of

the Promised Qa'im (The Messiah). This flared up the fire of his ever-growing longings. He began to practice an ascetic life with long prayers, successive days of fasting and secluding himself from people and from the world. His parents and relatives never approved of such practices, nor did they permit him to continue this seclusion which was contrary to their ways of life and ambition. Such opposition could not be tolerated by a man like Ahmad who was whole-heartedly searching and striving to reach his heart's desire - reunion with his eternal Beloved. Therefore one day early in the morning, he made a small bundle of his clothes and belongings and under the pretext of going to a public bath, departed from his father's home and set out on his way to search for God's manifestation.

In a beggar's outfit he roamed from village to village, and wherever he found a "pir" - spiritual leader - with great devotion and rectitude of conduct he sat at his feet in the hope of finding a path to the mysterious worlds of truth. He invariably begged such people for the special prayer, the reading of which would draw him near the court of his Beloved. Whenever someone would suggest to him any practice, he was so ardent in his search that he would invariably carry out the instructions with absolute sincerity no matter how time consuming or arduous those practices were. But all of this was of no avail.

Losing hope and faith in such pursuits, he made his way to India, a land so well known for its mystic teachers and hermits with special powers and spiritual gifts. He reached Bombay, and took up his residence there, still looking for someone to give him a glimpse of the glorious court of the Promised One.

He heard that if one would perform a specific ablution, put on spotlessly clean white garments, prostrate oneself and repeat the following verse of the Qur'an, "There is no God but God" twelve thousand times, he would definitely attain his aim and heart's desire. Not once, but several times, Ahmad prostrated himself for hours to repeat the above-mentioned verse 12,000 times, but still found himself in darkness.

In his dismay he returned to Persia, but did not go to his own home town of Yazd. He settled in the city of Kashan and started his own craft of cloth-making in which he was an expert. In no time he became a very successful businessman; but still in his inmost heart he was restlessly searching.

A Stranger Points the Way

"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "Ask, and it shall be given you." No true seeker ever returned from His door of mercy deprived or unanswered.

It was here in Kashan that the rumors about One claiming to be the Promised Qa'im were heard by him. Ceaseless in his efforts and sincere in his search, he asked many people in many different ways. No one ever gave him a clue.

Then one day an unknown traveller arrived in this town and stayed in the same inn where Ahmad had established his successful business. A certain inner urge drew Ahmad close to this unknown man. In their conversation, the traveller was

asked about the already spreading rumour. "Why do you ask this question?" he inquired. "I want to know if it is true. If it is, I shall follow it, with all my might," was Ahmad's rejoinder.

The traveller with a smile of triumph on his face, instructed him to go to Khurasan and find a certain famous learned man called Mulla 'Abdu'I Khaliq who would tell him the whole truth.

The very next day Ahmad was on his way to the province of Khurasan. The owners of the neighbouring shops were very much surprised when they did not find Ahmad at his work as usual. "What passed between him and the unknown traveller?" they asked one another, and no one knew the right answer.

Ahmad crossed deserts and mountains on foot, and his heart overflowed with joy and longing. Every step he took he found himself nearer to the time when all his efforts would yield the desired fruits - his reunion with his Beloved in the search of Whose he spared no effort and found no sacrifice too great.

He reached Mashhad, Khurasan, exhausted and so ill that he had to stay in bed. After two months' struggle to overcome his weakness, he mustered the last ounces of his strength and courage and went directly to the door of the desired house. Here are his own words as related to his friends and companions of those days: "When I reached the house, I knocked at the door and the servant of the house came forth. Holding the door ajar, he asked me, 'What do you want?' 'I must see your Master,' I answered. The man went back into the house and then the Mulla himself came out. He admitted me to his house and when we stood face to face I explained to him all that had happened to me. When I finished, he at once grasped my arm and told me, 'Do not say such things here!' and he pushed me out of his house. There was no end to my sorrows. Heartbroken and utterly astounded I said to myself, 'Are all my efforts in vain? To whom shall I turn? Whom shall I approach? But I will never leave this man. I will persist till such time as he will open his heart to me and will guide me to the right path of God. It is incumbent upon the one who searches to drain the bitter cup of hardship.' The next morning I was at the door of the same house. I knocked harder than the previous day. This time the Mulla himself came to the door and the moment he opened it, I said, 'I will not go away, I will not leave you until you tell me the whole truth.' This time he found me earnest and true. He became sure that I had not been at his door to spy or cause difficulties for him and his friends."

Ahmad was then instructed to attend the evening prayers at a certain mosque where the same Mulla led the congregational prayers followed by a long sermon. He was also told to follow the Mulla after the sermon was over. The next night Ahmad tried his utmost to find the Mulla after the prayer and the sermon, but crowds of people surrounded him and Ahmad did not have the slightest chance to even approach him. The next day when the two met again Ahmad was instructed to go to another mosque at night and a third person would be there to show him the way. Accordingly Ahmad was at the mosque at sunset and as promised, after the evening prayers, a certain person came to him and beckoned him to follow.

Without hesitation or fear Ahmad followed. Now the three men started to walk like shadows in the darkness of the night, through narrow and obscure lanes. Ahmad, a complete stranger, never wavered nor faltered nor fled. He took every step with great determination and was ready for any outcome.

At last they reached a certain house. They knocked at the door very gently and it was opened immediately. The newcomers went in very quickly. They passed through a covered passageway, reached a small courtyard, climbed a few steps and were at the door of an upper chamber where a very dignified figure was sitting. The Mulla approached that revered personage with great humility and absolute reverence and courteously whispered; "This is the man I told you about," and indicated Ahmad, who had been standing at the threshold with utter respect and high expectation. "Welcome. Please come in and be seated," said the man. Ahmad then entered the room and sat down on the floor.

The host was no less a person than Mulla Sadiq (Truthful), one of the early believers during the Bab's ministry and very distinguished for his erudition, audacity and steadfastness. During Baha'u'llah's ministry the same Mulla Sadiq (Truthful) displayed such great ardour and zeal that he was entitled 'Asdaq (the most truthful) by Baha'u'llah.

A Treasure is Found

Ahmad who for twenty-five years had been wandering in the valleys of search and had nowhere found even a drop to quench his thirst; now found a path to the main spring. With parched lips and an insatiable longing he drank in the sweet scented stream of the verses of God through His new Manifestation. Three sessions were sufficient and he embraced the Faith with all his heart and soul. So elated, exalted and over-enthusiastic he looked, that 'Asdaq exhorted him to return to his family in Kashan and insisted that he should not mention the Faith to the people, not even to his own wife.

Those days were days of extreme danger to the nascent Cause of God. The few followers recruited from the poor people of the world were forever the targets of many atrocities. Even the air was imbued with suspicion, spying and slander. Therefore the friends had to be very careful, lest the slightest unwise deed or even a foolish word would ignite a never-ending conflagration that would consume the believers in its flame.

'Asdaq, knowing how Ahmad had suffered, felt that he had no money to go back home; therefore he gave him some small gift for his family and the sum of three tumans (\$1) and again advised him to be very wise.

Commenting upon his return to Kashan, Ahmad has said: "When I reached Kashan, everyone asked what had happened that I had left everything so abruptly. I told them: 'My longing for pilgrimage was too great to resist, and I was right.' What else could take me away from my work, my house and my family except that innermost yearning? The instant I heard these words from the traveller there was no more patience left in me."

In Kashan he resumed his work, but longed to teach the Faith. He heard rumours

that a certain man by the name of Haji Mirza Jani had changed his faith and had become the follower of a new obscure religion. He searched for him and when the two found each other, there was no end to their joy and excitement. They became fast friends, constant companions and the first and only Babis of that town.

One day, Haji Mirza Jani went to Ahmad and with great enthusiasm and uncontrollable excitement asked him, "Would you like to visit the countenance of Your Lord?" Ahmad's heart leapt up. With much joy and ecstasy he immediately got up from his seat and asked, "How and when?" Haji explained to him how he had arranged with the guards to have the Bab in his house as a guest for two or three nights. Therefore at the appointed hour Ahmad went to Haji's house. When he entered, his eyes fell on a face the beauty of which surpassed heaven and earth. A young Siyyid was sitting with such meekness, grandeur and majesty that one could not help but behold the light of God in His countenance. Some of the divines and dignitaries of the town were seated on the floor around and the servants stood at the door.

One of the Mullas faced the Bab and said, "We have heard that a certain young man in Shiraz has claimed to be the Bab. Is it true?" "Yes," answered the Bab. "And does he reveal verses, too?" asked the same man. The Bab responded, "And We reveal verses, too."

Ahmad has further said, "This clear, end courageous answer was sufficient for anyone who had ears to hear and eyes to see and find the whole truth immediately. His beautiful face and His powerful Words and presence sufficed all things. But when they served tea and a cup was offered to the Bab, He immediately took it, called the servant of the same Mulla and very graciously gave it to him. The day after, the very same humble servant came to me and with great sorrow deplored the stupidity of his master. A little explanation as to the station of the Bab brought him to our fold and our number grew to be three.

This small nucleus started to grow and the number of the adherents increased. This angered the divines who used all their cunning to stop the flow of the already powerful stream of life. They instigated the cruel ignorant mob to plunder, confiscate and kill all those who bore the name of the Bab. Every day they would go to a house, so enraged that they would break its doors and windows, destroy the building and plunder and loot the contents. In the evening one would find the bodies of people dead in the streets and lanes and even scattered over neighbouring mountain and plains. This continued and Ahmad's house was no exception. Ahmad then had to hide in a tower for forty days and the friends used to take him food and provisions.

Journey to the Abode of Peace

Finding life unbearable in Kashan and hearing that Baghdad had become a point of attraction, he decided to go there.

"And God calleth to the Abode of Peace (Baghdad) and He guideth whom He will into the right way."

In the darkness of the night, Ahmad emerged from his hiding place and scaled

the wails of the city to make his way to Baghdad. He travelled on foot, full of love, enthusiasm and eagerness to behold the countenance of the One Whom God would make manifest. As he was walking, he came across another man travelling same direction. Afraid of being molested further, Ahmad tried to ignore the stranger, uttering not a word, but the man persisted in walking by his side. Taking great care never to even allude to the Faith or the purpose of his journey, Ahmad and his fellow-traveller reached their destination. On arrival in Baghdad, they separated and Ahmad immediately set out searching for the House of Baha'u'llah. When he found the House and entered therein, he found, to his utter astonishment, that his companion was there, too. He then understood that his friend was also a Babi and had been on his way to attain the presence of the Blessed Beauty.

Ahmad in the Presence of Baha'u'llah

It was a breathtaking experience for a man like Ahmad who all through his life had been searching for this immense spiritual Fountainhead. When for the first time he glanced at the youthful countenance of Baha'u'llah - a Face full of charm, freshness of colour and penetrating powers, he was overwhelmed. He came to his senses only through the mirthful remark of the Ancient Beauty, "He becomes a Babi and then hides in the tower!"

Baha'u'llah allowed him to remain in Baghdad and have his residence very close to the House. Ahmad immediately installed his small cloth-making machine and was the happiest man in the world. What else does one expect? To live at the time of the Supreme Manifestation of God, adore Him, be loved by Him and be so close to Him in heart and soul and even in residence.

When once asked about the events of the years he spent in such close proximity to Baha'u'llah, with tears in his eyes he said, "How innumerable, how great and how immensely mighty were the events of those years. Our nights were filled with memorable episodes. Joyful and at times sorrowful were our experiences, yet beyond the power of anyone to describe. For example, one day as the Blessed Beauty was walking, a certain government officer approached Him and reported that one of His followers had been killed and his body thrown on the river bank. The Tongue of Power and Might replied, "No one has killed him. Through seventy thousand veils of light We showed him the glory of God to an extent smaller than a needle's eye; therefore, he could no more bear the burden of his life and has offered himself as a sacrifice."

When the caliph's decree was conveyed to Baha'u'llah and He had to leave Baghdad for Istanbul, He left the town on the thirty-second day after Naw-Ruz for the Ridvan Garden. On that same day the river overflowed and only on the ninth day was it possible for His family to join Him in the Garden. The river then overflowed a second time, and on the twelfth day it subsided and all went to Him. Ahmad begged Baha'u'llah to be amongst His companions in exile, but Baha'u'llah did not accede to this request. He chose a few people and instructed the others to stay to teach and protect the Cause emphasizing that this would be better for the Faith of God. At the time of His departure, those

who were left behind stood in a row and all were so overcome with sorrow that they burst into tears. Baha'u'llah again approached them and consoled them saying: "It is better for the Cause. Some of these people who accompany me are liable to do mischief; therefore I am taking them with Myself." One of the friends could scarcely control his anguish and sorrow. He addressed the crowd reciting this poem of Sa'di:

"Let us all rise to weep like unto the clouds of the Spring Season. On the day when lovers are separated from their Beloved, one can even hear the lamentations of stones."

Baha'u'llah then said, "Verily this was said for this day." Then He mounted His horse and one of the friends placed a sack of coins in front of the saddle and Baha'u'llah started to distribute the coins to the bewailing poor who were standing by. When they ran to Him and pushed one another, He plunged His hand in the sack and poured all the coins out saying, "Gather them yourselves!"

Ahmad saw his Beloved disappear from his sight headed for an unknown destination. Little did he know that He was like unto the sun rising towards the zenith of might and power. Sad at heart and utterly distressed in soul, he returned to Baghdad, which to him seemed devoid of any attraction. He tried to make himself happy by gathering the friends and encouraging them to disperse and teach the Faith which had just been declared. Though actively serving the Cause, he was not happy. All that could keep him happy was nearness to his Beloved.

The Tablet is Revealed

After a few years he once again left his home and work and set out on foot towards Adrianople, the city of his love and desire.

When he reached Istanbul he received a Tablet from Baha'u'llah, now well known as "The Tablet of Ahmad." He describes receipt of this Tablet as follows: "I received the Tablet of 'The Nightingale of Paradise' and reading it again and again, I found out that my Beloved desired me to go and teach His Cause. Therefore I preferred obedience to visiting Him."

He was specially commissioned to travel through Persia, find the old Babi families and convey to them the new message of the Lord. Hence such glorious reference to the Bab in this Tablet. The task was arduous beyond description and therefore such exhortations as, "Be thou a flame of fire to My enemies and a river of life eternal to My loved ones and be not of those who doubt." The path to be pursued by him would be full of blood, thorns and hardships to be borne, but followed by such soul-stirring promises of victory as "And if thou art overtaken by affliction in My path, or degradation for My sake, be not thou troubled thereby."

With this divine amulet in his possession - a small piece of paper which had been "invested by Baha'u'llah with a special potency and significance," and clad in the simple garments of a mendicant, Ahmad made his way back to Persia. He entered the country from the district where the Bab had been imprisoned and

martyred and crossed this region like unto the breeze of life. Many of the Babis were thus enabled to see the sun then shining from Adrianople and even many of the Moslems embraced the Faith wholeheartedly.

"Glad Tidings of the Nearness of God"

Ahmad became the embodiment of his own Tablet. Such persistence, undaunted spirit, tenacity and steadfastness as his are hardly to be found any annals of the Cause. When he found a contact, although he suffered afflictions and degradations, he would return again and again to finish that which had been left half discussed.

For example, when he was travelling throughout the Province of Khurasan, he went to the house of a very well known Babi family, the head of which was no less a person than Furughi - one of the survivors of the Tabarsi upheaval. Ahmad went in and gradually opened the subject and in very frank, vigorous and emphatic terms explained that the One to be manifested by God was none other than Baha'u'llah whose light was then shining from the horizon of the "Remote Prison" - Adrianople.

Furughi, who has so audaciously fought in Tabarsi, started a fight here, too. The discussion became more intense as the hours went by. Furughi became very angry, attacked Ahmad, breaking one his teeth and threw him out of the house.

Ahmad left broken-hearted; but, undaunted, he later returned, knocked at the door and told them that he would not go until such time as the subject was fully discussed and some definite conclusions reached.

We must bear in mind that the Babis were in such great danger that even a piece of paper bearing the verses of the Bab found in any house was enough for the house to be demolished and the inhabitants to be sent to prison or even to the field of martyrdom.

Therefore many of the friends hid their books and writings in the walls of their houses. When Ahmad went to Furughi's house for the second time to resume the discussion, he said emphatically that the Greatest Name BAHÁ had very often been mentioned by the Bab in all His Writings. Furughi challenged the truth of this statement. To prove to Ahmad that he was wrong, he tore a part of the wall down and brought out a bundle containing the Writings of the Bab, and promised not to say a word against the explicit texts. Ahmad says, "The very first one we opened referred to the name of Baha." As promised, Furughi and all the members of his family accepted the Faith of Baha'u'llah and became zealous defenders and very outstanding in its propagation and protection.

"A Flame of Fire"

After crossing all the lands of Khurasan, Ahmad decided to go once more to Baghdad to convey the message of love and greetings on behalf of Baha'u'llah to all the friends of that very important city, but unfortunately on the way he again fell sick and could not reach Baghdad. In addition, in Tihran, some of the divines of Kashan recognized him and lodged complaints against him at the

court of the King, who was ever ready to inflict hardship on the adherents of the new Faith. He was consequently arrested and committed to the hands of a certain young officer who was ordered to investigate the case and if he was sure that his victim had gone astray, to put him to death immediately.

The young officer did not wish to molest Ahmad and therefore insisted that he should recant his Faith. Ahmad says, "At that moment I was at the height of my faith and enthusiasm and never for one moment even thought of recanting." Ever ready to lay down his life in the path of the Cause, he served with such self-sacrifice, he insisted that he was not a Babi, but a Baha'i, a follower of the Supreme Manifestation. He was detained and while in prison he heard of the sudden and severe illness of the officer's wife. In great fright and in extreme distress, the officer came to Ahmad and said, "Should my wife recover, I will release you," and after three days the young man, heedless of the dire consequences to himself, took Ahmad to the gate of Tihran and set him free.

"A River of Life Eternal"

Released like a bird, he first went to the villages where some sifters of wheat were Babis. They received him with the utmost love and courtesy. They offered him hospitality and he guided them to the right path of God and in great rejoicing Ahmad left them and made his way to the Province of Fars, the capital of which was Shiraz.

He lived in this Province for about a quarter of a century. He became the constant companion of the wronged and afflicted ones. He consoled them during times of persecution and gave them hope and vision of the ever-widening horizons of victories and triumphs.

It was through the old people of this district of Persia that this humble servant, the writer, came to hear the distant echoes of a glorious dervish living amongst the villagers and that he had been to them an angel of protection, guidance and mercy. Such rumours set me to search about for him and then I found out that this adorable individual was our precious Ahmad - a name now mentioned throughout the world with so much love and devotion.

Ahmad received many of the travelling teachers who passed through this part of Persia and feasted with them in his humble abode, mentioning God, His Faith and recounting the experience of the many teachers who had been in those days quickening many souls.

One of the most touching incidents as related by himself was the following:

"One day a man barely clad and almost barefooted came to the door of my house. He was utterly exhausted and worn out. His clothes were stiff and brownish with a mixture of dust and perspiration. He happened to be Haji Mirza Haydar-Ali. I immediately helped him to take off his clothes. I washed them and spread them in the sun to dry while he rested, waiting for the friends to come for a meeting."

"Steadfast in my Love"

The years passed by full of eventful days, but when the waves of persecution spread all over Persia, the friends in their love and admiration for Ahmad endeavoured to protect him against fatal attacks and after long consultations, they suggested to him that he immediately leave that forlorn and forsaken corner of the country for a more populated centre. Wherever Ahmad went, the friends suggested the same thing to him. He was so well known through the length and breadth of the country that his mere presence would cause agitation amongst the bigoted Muslims whose first arrows would be aimed at Ahmad himself. After changing many places of residence many times, he settled in Tihiran. He never wavered, nor was he ever anything but that "flame of fire" and "the river of life eternal." After having lived one century, always enjoying good health, he passed on to the presence of his Beloved in 1905 in Tihiran.

As to the family of Ahmad, he had two children: a son called Mirza Mohammed and a daughter Khanum Guhar. When Ahmad's house was confiscated, Mirza Mohammed, his wife and children left the city of Kashan for Tihiran. He, his wife and small daughter died on their way to Tihiran. The traces of their graves - if any - are lost forever.

There remained only their son, Jamal, aged five. The mule drivers who used to take food from Provinces to Tihiran, not knowing that Jamal was a son of Babis, took pity on the forsaken and homeless child and placing him on one of the loads brought him to Tihiran. In that great capital the poor child was left all alone and no one even told him of his glorious ancestry or of the Faith in the path of which the family had borne so many afflictions and untold hardships. He was left in this state until his aunt Khanum Guhar also went to Tihiran. When Ahmad reached the capital, he came to know of his grandson whom he loved very much. He took him under the wings of his own love and protection and Jamal grew to be an excellent Baha'i. His most outstanding characteristic was his iron determination and his indefatigable energy. Nothing could ever deflect this man from the straight path of God, though to him it had always been narrow and strewn with thorns, blood and multifarious plights and calamities. Towards the end of his life, Ahmad entrusted the original Tablet to Jamal who in turn, out of the purity of his heart and his devotion to the Faith of God offered it as a gift to Hand of the Cause, Trustee of Huquq, the son and brother of two illustrious martyrs, Jinab-i-Valiyu'llah Varqa. When Jinab-i-Varqa, according to the instructions of the beloved Guardian, attended the opening ceremony of the Temple in Wilmette during the Intercontinental Conference of the year nine (1953), he brought this most precious Tablet as his offering to the archives of the Baha'is of the United States. Now the beloved friends of that country are the trustees of this great gift of God to humanity.

References

1. A letter written on the same subject by Jenab Eshragh Khawari at the request of Mrs. Amelia Collins in 1958.
2. Manuscripts sent to the author by Mirza Faz'lullah Shahidi of Khurasan.
3. Personal investigations from the Djamalis, descendants of the immortal Ahmad

in Iran.

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