

attracted the Babi leaders to the recognition of Baha?-Allah as the fulfillment of the Bab's prophecies concerning the promised messianic figure and helped reinforce the belief of the new Bahais in the teachings and principles that were being advanced by Baha?-Allah. Through these activities, Nabil turned into an outstanding teacher, defender, and promulgator of the Bahai faith.

While Nabil was in Khorasan in spring 1866, at his suggestion, the greeting *Allaho abha* (God is the most glorious) was adopted by the followers of Baha?-Allah, replacing the old salutation of *Allaho akbar* (God is the greatest), which was common among the Babis (Shoghi Effendi, p. 176). This was a significant action that gave group identity to the Bahais and was a sign of their independence from the Babis and the Azalis, a Babi faction that considered Mirza Yahya Sobh-e Azal (d. 1912) as the legitimate successor to the Bab.

Nabil was the first Bahai to perform pilgrimage (hajj) to the house of the Bab in Shiraz in fall 1866, in accordance with the rites prescribed in the *Surat al-hajj* revealed by Baha?-Allah. He also went to Baghdad and performed the pilgrimage to the House of Baha?-Allah in spring 1867, according to another sura written by Baha?-Allah for that purpose (Rafati, p. 36). Nabil's pilgrimage to those two houses marked the inception of pilgrimage laws ordained by Baha?-Allah later in his *Ketab-e aqdas* (Shoghi Effendi, pp. 176-77).

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Another historic mission undertaken by Nabil under Baha?-Allah's instruction was his travel to Egypt to appeal to the officials for the release of several Bahais who had been imprisoned in Cairo at the instigation of their enemies (Shoghi Effendi, p. 178). Nabil's mission resulted in his own imprisonment for two months in Cairo in spring 1868 and then in the Alexandria jail for a few more months. After being released, Nabil traveled to Cyprus and Beirut, and then he joined Baha?-Allah's exiled community in Acre (?Akka) in late October 1869. He spent much of the last two decades of his life in Acre and its surrounding areas.

After the passing of Baha?-Allah in 1892, Nabil was chosen by ?Abd-al-Baha? to prepare a text for recitation in his tomb (Shoghi Effendi, p. 222). Nabil selected four passages from Baha?-Allah's own works and composed the text, which is known as the *Ziarat-nama* (?Andalib 18/71, summer 1999, pp. 19-20). The impact of the passing of Baha?-Allah on Nabil was so great and inconsolable that he drowned himself in the sea at Acre circa 10 Safar 1310/3 September 1892. He is buried in the Acre cemetery.

Nabil was the recipient of a number of Baha?-Allah's best-known works, including *Surat al-damm* (1866), *Surat al-hajj*, for the house of the Bab in

Shiraz (1866), and Surat al-hajj, for the house of Baha?-Allah in Baghdad (1867).

When Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957) designated nineteen prominent early Bahais as the “Apostles [Hawariyun] of Baha?-Allah,” Nabil was one of them (The Bahá'í World III, pp. 80-81). The title signifies the recognition of distinguished services that those nineteen loyal and devoted Persian Bahais have rendered to their faith.

Nabil's works are in poetry and prose. He was a gifted, prolific poet, who devoted most of his poetry to the historical events in the Babi and Bahai faiths. His most famous poem in couplet form (matnawi) about the history of the Bahai faith was published as *Matnawi-e Nabil Zarandi* in Cairo in 1924 in 65 pages and reprinted in Langenhain in 1995. In this matnawi he describes major historical events from the early days of the Babi movement to the year 1869. His second matnawi, in 666 verses, deals with Baha?-Allah's banishment from Edirne to Acre. Other historical poetry of Nabil consists of his matnawi titled “*Matnawi-e wesal wa hejr*” in 175 verses (pub. in Rafati, 2014, Chap. 6; Doka?i, p. 416) and his matnawi on the life of Aqa Mohammad Nabil Akbar Qa?eni in 303 verses (*Ku?aha-i az karman-e adab wa honar* 13, pp. 108-16). In addition to those matnawis, Nabil left behind a great collection of poetry in different forms, only a fraction of which has been published.

Nabil's works in prose include a treatise on the Babi-Bahai calendar, a treatise on Bahai inheritance laws (Fazel Mazandarani, IV pp. 1, 214), and his account on the event of the passing of Baha?-Allah (Nabil Zarandi, *Matnawi-e Nabil Zarandi*, Langenhain, 1995, pp. 67-108). But Nabil's most celebrated work is *Matale? al-anwar*, an extensive historical narrative of the Babi faith, written in Acre in 1888-90, which was edited and translated into English by Shoghi Effendi as *The Dawn-Breakers*. The work was first published in the United States in 1932.

Matale? al-anwar, the most authentic and the main primary source on the early history of the Babi movement in Iran, is regarded by the Bahais as the definitive account of the Bab's dispensation. The work has been translated into many languages, and it has played a major role in familiarizing the Bahais around the world with the historical background of their faith and helping them understand its link to the socio-religious climate of the Persian society in the early days of its development. The original Persian manuscript of *Matale? al-anwar*, preserved at the International Bahai Archives in Haifa, comprises 1,014 pages of 22-24 lines.

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