

a gathering of the learned and divines. He was not wearing the customary turban which would denote his rank, but wore an ordinary hat and no one recognized him. After listening to his discourse on the subject being discussed, they said no one can rival this stranger's eloquence and erudition except the famous Fadl-i-Qaini, which was himself. Rather amusing for Fadl to hear that.

Haji Mirza Haydar- Ali, one of the great teachers whom Abdu'l-Baha honored with the title of The Angel of Carmel, and also the writer of the book *The Delight of Hearts*, said this about Fadl. Should Fadl state that fire is wet and cold might as well accept it or with logic he would convince you. Both these learned people, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl and Mirza Haydar-'Ali, when at the gatherings of the believers with Fadl present, would not utter a word. Matter of fact, when smoking indoors was a common practice, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl who was a chain smoker, would not smoke in the presence of Fadl until Fadl who realized his addiction, would ask him to smoke.

Who was this unusual man whose good looks complemented all his other great qualities? In the course of this story, you will learn why it was decided to call his story 'The Taming of the Phoenix.'

Well----it is a rather long story, but an exciting one. You shall witness how the phoenix arose from his smoldering ashes, and how on the wings of his soul he soared to the realm of abiding light. By the end of this hour, hopefully, you will find it well spent but, please, a word of caution.

The stories of these early believers should not be considered as fables or taken for entertainment. These are accounts of those who were so overwhelmed with love for Bahalullah that they forsook their homes, family, wealth, fame and name. But they left for posterity a legacy of what is meant by being a lover of Baha'u'llah. Such love comes only after true recognition resulting in utter humility and feeling of nothingness. With this commentary before we start, might as well share with you the story of a beautiful raindrop by Saadi, the great Persian poet of the 13th century.

by Adib Taherzadeh
- *Masabeh-i-Hidayat*, Volume I in Persian language by Azizu'llah Sulaymani was the foundation for this presentation.

From a lofty cloud this pure drop of rain began its descent. Soon it became conscious of its own qualities so with pride told itself, 'I

I am the water of life. All existence depends on me." Swollen with self-admiration and pride, suddenly it looked down and saw the vast ocean beneath it. Dumbfounded, it said, "By God, if that is water, then who am I?" Filled with remorse and utter humility, it fell on the ocean. The mighty ocean, with admiration

and love, embraced the drop and made at the companion of the pearl. How beautifully expressive of the paradox of the greatness in humility.

And now the story.

To start this story without adequate introduction is not proper. Baha'u'llah revealed the Tablet of Wisdom, or Lawh-i-Hikmat, in honor of Fadl, and after Fadl passed away, Abdu'l-Baha accorded him the rank of a Hand of the Cause. Later on Shoghi Effendi designated him as one of the nineteen Apostles of Baha'u'llah. To complete the list of honors, the degree of ijtiḥad which is a doctorate in Islamic law must be mentioned. One cannot find too many people with all of the above.

The sources for this story are:

- The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah
- Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah
- Memorials of the Faithful by Abdu'l-Baha
- Baha'u'llah, the King of Glory
by Hand of the Cause H. M. Balyuzi
- Eminent Baha'is in the Time of Baha'u'llah by the
same author
- The Revelation of Baha'u'llah Volumes I and IV

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- Masabeh-i-Hidayat, Volume I in Persian language by

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presentation.

Fadl was born on March 29, 1829, and passed away after the ascension of Baha'u'llah in 1892. His place of birth was the small town of Naw-Firist in the District of Qa in in the large province of

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Khurasan. He came from a family of eminent clerics and received the usual religious education in his home town.

After his basic education, at the age of 17 he left home for advanced studies. First he went to Maahad, the capital of the province. While there he became interested in the study of philosophy. So he travelled to Sabzivar where Haji Mulla Mihdi, the most eminent Persian philosopher of the 19th century, was conducting classes.

After five years, he returned home, but did not stay long due to repeated heated arguments with his father over differences in understanding of certain principles. Where to go? Of course, nowhere else except to his illustrious and favorite teacher of philosophy. The teacher insisted that Fadl must write a letter

to his father and ask for his guidance. As loving fathers do, he sent Fadl money, a horse and a servant and advised him to go to the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf, the center of Islamic theological schools which are located in Iraq for higher education.

He went through the capital city of Tehran and since the summer season was approaching, he decided to spend the summer in Tehran and then proceed toward the holy cities before fall. Being thirsty for knowledge, he attended theological classes in Tehran.

A teacher, who was also the president of the school, soon discovered Fadl's depth and talent. Before long Fadl became his favorite student. This did not please the more established students who felt displaced by this newcomer.

The timing of this was in 1852 when an attempt was made on the life of the king by a few crazy Babi youth avenging the execution of the Bab two years earlier. This resulted in the Babis, high and low, being rounded up and killed. As you recall, that attempt was the reason that Baha'u'llah, a widely-known well-respected nobleman, was cast into the Siyah-Chal, being accused of masterminding that attempt. In those days of terror, the least suspicion was enough reason for arrest and execution. Jails and prisons were only holding places before execution.

Well, the jealous students used the very handy weapon, accusing Fadl of being a Babi. Soon he was arrested and taken to the house

- of notorious Mahmud-Khan-i-Kalantar, the mayor of Tehran, for questioning, torture, and you know what. The name of the mayor should be familiar to you if you have heard the story of Tahirih. Tahirih spent four years in that house and was martyred in the same year, 1852. You might wonder how they could keep so many people in the mayor's or police chief's houses when they, with their families, occupied them. Even a four bedroom house could not accomodate all of that. Maybe a house with a basement? No, even that wouldn't do it. The residences of these officials were immense complexes including multiple buildings and numerous attendants and servants for anything from bringing a glass of water to a pampered child or torturing the people in confinement.

Fadl was taken to a room where an older man, possibly a real Babi, was also kept. The screaming they heard indicated some being tortured. The fiendish mayor, after attending the torture, came and sat in a room across from Fadl's room. Without being summoned, Fadl walked to that room and tried to convince the mayor that he was not a Babi and had nothing to do with that religion. All fell on deaf ears. So he decided to put his fate into the mysterious hand of destiny, and what a mighty hand it proved to be! Wait and see.

When Fadl was first arrested, he managed to send a message to his teacher, the principal, about what was happening to him. All of a sudden, the secretary of the principal rushed to the mayor and handed him a note. You should have seen the 180 degree change in attitude. A beast turned into a human. Pleasantly, the mayor told Fadl, "Apparently the honorable principal expects you, so may I ask that, without any delay, you go and see him." The mayor got up and, as a sign of respect, followed Fadl to the door.

Fadl continued to attend the classes in Tehran, but he had to cope with another aggravating irritation. He became known by the divines and their students as a Babi who was released through the intervention of the principal. He became so well-known as a Babi that even the laymen would point at him, and the students while walking kept distance from him to avoid defilement of their robes should it touch his.

Many of these religious schools had rooms for the students to stay.

In one of the rooms in that school where Fadl stayed, there was a man called Siyyid Ya'aqub who secretly was a Babi. Like Fadl, he also was from the district of Qain which brought them closer together, particularly in that large city.

One of those summer nights of 1852, Siyyid Ya'aqub, we shall refer

to him as Siyyid, told Fadl jokingly, "Do you know that you are known as a Babi?" Fadl denied being a Babi and said, "I have never met a single one of them or read a line from their writings."

If only he could guess what was in store for him.

Siyyid said,

"Well, it does not make any difference, and by the way, I have come across some of the writings of the Bab which are too heavy for me to understand. I thought I should bring them to you so with your degree of learning you could explain them to me." He placed the papers on the table and left.

Fadl states, "To please the Siyyid, I scanned the paper

rs, but since they did not appear to be in my style, which was that of philosophers, they did not impress me. Finding them not worthy of my time, I hid them under some books and papers so no one would find such incriminating material in my room.

"The next night Siyyid came back. I told him I found them worthless, and how I felt sorry for the foolish and gullible who had embraced that Cause to the point of giving their lives for it. Worse than them, I said, were those learned people who should have known better than to become overzealous followers of the Bab, misleading the innocent Muslims.

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Upon hearing my words, Siyyid's face showed his deep emotional despair. He lowered his head. After a long pause, he raised his head a few times as if he were going to say something but held it back. Finally on the way to the door, he recited this poem,
'How often knowledge and intelligence turn into a monstrous thief robbing the wayfarer.' As the final word, Siyyid said, 'Turn your heart to the truth in these words' and left.
Seeing him in that shape and hearing the poem and his final words had an unusual effect on me. However, I concluded that he was a Babi and was setting a trap for me, but did not realize the cleverness of his intended quarry. His naive delusion to trap me was pitifully ridiculous." The rendering of the poet states, "Set your trap for another bird, O trapper, why? For I am the phoenix and my nest is way up high."

The invisible trapper had His sight fixed on Fadl and his paradoxical trap of deliverance was firmly set. It was only a matter of time. This phoenix was needed in the service of the Cause. Yes, those mighty wings were destined to propel the Cause of God and nothing else.

Fadl continues to state, "Although Siyyid's mood and final words had caused an internal turmoil in me, philosophically I decided to dismiss it with logic. Well, why not. I felt with my knowledge

and intelligence I could find enough proofs within those papers to save poor Siyyid from getting any deeper in his confusion. He looked like a good man and should be brought back into the fold of Islam. My motivation was not to learn, but to find faults to prove the fallacy of the Bab's claim.

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With every line I read a new door of knowledge opened before my eyes. Sleep escaped me and I was led into a new world. All night I read the Bab's writings with increased enthusiasm discovering gems previously hidden from me. The first rays of the sun found my vision, my soul, and my heart totally changed and refreshed.

That evening the Siyyid came back. As soon as he learned what had happened, he was overwhelmed and nearly went crazy. He prostrated and in humility praised the Lord. Then if he was not crying, he was laughing." Well! What do you expect? He had put the bait for the phoenix, but the real trapper was the invisible power, that inexplicable power of attraction to the Words of God.

From then on Siyyid could not supply him fast enough with other writings of the Bab, one of which was what the Bab had revealed for the matchless and erudite Vahid, the emissary of the king, who instead of defeating the Bab, was captivated by Him and became a staunch, dynamic, and dedicated follower. Please do yourselves a favor and learn about the history of the Bab, truly a divine drama.

Now the sun had begun its descent, and day by day was setting lower. With the approach of fall, it was time for Fadl to oblige his father's wishes. But who needed any further Islamic learning, having discovered the real source of knowledge.

Fadl decided to go on with the original plan and acquire all the Islamic learning he could so no one could say "If he knew better, he would not have become a Babi."

With his ability, why not aim for the highest degree of ijihad which is the doctorate degree of Islamic law. Wouldn't you say that it was a memorable summer for Fadl? Well, the unforgettable occasion is yet to come. Our phoenix is trapped but not yet tamed.

A new chapter in the life of this great man opens with his pursuit of knowledge at the feet of well-known divines in Najaf and Karbila, the two holy cities in Iraq.

Before opening the curtain to this stage, a timely digression is worthwhile, one historical and one mystical.

It staggers one's mind to know that in the blood-bath of Tehran in 1852, when the cross-fire of gory persecutions was mowing down the Babis, there were some who actually dared to proclaim themselves

as new believers. Couldn't they wait until the danger was over? No, not those who found the truth and saw its dazzle with their spiritual eyes. Fadl was not alone. Another noteworthy person, who already was a mujtahid, declared his belief in that year. His title, given by Baha'u'llah, was Zaynu'l-Muqaribin, meaning the ornament of the intimate ones. He was the most meticulous transcriber who compiled the Questions and Answers part of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. An unshakeable conviction does not pay attention to the fear of persecution or death or any other obstacle, such as disapproval from family and friends. Let us pray that all of us attain such a certitude.

Where were we? Did I really tell you that it was Fadl who decided to proceed to the holy cities for furthering his education, or was it his father who had advised him to do so. Well, maybe it was himself, maybe his father, maybe both, and again, maybe neither. Are you slightly confused, or am I?

Let us think of a child who has never seen a magnet which is setting on the table. While playing with paperclips, one of them gets close enough to the magnet and jumps to the magnet. The child might think that the paperclip decided to move and stick to the magnet. There are similar mysteries in this world and the worlds beyond which are beyond our comprehension. That power, that force is unfathomable. Wasn't it the same force which, some years later, attracted to Baha'u'llah the seventeen-year-old Badi, the martyr-messenger who took Baha'u'llah's tablet to the king of Persia? Superficially, it appeared that he and his father had made plans to make the long, dangerous, and difficult journey to attain the presence of Baha'u'llah, but who knows. Coincidentally, Badi and his father were from the same province of Khurasan blessed by the footsteps of Quddus and Mulla Husayn. Both and later Badi, like many others, were chosen and drawn to the magnet of Baha'u'llah's attraction to be recreated and magnetized.

We should not think that now in Baha'u'llah's physical absence such transformation is no more possible. The glory which was concealed within the Holy Being of Baha'u'llah is even more present. What is asked of us is purity of motive, humility, and submission. He works wonders if only we take the first step. You may have experienced or witnessed such transformation which astonishes even the person who has undergone such a transformation.

If Fadl gave any thought to what we just discussed or not, we don't know, but we know with certainty that he safely arrived at the cities which were the center of Islamic learning.

He sat at the feet of prominent Islamic divines, the greatest of whom was no less a person than - - Murtida-i-Ansari. This great

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man of learning and wisdom, praised by both Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, had such exacting and strict standards that he rarely bestowed the title of mujtahid on any one. The six years which it took for Fadl to graduate was much less than the time it took for others.

For his final dissertation in answer to some questions asked by

- - Murtida, Fadl wrote a book of a few thousand verses. -

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Murtida wrote on the margin of that book his astonishment and praise for Fadl's depth and degree of knowledge. Fadl's diploma was signed by this leading Mujtahid of Shi'ih Islam. When jealous students of theology showed dismay about the - - having given the highest Shaykh

degree to a person who was a Babi, he told them you write a similar book and you shall receive my signature. You might be interested to learn that only two other students received such a degree from Shaykh

- - Murtida. One was Mirza-i-Shirazi, who became the successor to the - - as the leading mujtahid, but as you may remember Shaykh

from the talk on the Kitab-i-Aqdas, he was secretly a believer in both the Bab and Baha'u'llah. The third person receiving the degree of ijti had from the a a y k died while traveling in Arabia. Doesn't it tell us something; that two of the three prize students of such an honorable divine were believers in the Baha'i Faith.

Should time permit at the end of this talk we shall audit the assets of - - Murtida and Fadl when they died compared to the other Shaykh greedy mujtahids.

One wonders how Fadl felt after receiving the highest honor. We have a well-decorated mujtahid fully aware of his own genius. Being in such a position is challenging and dangerous. Our tests grow harder with our growth. It is exactly like the air resistance which a moving object confronts. The faster it goes, the more resistance and listen to this, the higher it goes, the more dramatic becomes its fall. By remembering this analogy, we could always be reminded about such an equation. Forewarning about tests and dangers is a good protection. The only problem is sometimes we don't realize that we are being tested. It is so easy to pass the test if only we do our homework and read the guide book offered to us by Baha'u'llah, the Redeemer of mankind. One thing is for sure, and that is Baha'u'llah's assurance that we will never be tested beyond our capacity.

What would you do if you were in the place of Fadl? Well, go home, but of course, being so close to Karbila who would miss the last opportunity of a visit to the holy Shrine of Imam Husayn there. The year was 1858, five years before Baha'u'llah's declaration in Ba&dad.

While in Karbila, Fadl met a Persian Babi there. Fadl states, "This believer gave me all of the news and he made frequent references about the exiled Babis in Ba&dad, fifty miles away. This, of course, meant Baha'u'llah and other Babis. He insisted that I must pay them a visit before returning to Iran or I might regret it forever. His praise of Jinab-i-Baha (as Baha'u'llah used to be called in those days) had no bounds but when asked about Mirza Yahya, the younger half-brother of Baha'u'llah who was nominated by the Bab as the temporary head of the Babis, he became subdued and stayed quiet. To make it short, he begged and made me swear that when passing through Ba&dad, I would visit Baha'u'llah.

The unfoldment of the following events in the life of Fadl could be considered the highlight of this story, and that is the taming of the phoenix who roams around head and shoulders above every one else.

Don't you wish you could open the window wide by yourself without me slowing you with digressions? My purpose is to guide you through some passages of history, hoping that you will consider the history of our precious Faith interesting, exciting, and inspiring. Then you can be on your own, opening window after window through the pages of the books decorating your shelves.

As requested by that Babi in Karbila, Fadl, while passing through Ba&dad on his way home, stopped over at Baha'u'llah's house. It was in the afternoon when he entered a house which for ages will be the center of circumambulation by the lovers of Baharu'llah in obedience to the law of obligatory pilgrimage.

After a few minutes, Baha'u'llah came out from the private quarters of the house to meet the visitor, Fadl. In that celebrated hall which witnessed so much history, Baha'u'llah greeted Fadl, extending a warm welcome to him. Then smilingly told him, "Don't you know that in the eyes of the government of Iran We are considered to be the enemy of the state and therefore have been cast out? People, too, regard Us as outlaws and shun Us. You are a learned man, a mujtahid who is highly respected. Whoever comes to meet Us and associates with Us is labelled the same. How, then, did you dare to come to Us, not sparing your position and status?" Then very kindly, Baha'u'llah invited Fadl to stay at His house as His guest. He instructed His secretary, Mirza Aqa Jan, to look after Fadl's comfort.

Fadl states, "One day in Baha'u'llah's house, I was visiting with Mulla Sadiq-i-Muqaddas, a very dignified and distinguished follower of the Bab. Baha'u'llah, accompanied by a Persian prince, also an exile, entered the house and came straight to us. Mulla Sadiq jumped out of his chair and threw himself at Baha'u'llah's feet. Baha'u'llah disapprovingly told him, "Mulla, stand up and stop these old practices," and immediately left with the prince. Fadl states, "I could not believe my eyes. Somewhat stunned and upset, I decided to give him a piece of my mind, seeing how Baha'u'llah had admonished him." For your information, Mulla Sadiq is the same man who converted the celebrated Ahmad. Listen to Ahmad's story. It is quite touching.

Fadl goes on to state, "I said, Mulla Sadiq, you not only are of the learned but also occupy the exalted position of having been appointed by His holiness the Bab as a witness, which ranks second to the Letters of the Living. There is no question that Baha'u'llah is a respectable man of nobility, and we know that on account of His being a Babi. He was cast into the Siyah-aal, His belongings were ransacked, and He was then exiled to this city. None of this justifies that a person of your caliber should act as a slave at the feet of his master. Mulla Sadiq refrained from answering me. He was in another world. Beaming with joy, he said, 'I beg God to tear the veils away from your eyes and shower you with His abundant grace.'

This answer puzzled me more than his action which I could not figure out. I was prompted to closely observe the person of Baha'u'llah, His words and deeds. I secretly began my own research." Imagine the paper clip researching the magnet, oblivious of its invisible force.

Well, there was nothing wrong with his research. After all, independent investigation of truth is a teaching of Baha'u'llah. But listen to this outlandish remark. Apparently, the phoenix is swelling with pride by the minute waiting for something to happen. Like what? Possibly like an overexpanded balloon? Pop? No, this is the undying phoenix!

Fadl continues his story, "The more I concentrated on Baha'u'llah, the less I found anything significant to impress me. He was the embodiment of humility and self-effacement. Nothing pointed to His claiming any station. That grievous delusion led me to consider myself in every way superior to Baha'u'llah. This proud attitude was inflated by the respectful attitude of Baha'u'llah and others. In all gatherings I occupied the seat of honor and when speaking, would not give a chance to anyone, including Baha'u'llah, to utter a word. "

So far our phoenix is having fun, but the hour of taming is drawing

closer. None of us enjoy the thought of such a great being turning to ashes, but that is the only way to be recreated.

One unforgettable afternoon, something drastic happened. A fire? No, not a visible one, let us go to the words of Fadl, himself, "On that afternoon in the same hall where the gatherings used to be held, under the instruction of Baha'u'llah, a large gathering was held. As usual, I sat in the seat of honor and Baha'u'llah sat in the middle of the crowd pouring tea with His own hands."

Oh, what a sight! Don't you wish you could have just one drop of that tea?

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A question was asked and every one was quiet, so I was satisfied that no one in the room was capable of answering it. I began my usual discourse with everyone quietly absorbing every word except Baha'u'llah. He, at times while agreeing with my statement, added further explanation. Gradually, He increased His explanation until He took over and I became silent."

Well, friends! This is that long-awaited moment. That electrifying sight when the phoenix consumes itself into ashes so he can be recreated into that beautiful being deserving to be called by the Blessed Beauty with these affectionate words "O my Nabil." (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 151)

You see, such a state of utter selflessness and nothingness is the absolute requirement at the end of the valley of search before one could step into the realm of unshakeable certitude. Such was the state of the greatest scholar, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl when he embraced the Cause, and such was the state of the raindrop in our story before the ocean embraced it. As was said before, Fadl was one of the guiding stars when Mirza Abu'l-Fadl was treading the valley of search.

Back to the awesome scene of immolation and Fadl's own words, "When I heard the outpouring of His profound words and surging of the ocean of His utterance, I was dumbfounded. I was filled with awe, fear, and shame for having occupied the seat of honor and went into a state of fainting to the point that I could no longer hear Baha'u'llah. I was so ashamed that I wished to run out, but like a sparrow in the claws of a mighty falcon, I could not make a move. I was waiting for Him to finish His utterance, but I could not hear Him. When His blessed lips stopped moving, I dashed out, and in remorse hit my head three times against the wall for my blindness."

By witnessing that glimpse of Baha'u'llah's might and glory, he realized that Mulla Sadiq's prostrating at the feet of Baha'u'llah was well justifiable.

Fadl had two obstacles to deal with. The worst was self and ego and the next was the question of rank among the Babis. The first was conquered through Baha'u'llah's mercy, but the question of Mirza Yahya's position perplexed his analytical mind. He overcame this frustration by philosophically concluding that Mirza Yahya, the nominee of the Bab, was in charge of day-to-day affairs of the Faith, but Baha'u'llah was the spiritual leader and source of innate knowledge.

Before long, at the home of a believer, Fadl was also present when Baha'u'llah revealed words about the mysteries and the origin of creation. This made the words of all scholars appear to Fadl like the talk of children. It was not the nature of this great man, Fadl, to be overcome by anxiety. He always could reason himself out of it, but not this time. He being was shaken to the core. Every minute of those anxiety-ridden days seemed like eternity. Every time he tried to soar on the wings of knowledge and logic, an invisible force would direct him down to earth. Such instability became unbearable, so with utmost humility, Fadl wrote a letter to Baha'u'llah and requested Abdu'l-Baha, at that time an adolescent, to present it to Baha'u'llah. In the letter, Fadl begged Baha'u'llah to reveal His position.

In answer, Baha'u'llah revealed a tablet which began with utter humility. In the middle, He touched upon Irfanic or Illuminati subjects which were familiar to Fadl, and at the end, He expounded on His own exalted station. This tablet was taken to Fadl by Abdu'l-Baha who instructed him to read it and return it to Baha'u'llah.

The mighty phoenix soared to the pinnacle of certitude, achieving immortality. Abdu'l-Baha's words verify this. You will hear them at the end of this talk. His true mission in life began. May all of us learn what is our real purpose and calling. Definitely it is not mundane fame and wealth. Meditate on it. Baha'u'llah calls each one of us the immortal phoenix in this passage from The Hidden Words and illuminates our mission, "O Immortal Phoenix! Dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to obtain thy goal." (HW p. 22)

It wouldn't be fair to you not to recount an interesting story related by Fadl about events while he was a guest of Baha'u'llah. He states, "One day I was sitting on my knees at the presence of Baha'u'llah when an agent of the Muslim divines in the holy cities arrived. His name was Mulla Hasani-Amu. He knew me quite well. He had come there on behalf of the doctors of Islam to ask Baha'u'llah to perform a miracle as a proof of His powers."

Fadl goes on to state, "Mulla was dumbfounded to find me sitting at the feet of Baha'u'llah. He sat down and gradually moved closer to me and whispered in my ear, 'What is a personage of your eminence doing here?' I whispered back in his ears, 'I am here for the same reason that you are.'" Both were seeking the truth, but in different ways.

Now we turn the page to a new chapter in the life of Fadl-i-Qaini who was later given the title of Nabil-i-Akbar by Baha'u'llah. Upon his return to his hometown a large number of divines, students and merchants went a distance in advance to welcome the great mujtahid home. The Amir or ruler of the district of Qa in personally welcomed him with generous words of praise. Matter of fact, he invited Fadl to be his guest twice a week and to teach him philosophy.

The divines and the students who had heard all about his fame and degree of ijtiḥād secretly planned to test him. They chose the most learned among them for the task. He reported back that Fadl's knowledge was superior. One thing after another made him ascend the ladder of prestige and popularity quite fast--but to our dismay, this did not last long due to two elements.

One was the jealousy of the established ecclesiastics who found themselves displaced by Fadl, and the second one obviously was his teaching the Faith. Although he used his discretion in choosing the receptive souls, it didn't work out that way. With his charisma and knowledge, converting people was no problem. One of the many Muslims he converted was a preacher and a relative of Fadl.

One day when this relative was giving a sermon, he intermingled some new verses which the listeners were not familiar with. If you like to see an uproar of disapproval, you should have been there. The large crowd interrupted his sermon with shouts of "What are these words?" Quite frightened and not thinking of the consequences, he said, "These are not my words. I heard them from Fadl." Well, that was it. The clergy who were badly waiting for the opportunity to strike were supplied with ammunition against Fadl. They poisoned the goodwill of the ruler who used to see Fadl twice a week to the point that the fickle ruler decided to arrest, chastise, and imprison Fadl. What an intriguing world.

At that time Fadl was in his early thirties and was engaged to a fine young lady from a nearby village. No doubt she was the envy of many women her age. After all, Fadl's good looks complemented his other unmatched qualities. It is yet too early to think of the biggest wedding in that corner of the world.

One day when he was returning from that village, before reaching his hometown, the agents of the Amir intercepted him and showed

him the order of the Amir, the same ruler who used to have Fadl come twice a week to teach him philosophy. He was ordered to dismount his horse. The agents removed his boots and filled them with gravel and hung the boots around his neck. Barefoot, he covered the distance back to the village over thistles and rough ground. There he was thrown into a prison where he was denied water and food. This period of suffering from inadequate food and water lasted about two months. Then with stocks on his feet, which are heavy blocks of wood locked around the ankles, he was taken to Birjand, a city in that province. There he was confined in the house of the police chief. I think that was the end of that engagement for Fadl. Maybe he will have better luck next time.

That inhumane treatment of Fadl should be followed by a refreshing incident, but all of us may wonder about the purpose of tests and difficulties which most of us have experienced or witnessed. There are many passages in the Baha'i writings about their purpose and significance. They definitely make us stronger with a cleansing and mellowing effect, the way the earth is torn by the plow clearing thistles and rocks. Some may become bitter and resentful. What tests and tribulations do for our soul could be explained as precisely as the soul itself. Limited human understanding is incapable of comprehending the infinite, the world to which the soul belongs.

Now the delightful story which was related by the son of the police chief of Birjand. He states, "Before Fadl was brought to our house, one night my mother saw in her dream that the sun descended from the sky right into our house and set in a corner of a certain room. The next day Fadl was brought for confinement in our house. When my mother looked through the window, she saw Fadl sitting exactly in the same corner where she saw the sun set in her dream. She realized the importance of the stranger and treated him with reverence." You see, Baha'u'llah did not forsake His chosen servant.

There, in Birjand, the authorities decided to return Fadl to his hometown hoping that he would keep a low profile. Fadl planned to settle there, and built a house which was still in existence at the time of the writing of the history book *Masabih-i-Hidayat* in 1946. We don't know what the present regime has done to it. Since the writer of the history book reported that the house was in the hand of non-Baha'is, there is some hope that it may be preserved, as mainly Baha'i properties were destroyed by the present fanatic regime in Iran.

The culprit for all of this mischief was an influential man called Abu-Talib who was a bitter enemy of Fadl. Not tolerant of Fadl's

presence in his small hometown, he caused the government agents from the provincial capital of Mashad to come and take Fadl back to Mashad. As depraved as ~ b u - ~ x i was, b he bribed the agents to torture Fadl on their way to Mahad. Again, the hand of providence was at work. The governor general, as expected, was a prince but had exceptionally good character. He received Fadl with respect and gave him protection from the enemies. There Fadl wrote a book called Hesamiyih which hopefully some day will be found. A dignitary close to the governor also became captivated by Fadl's charisma and qualities and arranged for a handsome annual allowance for him. With honor he was encouraged to return to his district of Qa'in. One would think that with such honorable treatment, smooth sailing should follow. But ruthless is the word for many enemies of the Faith who have hounded the innocent believers even to these recent years.

The wretched Abu-Talib sent complaint after complaint to Tehran, and did not rest until the king's agent came and took Fadl to Tehran. The ups and downs of this story were not arranged for the sake of story telling but are in the order they occurred. Well, to your and my surprise, in Tehran they set him free. This was in 1869. (Eminent Baha'is in the Time of Baha'u'llah, p. 114)

Of course. What else? He became the light and source of inspiration in every Baha'i gathering in that large city. Oh, how badly this narrator wishes he could hear one of Fadl's speeches. By many accounts, his speech would galvanize everyone in the audience. Before speaking, he used to look intently into the eyes of the individuals in attendance as if reading their souls and establishing a strong connection.

It is timely to mention some of the strict principles which Fadl observed personally and stressed to others.

1. Speech is by itself an action and every action will leave a permanent effect in both this world and the next. Therefore, our speech, even when joking, must be guarded as much as our deeds.
2. On quoting a source, one must always acknowledge the source or it will be an act of stealing.
3. When presenting a subject, should one realize he has made a mistake, he should not hesitate to correct it. Should someone, in the audience correct the mistake, one should gracefully stand corrected with humility and joy. We should be grateful when someone reminds us of our true nature, which is imperfection.

Finally, he stressed over and over that dissemination of wrong information, by all means, must be avoided, advice which has been the goal in this series of tapes, but who can claim perfection?.

May we all continue to adhere to this advice in all of our speeches, writings, and other endeavors.

Soon Fadl's fame spread, and the large city of Tehran became too small for him. The clergy became agitated and the usual course of events followed. His stay in Tehran lasted three and a half years. He got married in Tehran but it was short-lived. Two of the greatest clergy of Tehran had plotted to assassinate Fadl, so, as a disguise, he discarded his turban and put on civilian hat which is shown in his photograph. Under the order of the king, the police were searching for him everywhere, but without luck. Frustrated, they arrested Fadl's fifteen year old brother-in-law and tortured him to reveal Fadl's whereabouts which he did not know. Fadl moved from house to house. When he was told by an informant that the noose was getting tighter and trapping was at hand, he decided to leave Tehran. This was only one month after his marriage.

Under disguise, he left Tehran to face never-ending trials and difficulties which was the lot of all dedicated servants of Baha'u'llah. His reward was permission to attain the presence of Baha'u'llah, now in Akka, confined in the house of Abbud. The year was 1873, that memorable year. In that year, that house witnessed the revelation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Abdu'l-Baha's wedding, and the revelation of the momentous Tablet of Wisdom in honor of Fadl. Baha'u'llah honored him with the title of Nabil-i-Akbar, Nabil meaning noble and learned, and Akbar meaning great. The Tablet of Wisdom will be briefly discussed at the end of this talk.

With heavy heart, he said farewell to those unforgettable days and with refreshed spirit returned to Iran. He crisscrossed the country, edifying the believers and teaching the non-believers.

He went to Tehran and spent some years in Qazvin where he got married for the second time. His only child, a daughter, married Fadl's nephew, who was very close to him, and has given most of the accounts of this story.

The enemies never stopped looking for Fadl. Sometimes they would send advance notices to his next possible stopping-place. Now he had become so well-known that he stated the whole country became too small for him.

Finally a major complaint was filed against Fadl, and the king issued the order for his arrest and transfer to Tehran for execution. His age at that time was about 62.

The governor-general of the province of Khurasan was notified about Fadl's probable escape to that corner of the country, as it was his home territory. The governor sent notices to all of the mayors

and rulers to be on the lookout for Fadl. This was not the previous governor in whose protection Fadl wrote a book, but we shall see if he was as princely as the former governor. Now spies were posted everywhere.

The following story is related by Fadl's nephew, who was also his son-in-law and accompanied him. His name was Aqa - - Muhammad Shaykh

Ali, and he was also a distinguished believer. The nephew states, 'I

Fadl and I were approaching Sabzivar (the city where he received his education in philosophy), when we decided not to enter the city in order to avoid recognition. Therefore we went to a caravanserai and lodged in a room. Our disguise in civilian clothing had worked so far. However, at midnight an agent came and told my uncle, 'You are Fadl, and I am ordered to take you to the governor.'

The governor was sitting at his desk, expecting Fadl. As he entered the room, the governor raised his head and gazed at him for a while without uttering a word. Then he said, "Without a doubt, you are the celebrated Fadl.' Fadl remained silent. With anger in his voice, the governor said, 'I know Mirza Husayn- Ali from Nur (meaning Baha'u'llah). I cannot fathom a person as great as you giving your allegiance to Him. You received your education in this very city, impressing your teacher, the greatest philosopher, Mulla Hadi. You received your degree of ijtahid from no less a person than - - Murtida-i-Ansari.

Shaykh Aren't you ashamed to be a follower of Mirza Husayn- Ali? It is truly a mockery beyond compare. I wish you had declared yourself to be a prophet. Come on and have mercy and relieve yourself from such unworthy burden.'

Fadl responded in these words, 'Your highness knows that it is a natural instinct for everyone to want to be respected, particularly the higher class and the learned. I was no exception to the rule. When I met Baha'u'llah for the first time I considered myself way superior to Him, but in the course of events when I heard His outpouring of gem-like utterances, I was convinced that He was the ocean and I was but a lowly drop. I find myself to be a helpless bird in the claws of the mighty falcon. He rules my heart and my soul. This is my confession. Do with me what you have to do. Kill me on the spot, put me in chains and stocks, or transfer me to Tehran for execution.'"

'I

The prince governor was really moved by such sincere and bold declaration. His face could not hide his emotion. He said with quivering voice, 'I detest to see any harm done to you. I shall

pretend that I have never seen you. For heaven's sake, leave the city at once and be extremely careful because spies are posted everywhere. ' " Doesn't this just stagger your imagination? No one could resist the force of Fadl's personality.

Fadl returned to the caravanserai and related to his nephew what had transpired. They wasted no time. Before dawn they were on their way, using the side roads. They headed for a town where its ruler was a very close friend of Fadl. Gracious hospitality was extended to both Fadl and his nephew who needed some rest before the next surprise in the life of Fadl.

They bought two donkeys and headed for the Russian border aiming for Ishqabad, a sanctuary for many persecuted Persian Baha'is.

There was only one problem which was not so minor. Neither had a passport and the border was only a short distance away.

Fadl said, "Baha'u'llah has always come to my assistance. We shall rely upon Him again." No doubt with Fadl's past experiences, he could almost see the Hand of Providence. Fadl said, "Let us

dismount our donkeys and walk ahead of them. In such situations I usually chant a prayer from the Bab." That worked like magic.

As they walked through the Persian section of the customs, the chief was standing talking to his staff. As the two passed by them, the chief greeted Fadl and offered them tea, which Fadl did not accept, pretending he was in a rush. They also passed through the Russian customs without anyone demanding to see their documents.

They arrived in Ishqabad with no further trouble. The year was 1892. There, Fadl enjoyed reunion with the celebrated Mirza Abu'l-Fadl who had moved there a few years earlier. What a bounty for the people of Ishqabad to have two of the greatest luminaries of the Faith among them.

One story about Fadl during his stay in Ishqabad makes me very sad and makes me wonder if I ever have been guilty of such a neglect.

Fadl enriched everyone in that city by his knowledge, but he had no income and was living in poverty. He was too dignified to ask for assistance. A believer from Ishqabad relates the following sad story: "One night I invited ~ a d l for dinner. Before dinner was served, I saw Fadl picking up a dry piece of bread in the corner of the room and, with a sigh, began to eat it. I learned that Fadl had not eaten a few meals." Apparently he was overcome by the aroma of the delicious meal being prepared and could not fight his hunger any longer. Just think! During the Fast we miss only one meal and feel starved by sunset. How about missing a few meals? This is a lesson to us to always be aware of the needs of others.

You know, in the story of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, similarly it is mentioned that a meal consisting of a dry piece of bread dipped in water was no stranger to that great scholar.

With their capacity and knowledge, how much wealth and fame could have been theirs had they stayed Muslim, but they chose the Faith of Baha'u'llah.

After a while, accompanied by Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, Fadl-i-Qa ini moved -
to Bukhara in the province of Uzbekistan, north of Afghanistan.

In a short time, Fadl became ill and on July 6, 1892, five weeks after the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, he passed way at the age of 63. After more than thirty years of dedicated service, the immortal phoenix winged his flight in the wake of the Ascension of his Lord to the realm of eternity. He died penniless, far, far away from his home and family. Abdu'l-Baha conferred upon him the title of Hand of the Cause posthumously.

Abdu'l-Baha honored him with a tablet of visitation and instructed the local Assembly of Ishqabad to have nine people visit his resting place on the anniversary of Fadl's passing and chant that tablet as it would attract the bounties of God. For twenty years, the believers visited that spot. When Fadl's nephew attained the presence of Abdu'l-Baha, he was instructed to transfer Fadl's remains to IGqabad. This was done in 1923 and soon the wisdom of it became apparent. The cemetery in Bukhara- was leveled by order of the government.

The Tablet of Wisdom, or Lawh-i-Hikmat, was revealed by Baha'u'llah in honor of Fadl in 1873. The English translation, which you are urged to read, is in the book called Tablets of Baha'u'llah. It was revealed in rich Arabic language in the style familiar to Fadl, who was a great philosopher. Much of the following description is extracted from The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Volume 4 by Mr. Adib Taherzadeh, and in parts directly quoted. (pp. 33-49)

In another tablet, Baha'u'llah states that in each verse of The Tablet of Wisdom an ocean is concealed. The Tablet of Wisdom is distinct from other tablets of Baha'u'llah for its philosophical terminology, its reference to Greek philosophers, praising Socrates as the father of philosophy and the most distinguished. Among many other topics, He describes the influence of the Word of God, as well as the cause and origin of creation and refers to the mysterious workings of nature.

In that tablet, Baha'u'llah affectionately calls Fadl "O My Nabil," which must have balm the wounds he suffered in the path of his Lord. Then comes the following celebrated passage revealed fifteen years after that memorable day when Fadl suddenly recognized

Baha'u'llah's superior knowledge. It is possibly in answer to Fadl's question or curiosity as to how Baha'u'llah attained omniscience. Don't we all want to know ?

"Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess, and we acquired not the learning current amongst them, and yet whenever We desired to quote the sayings of the learned and the wise, presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures. Thus do We set down in writing that which the eye perceiveth. Verily, His knowledge encompasses the earth and the heavens. This is a Tablet wherein the Pen of the Unseen hath inscribed the knowledge of all that hath been and shall be - a knowledge that none other but my wondrous Tongue can interpret."

To close this window, no words could be more befitting to honor this Hand of the Cause and Apostle of Baha'u'llah than this tribute from Abdu'l-Baha in Memorials of the Faithful (pp. 1-5)

"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 horizons of the abiding light."

— Fadl-i-Qa'ini: The Tamed Phoenix (Used by permission of the curator)