

--Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp.
473-4.

Memories of Ashchi

The beloved Guardian wished for a detailed biography of Bahá'u'lláh, drawing from many sources, and befitting the life of the Supreme Manifestation of God, to be written. And while he himself provided a masterful outline of this noble Life in God Passes By, he commented to others that a separate volume, detailing many events was yet to be prepared in English. His manifold duties as the Guardian of the Cause of God, particularly on the eve of launching the Ten Year World Crusade, perhaps the single most important achievement of his ministry, prevented him from undertaking this project. But he told a cousin of his, Hasan M. Balyuzi, a Hand of the Cause and an Afnan, to research and write such a biography of the Blessed Perfection.

Hasan Balyuzi had already written a 130-page long essay on the life Bahá'u'lláh, "Bahá'u'lláh: the Word Made Flesh", when he set out to do research for his trilogy on the life of the Central Figures of the Cause. His volume on the life of the Blessed Beauty, "Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory", was published in 1980.

In order to collect his materials, Balyuzi used many sources, but the most important among them are:

Nabil's narrative (unpublished section)

memories of Aqa Husayn
Ashchi

narrative of Aqa Riday-i Qannad

narrative of Mirza Habib Afnan

Of these 4 manuscripts, I am in possession of the second and the fourth items, and if there is sufficient interest on Talisman, would like to spend some time outlining them for everyone's enjoyment. And if anyone finds it boring or has any objection, please advise and I'll cease immediately. However, for now, I'm going to assume that folks on Talisman have no objection if I start a series on these two manuscripts.

Before we delve into the subject, allow me to share an important point: I am a firm believer in use and distribution of primary source documents. While like everybody else, I greatly enjoy such secondary histories as "God Passes By", "Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory", "Dawnbreakers", etc., I particularly value and have an affinity for the words spoken by those blessed enough to be eyewitness to the events. In the past, I've briefly described some of the Babi narratives and hope at some point to get back to that subject and discuss them more fully.

I also firmly believe that often the primary source documents must be augmented with annotations and footnotes in order to make them useful,

balanced and comprehensible.

...Let me say a few words about these two narratives which we'll use to do our collective study:

Mirza Habib Afnan was a relative of the Bab and a son of Aqa Mirza Aqa-i Afnan, surnamed Nuri'd-Din. Together with his brothers (one of whom is the Hand of the Cause of God, Aqa Siyyid Aqa-i Afnan) and their illustrious father, Mirza Habib who was born and raised in the House of the Bab in Shiraz, visited Bahá'u'lláh in 1991-2 as a young man and stayed in Holy Land as Bahá'u'lláh's guest for nine months. He then moved to Egypt and established their commercial enterprise there. This enabled him to frequently visit the Master in Holy Land and indeed he is the very person to whom Abdu'l-Bahá entrusted the details of Covenant-breaking activities of Muhammad-Ali and other sons of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mirza Habib has left behind a marvelous narrative which shares some unique stories of the childhood of the Bab, many glimpses of Khadijih Bagum (the Bab's wife) who had raised Mirza Habib as her own son, and of course many aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's daily doings as observed Him during his nine months of stay in Holy Land and then concludes with a very large section of the events after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh (for the next 4 years). It is absolutely no exaggeration to say that this narrative is among the most important treasures of this Cause as it offers details about the events associated with the Heroic Age of our Cause that are truly unique.

My wife, Maryam, who is editing and preparing annotations for this narrative has given me permission to post extracts from this narrative. Mirza Habib's son, Abu'l-Qasim Afnan (my father-in law) had given a copy of this narrative to his cousin Jinab-i Balyuzi who not only incorporated sections in his "The Bab" but also devoted a whole chapter in his "Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory" to it, (starting page 403) as well as using it throughout his book. But still much more remains in this precious narrative seen by so few.

However chronologically it makes more sense to start with Aqa Husayn Ashchi's narrative first as it surveys the events from the Baghdad period forward.

Starting with the next post, we'll outline memories of Ashchi and again let's hope for good participation by Talismanians as we focus on the life of the Blessed Perfection.

With your kind permission, like to begin gaining glimpses of the events associated with the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh through the memories of Aqa Husayn

Ashchi -- a narrative that in a different culture, would have perhaps been titled "The Gospel of Ashchi".

In early 1920's, Fadil-i Mazandarani (remember him?!) wrote to the beloved Guardian suggesting systematic efforts be launched to capture the recollection of those who were alive at the time of Bahá'u'lláh. The beloved Guardian wholeheartedly approved this idea and issued instructions that a number of

faithful believers who were around at the time of Bahá'u'lláh and had witnessed many early episodes of the Cause to write down their recollection of the events. However by then most of them were in advanced age and at least some 30 years had passed since the time of Bahá'u'lláh. So, the Guardian had a number of younger believers to sit with these older ones and write down anything they could remember. A simple, brilliant idea, vintage Shoghi Effendi!

One of the early believers suggested by Fadil-i Mazandarani for such interviews was Aqa Husayn Ashchi who was living in the Holy Land at the time and about 80 years old.

This is what Jinab-i Balyuzi says of him in the Preface to his masterpiece, "Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory", p. vii

Aqa Husayn was the son of Aqa Muhammad Javad-i Kashani, a Babi of early days. Orphaned, when a young boy, he was taken to Baghdad, where he grew up in the household of Bahá'u'lláh, eventually becoming His cook. For that reason he came to be known as Ashchi, (Broth-maker). When, in Dec 1924, Aqa Husayn-i Ashchi was at an advanced age and on his death-bed, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, instructed Aqa Abdu'r-Rasul-i Mansur-i Kashani to sit by his bedside and take down all that the dying man could remember of the events of seven decades. It is a fascinating story that Ashchi had to tell; and what is particularly striking is the amazing rapport between the reminiscences of an elderly man, very soon to die and the narrative of Aqa Riday-i Qannad.

A while ago, through the infinite kindness of a deeply-loved friend whom I will do the honor of not identifying, I came to benefit from this narrative (and please don't ask for copies as due to its nature, I've sworn not to forward to anyone.)

In 1925, after Fadil-i Mazandarani had requested a copy of this narrative from the Holy Land, a copy was sent to him for his research and studies and he made excellent use of it in his Zuhuru'l-Haqq series. He then gave the original copy to Iranian National Bahá'í Archives for safekeeping where in 1967 Muhammad-Ali Malik-Khusravi transcribed a copy for Badi` Mansour, the son of Aqa Abdu'r-Rasul-i Mansur-i Kashani, the person who had captured these recollections of Aqa Husayn Ashchi.

Anyway, the present copy is 149 pages long and its in the hand of Malik-Khusravi. The first two pages is a letter from a certain Azizu'llah Bahádur dated 9 July 1925 addressed to Jinab-i Fadil-i Mazandarani. A rough and quick translation follows and I've added a couple of points to clarify in square brackets:

A while back you had recommended preparation of a history of the Faith and now it has been approved [by the Guardian]. [This must be a reference to Zuhuru'l-Haqq project.] Last year, instruction was issued

for the late Aqa Husayn Ashchi, who was a fellow-traveler with the household of Bahá'u'lláh, to commit to paper any recollections of the events of Baghdad and travels to Istanbul, Adirinih, and the Most Great Prison [Akka]. Despite illness, he shared his memories with another believer who wrote it all down and is enclosed herewith. After your suggestion was received, the Guardian said although the narrative of Aqa Husayn is not considered part of history, it's a good idea to send you a copy. You may find many historical details of benefit to your history writing project. Therefore a copy is being sent through Mr. Davachi [correspondence from Haifa were conveyed through him to the friends in Iran]. You should also know that you're free to accept or reject any portion of this narrative and just because its sent from the Holy Land does not mean accuracy is assured. The history of the Cause must be prepared based on solid evidences and not unworthy matters.

Regarding the matter of celebration of the Guardian's birth, and proclamation of [Abdu'l-Bahá's] Will and Testament, earlier you'd ask for exact dates and I don't recall if I responded or due to many distractions forgot about it. The Guardian does not wish for these events to be considered as Holy Days because if the friends are to celebrate the birth, announcement of the Guardianship and commemoration of the passing of each Guardian, then the entire year will be devoted to such events and no days remain for work. This clearly is against the interest of the Cause. He states only those Days mentioned in the Writings are considered Holy Days and no other is permitted to be celebrated or work be suspended. [closing pleasantries, including assurance of prayers.]

Azizu'llah [Bahádur] This last paragraph actually has nothing to do with our discussion, but I thought to share this rough translation because it clearly shows the Guardian's anticipation of appointment of many more future Guardians. Interesting! Also, I should explain that early believers expected that we each Head of the Faith after Bahá'u'lláh, then 3 Holy Days to be observed: Birth, Assumption of Office and Passing. Abdu'l-Bahá's Birth was of course celebrated on the same Day as the Bab's Declaration and the Day of Covenant was the symbolic representation of His assumption of Office (similar to "Declaration" Days) and of course His passing was observed (though work was not suspended). So, much the same way, the friends during the early days of Shoghi Effendi thought that his birth, assumption of office and passing must also be marked by observances -- and that's what he prohibited.

Other thoughts on the above letter:

1. I don't know Ashchi's exact date of passing (if anyone does, please enlighten), but from the above its clear that it occurred during the first half of 1925.
2. When the Guardian refers to Ashchi's recollections not to part of history, I read as the Guardian's desire for history to be written in full details, placing many events in their proper perspective and no simply based on any one

person's recollection. Clearly, Ashchi's recollections are most vital in assembling such a history -- as Fadil used them in his *Zuhuru'l-Haqq* and Balyuzi in his "*Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory*".

I want to emphasize that I like to approach this thread not so much as a series of postings where one (I, in this case) posts and others passively print them and are done with, but rather as an opportunity to collectively deepen on many aspects of the life of Bahá'u'lláh.

In addition, presently, steps are being taken to have this narrative readied for eventual publication, but as you will note once we get in the text it needs a great deal of annotation in form of extracts and information gleaned from *God Passes By* (GPB) and *Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory* (BKG), as well as other sources, to provide a balanced perspective.

I'll post a section of the narrative and then will pause and let others contribute on "search topics".

Incidentally, one of Talismanians has brought to my attention that in 1920's the beloved Guardian took steps to have this narrative translated and prepared for possible publication. If anyone has any details, please share.

Here is an outline (not a translation) of Ashchi's memories:

In the Name of God, the Most Holy, the Most Great, Exalted and Glorified.

After praise and laudation of the divine and glorified Lord [Bahá'u'lláh], exaltation of the Bab, humility before the threshold of Abdu'l-Bahá, obedience to the Centre of the Covenant, and servitude before the offshoot of the Twin Holy Trees, the chosen branch and the Guardian of the Cause of God, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, may my spirit be a sacrifice for his favours, on 20th of December 1924, this ephemeral servant, Abdu'r-Rasul Ibn Khalil Mansur-i Kashani, was instructed by the Guardian to interview Aqa Husayn Ashchi and ask him questions about the travels of the Ancient Beauty from Baghdad until the end of His Life and other events associated with that period and ministry of Abdu'l-Bahá. The Guardian's instructions were to gather information on each of these episodes, from the time of departure of the Blessed Perfection from Baghdad through Akka period and to present him with a written document. Therefore, I informed Aqa Husayn Ashchi of this directive and in utmost obedience he accepted and confident of divine confirmation undertook to narrate this history. Whatever is written is from the lips of Aqa Husayn Ashchi Ibn Muhammad Javad-i Kashani [who was on his deathbed and as such unable to undertake the actual writings himself].

When this servant (Aqa Husayn Ashchi) attained the presence of the divine Countenance (Bahá'u'lláh), I was about 13 years of age. Previously I had lived in Kashan where we had suffered much by the virtue of being a Babi and since my father traveled extensively on behalf of Bahá'u'lláh, together with my mother and sister we moved to Tihran where my maternal uncles lived, one of them being Ustad Isma'il, the builder. We stayed in Tihran for a

while with the intention of moving to Baghdad. From the beginning, however, Aqa Mirza Rida-Quliy-i Nuri, one of the brothers of the Blessed Beauty, discouraged us to depart saying that any day our father, Aqa Muhammad Javad, will arrive from Baghdad and will bring a scarf and a ring for a blessed undertaking. Sure enough, shortly my father arrived bearing a scarf and a ring as a gift of the Ancient Beauty for the hand of a daughter of the late Aqa Mirza Muhammad-Husayn, upon him the glory of God, a brother of the Ancient Beauty. This daughter was known as Sharh-Banu Khanum and was intended for the Master, the most Mighty Branch. Since by that time, Aqa Mirza Muhammad-Husayn had passed away, his brother, Aqa Rida-Quli, looked after the affairs of his household. On the question of matrimony, this brother [being the girl's legal guardian] was at first agreeable, but soon changed his mind. He would complain that: "if I was to send the girl [to Baghdad], and the noblemen of the Shah's Court as the ministers inquired of me, how am I to respond?" Therefore he declined the offer of matrimony between the Master and Sharh-Banu Khanum. My father exerted much effort in this regard and had many discussions with Aqa Mirza Rida-Quli, but to no avail. He remarked to my father: "You [being a known Babi] visit me too often and this will reflect negatively on me." To which my father responded: "If two or three like you were found among the Holy Family, surely the Cause of God would come to nigh." One of his complaints was how to answer the Prime Minister [on the girl's marriage to Abdu'l-Bahá]. However, secretly, he was planning to give her hand in marriage to a son of this Prime Minister. At any rate, after losing all hope, my father left Tihran for Baghdad. However, deeply grieved for what had transpired [and his failure to fulfill Bahá'u'lláh's wishes], along the journey he fell ill in Kirmanshah. We waited for a few days there hoping for his recovery, but the illness continued and in such state took him to Baghdad. Our journeyman was one famous Mir Muhammad-i Shirazi, who during the days of Primal Point, was urged to serve the faithful. At the conclusion of our journey, a few steeds and some money was given to him. Spiritually he was firm and steadfast, but occasionally he vacillated. Later from Baghdad he accompanied the Blessed Beauty to Istanbul and when He moved to Edirnih, Aqa Mir Muhammad remained in Istanbul engaged in certain occupation. And later when the events associate with Mishkin-Qalam occurred, six of the believers were imprisoned: Mishkin-Qalam; Sayyah Effendi; Aqa Abdu'l-Ghaffar-i Isfahani, known as Kaj-kulah (skewed hat); Aqa Muhammad-Baqir Qahvihchi, the servant of Bahá'u'lláh; Ustad Muhammad-Ali Salmani (the barber); Aqa Jamshid Bukhara'i. These six were in the Ottoman jail until the blessed journey [of Bahá'u'lláh and the Holy Family] from Edirnih to Akka occurred. At that time, four of them were sent to Glibuli [sp?, Cypress] so they won't join the Blessed Beauty. Ustad Muhammad-Ali Salmani and Aqa Jamshid Bukhara'i were sent to Iran and it was never determined why such a decision. Aqa Mir Muhammad, the journeyman, ascertained that indeed the four of them had arrived at Glibuli, but couldn't find anything on the location of the other two [i.e. Salmani and Bukhara'i]. As such, greatly agitated and in the state of utmost

indignation, he went to the Exalted Court (Ottoman seat) and roared like a lion, shouting: "The prisoners were six in number and now only four have arrived at Glibuli. Where are the other two? And if you don't tell me their whereabouts, I will burn down Istanbul." Such he continued shouting for a while that the officials, seeing he is old and simple, were moved and informed him that indeed they were sent back to Iran and urged him to cable Iran and ensure their safety to satisfy himself. Officials also confirmed that four of the believers were sent to Cypress.

Ahang

speaking: This an outline of the first 5 pages of this 149 page narrative.

In the above section, a number of research questions can be identified which requires input from Talismanians by posting info from GPB, BKG or other sources.

1. Any biographical data on:

Abdu'r-Rasul; Ibn Khalil Mansur-i Kashani; Aqa Husayn Ashchi Muhammad-Javad-i Khashani (Ashchi's father); Ustad Isma'il, the builder, (Ashchi's uncle); Aqa Mirza Rida-Quli (brother of Bahá'u'lláh); Aqa Mirza Muhammad-Hasan (brother of Bahá'u'lláh); Sharh-Banu Khanum Mir Muhammad-i Shirazi; the six believers imprisoned in Istanbul

2. Year when the marriage arrangement between Sharh-Banu and Abdu'l-Bahá was being planned.

3. Details about imprison of 6 believes in Istanbul and their eventual fate.

From Sen Mcglinn

Subject: Ashchi backgrounder

Thanks for more of Ashchi, Ahang. Here is some homework from me

Re Shahr-Banu, the daughter of the late Aqa Mirza Muhammad-Husayn, who was intended for `Abdu'l-Bahá, there is a cross-reference in Munirih Khanum, Memoirs and Letters, [Kalimat] p 24f, where Sayyid Mihdi Dahiji is reported as saying: ...One day when the Blessed Beauty was in the outer rooms of the house, as he paced about he said, "Aqa Sayyid Mihdi, last night I had a strange dream. I dreamt that the face of the beautiful girl in Tehran, whose hand in marriage we have asked from our brother Mirza Hasan for the Most Great Branch, gradually became darkened and indistinct. At the same time, another girl appeared with a luminous face and a luminous heart. I have chosen here for the Most Great Branch." A footnote there refers to the obstruction of this match by Aqa Mirza Rida-Quliy-i Nuri, with a reference to Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp 342-44 (which I don't have). Would somebody like to check King of Glory and see how it matches with the passage below?

Bahá'u'lláh refers to this proposed match briefly, and blames the obstruction

on one of his sisters, not on Aqa Mirza Rida-Quliy-i Nuri:

However, Our late brother Mirza Muhammad-Hasan's daughter - upon him be the glory of God and His peace and His mercy - who had been betrothed to the Most Great Branch (Abdu'l-Bahá) was taken by the sister of this Wronged One from Nur to her own house, and from there sent unto another place. Some of Our companions and friends in various places complained against this, as it was a very grievous act, and was disapproved by all the loved ones of God. How strange that Our sister should have taken her to her own house, and then arranged for her to be sent elsewhere! In spite of this, this Wronged One remained, and still remaineth, calm and silent. (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 170)

Rida-Quli is referred to by Bahá'u'lláh in at least one place

Subsequent to Our separation in the Land of Ta (Tihran), We ceased to meet Mirza Rida-Quli, Our brother, and no special news reached Us concerning her. In the early days we all lived in one house, which later on was sold at auction, for a negligible sum, and the two brothers, Farman-Farma and Hisamu's-Saltanih, purchased it and divided it between themselves. After this occurred, We separated from Our brother. He established his residence close to the entrance of Masjid-i-Shah, whilst We lived near the Gate of Shimiran. (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pages 169-170)

It is not clear to me whether this is estrangement or simply setting up separate households. Shoghi Effendi refers to this brother being in the Siyah-Chal:

In the village of Takur, at the bidding of the Shah, the property of the inhabitants was pillaged, Haji Mirza Rida-Quli, a half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, was arrested, conducted to the capital and thrown into the Siyah-Chal, where he remained for a month, ... (God Passes By, page 199)

and one wonders how he came to released so rapidly.

Ustad Isma'il: there's a chapter on him in Memorials of the Faithful, pages 29-32, according to which he became known throughout Tihran as a pillar of the Bahá'ís. It became dangerous, and he departed for Iraq, where he lived in poverty.

"He had recently taken a bride, and loved her beyond measure. Her mother arrived, and by subterfuge, obtained his permission to conduct the daughter back to Tihran, supposedly for a visit. As soon as she reached Kirmanshah, she went to the mujtahid, and told him that because her son-in-law had abandoned his religion, her daughter could not remain his lawful wife. The mujtahid arranged a divorce, and wedded the girl to another man. When word of this reached Baghdad, Isma'il, steadfast as ever, only laughed. "God be praised!" he said.

"Nothing is left me on this pathway. I have lost everything, including my bride. I have been able to give Him all I possessed."

When Bahá'u'lláh departed from Baghdad, and traveled to Rumelia, the friends remained behind. The inhabitants of Baghdad then rose up against those helpless believers, sending them away as captives to Mosul. Ustad was old and feeble, but he left on foot, with no provisions for his journey, crossed over mountains and deserts, valleys and hills, and in the end arrived at the Most Great Prison. ...

By stealth, he approached the Fortress and went in, but he was exhausted, spent. He remained for some days, and came into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, after which he was directed to look for a lodging in Haifa. He got himself to Haifa, but he found no haven there, no nest or hole, no water, no grain of corn. Finally he made his home in a cave outside the town. He acquired a little tray and on this he set out rings of earthenware, and some thimbles, pins and other trinkets. Every day, from morning till noon, he peddled these, ... Then he would go home to the cave and content himself with a piece of bread. He was always voicing his thanks, always saying, "Praise be to God that I have attained such favor and grace; that I have been separated from friend and stranger alike, and have taken refuge in this cave. Now I am of those who gave their all, to buy the Divine Joseph in the market place. What bounty could be any greater than this!" Such was his condition, when he died. Many and many a time, Bahá'u'lláh was heard to express His satisfaction with Ustad Isma'il. Blessings hemmed him round, and the eye of God was on him. Salutations be unto him, and praise. Upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious.

There is a briefer account in *God Passes By*, pages 187-188, which appears to collapse some details:

Another pilgrim, Ustad Isma'il-i-Kashi, arriving from Mosul, posted himself on the far side of the moat, and, gazing for hours, in rapt adoration, at the window of his Beloved, failed in the end, owing to the feebleness of his sight, to discern His face, and had to turn back to the cave which served as his dwelling-place on Mt. Carmel - an episode that moved to tears the Holy Family who had been anxiously watching from afar the frustration of his hopes.

Here he comes from Mosul, but 'turns back' to his cave, which may be a sign that two different narratives have been combined. And on this occasion does not attain the presence, although `Abdu'l-Bahá says he did.

You asked also about Mir Muhammad-i Shirazi. I found him in this not unimportant bit part:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] transferred His residence to the house of Izzat Aqa, in which He continued to live until His departure from Adrianople. It was in this house, in the month of Jamadiyu'l-Avval 1284 A.H. (Sept. 1867) that an event of the utmost significance occurred, ...

A certain Mir Muhammad, a Babi of Shiraz, greatly resenting alike the claims and the cowardly seclusion of Mirza Yahya, succeeded in forcing Siyyid Muhammad to induce him to meet Bahá'u'lláh face to face, so that a discrimination might be publicly effected between the true and the false. Foolishly assuming that his illustrious Brother would never countenance such a proposition, Mirza Yahya appointed the mosque of Sultan Salim as the place for their encounter. No sooner had Bahá'u'lláh been informed of this arrangement than He set forth, on foot, in the heat of midday, and accompanied by this same Mir Muhammad, for the afore-mentioned mosque, which was situated in a distant part of the city, reciting, as He walked, through the streets and markets, verses, in a voice and in a manner that greatly astonished those who saw and heard Him. ... Mir Muhammad, who had been sent ahead to announce Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, soon returned, and informed Him that he who had challenged His authority wished, owing to unforeseen circumstances, to postpone for a day or two the interview. (God Passes By, pages 168-169)

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