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The Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb

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ONE OF THE most significant figures in the nineteenth-century Iranian Bahá'í community was Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad (1798–1876), known as *Khál-i Akbar* (the greater uncle) because he was the oldest maternal uncle of the Báb, the Prophet-Fore-runner of the Bahá'í Faith.¹ When *Khál-i Akbar's* nephew, Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz, began His mission as a divine messenger in 1844, assuming the title of *the Báb* (the Gate), He announced His ministry gradually and in veiled language to avoid immediate opposition from Iran's entrenched Islamic clerical establishment. *Khál-i Akbar* has long been portrayed in English-language histories of the Bábí Faith as not being a believer, perhaps skeptical of his nephew's

claims.² But *Khál-i Akbar's* private correspondence—only recently published in Persian, some of which is first translated into English in this article—reveals him to be a man with considerable sympathy toward the Báb, a man who recognized that his nephew was a remarkable spiritual teacher. The correspondence also brings the reader into the private discussions of the Báb's family, showing their affection for Him and each other, their desire to share news about His movements, and their allegiance to His person.

In spite of that allegiance, however, *Khál-i Akbar* either did not immediately understand or accept the notion that the Báb was a Manifestation of God. Such recognition was delayed until 1861, almost a decade after his nephew's execution by firing squad in 1850. It was brought about by Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí (1817–92) known to the world as *Bahá'u'lláh* (the Glory of God), the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. During the opening days of January 1861 *Khál-i Akbar* visited Baghdad to discuss with Bahá'u'lláh his concerns about the claim and station of the Báb and acceded to Bahá'u'lláh's request that he put his questions in writing (which are translated into English below). In reply Bahá'u'lláh revealed a treatise that He later called the *Kitáb-i Íqán*. *Khál-i Akbar's* private correspondence about the trip (also translated into English below) provides valuable historical context for understanding Bahá'u'lláh's second most significant work, as well as pinpointing the date of its revelation.

Khál-i Akbar returned to Iran both a confirmed believer in the Báb and devoted to

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1. *Khál-i Akbar* was the firstborn of Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Ḥusayn, the son of Áqá Mírzá 'Ábid (known as Zaynu'l-'Ábidín), the son of Áqá Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad (see Muhammad-Ali Faizi, *Ḥadrat-i Núqtih-i Ulá* [Tehran: MMMA Publications, 1975] 64). *Khál-i Akbar's* sister, Fátimih-Bagum, was the Báb's mother. The Báb would declare Himself to be an independent Manifestation of God in 1844 when *Khál-i Akbar* was forty-six years old.

2. See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1989) 212n; Hasan Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1992) 163; Hasan Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973) 33.

Bahá'u'lláh, Who had not yet announced His own claim to be a Manifestation of God. In 1866 Khál-i Akbar came to understand and accept Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God, when Nabil-i A'zam, a historian of the Bábí and Bahá'í faiths, visited Shiraz and proclaimed Bahá'u'lláh's announcement to the Bábís. The Báb's uncle (as the document translated below shows) quickly accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the One prophesied by the Báb. His will and testament (also given in this article in translation) demonstrates that Khál-i Akbar ended his earthly life as a devoted follower of Bahá'u'lláh.

*Khál-i Akbar's Earliest
Associations with the Báb*

KHÁL-I Akbar's family were among the best-known and the most trustworthy merchants in the province of Fárs. Khál-i Akbar's wife, Hájíyyih Bībí Fátimih-Şáhib (a daughter of Hájí Muḥammad-Muḥsin) also came from a prominent merchant family of 'Abdu'l-Ḥusaynī, which traded in Shiraz and Bushire and eventually had commercial interests that extended from India to Europe.³ Khál-i Akbar ran the family office in Bushire, where he and the Báb were partners during the first four

years in which the Báb worked there as a merchant.

Although Khál-i Akbar had no indication that the Báb would later declare Himself to be an independent Manifestation of God Whose purpose was to inaugurate a new religion and to prepare for the coming of "He Whom God shall make manifest" [Bahá'u'lláh], he grew increasingly concerned during those years about the Báb's preoccupation with religious matters, fearing that such proclivities might cause problems for their prominent family.

Mírzá Ḥabīb Afnán, the late custodian of the House of the Báb in Shiraz and a prominent member of the Báb's family, reports that One day in Egypt during the time when [Mírzá] Abu'l-Faḍl was occupied with writing the *Kitáb-i Fará'id*, we began talking about the Báb's early years, before His declaration, when He was engaged in trading.⁴ Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl related the following to me:

"I myself heard the late Hájí Sayyid Javád-i Karbilá'í relate that, when the Báb was pursuing a career as a merchant in Bushire, because of Hájí Sayyid Javád's friendship and close association with the uncles of the Báb, he used to stay with them whenever he visited either Shiraz or Bushire. One day Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad came to him with a request, 'Give some good counsel to my nephew. Tell him not to write or utter certain things that can only provoke the jealousy of certain people. These people cannot tolerate seeing a young merchant of little schooling showing such erudition and are, therefore, rendered envious and resentful.'⁵

Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad was very insistent that Hájí Sayyid Javád should counsel the Báb [to desist from such activities]. Hájí Sayyid Javád, however, replied with these lines of verse: "The fair of face endureth not being veiled; shut him in, and out of a window will he show his

3. Hájí Mírzá Ḥasan Fasá'í, *Fárs-námih Násiri* (Tehran: 1894)2: 76-77.

4. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl of Gulpáygán (1844-1914), the foremost scholar of his generation, wrote extensively, proving the validity of the Bahá'í Faith and defending it. One such book is his *Kitáb-i Fará'id* (Cairo: n.d.) written in 1897 in response to polemics against Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i Íqán*.

5. According to A.-L.-M. Nicolas (*Seyyid Ali Mohammed Dit le Báb* 190 [Paris: Dujarric & Cic., 1905]), the Báb, while in Bushire, wrote the *Risáliyy-i Fiqhíyyih* (treatise in jurisprudence), which augured well for "a brilliant future in the path of Shi'ite orthodoxy." It is conceivable that the writing of this treatise, or perhaps others similar to it, provoked Khál-i Akbar's concern.

visage.' He added: 'We are earthbound, and He is celestial. Our counsel is of no use to Him.'⁶

In the summer of 1844, after His stirring declaration on 23 May of His being a Manifestation of God, the Báb instructed Mullah 'Alí-i Bastámí, the second to believe in Him, to journey to Bushire and to share the news of His proclamation with Khál-i Akbar. It appears that, in the course of this visit, the Báb's uncle grew considerably in his understanding of his nephew's claim.⁷

*Khál-i Akbar's Letter
to His Mother and Sister*

A FEW months after Bastámí visited Khál-i Akbar, the Báb visited His uncle while traveling to Mecca for His pilgrimage. On His return He again stayed with His uncle for some ten days, beginning on 15 May 1845.⁸ By the second visit Khál-i Akbar had developed a deep sense of respect and devotion toward the Báb, warmly welcoming Him into his home and showing genuine interest in his nephew's claim. During the Báb's return visit, Khál-i Akbar sent a letter to his mother and to his sister, Fátimih Bagum (the mother of the Báb):

O the Best of the Protectors!

To be conveyed to the illumined presence of the exalted lady, my mother, and to my

sister, upon them rest the contentment of God.

He is.

To your sanctified presence it is respectfully submitted that first may your eyes and mine, and indeed all eyes, be illumined that, praised be God, in utmost health and well-being, the honored Hájí [the Báb] has arrived, and at present I stand in His service. It is deemed prudent for Him to tarry for a while in this place before proceeding [to Shiraz]. God willing, it will be soon that He will return to that city. Your blessed self [Khál-i Akbar's mother] should be assured that He sent a letter from Muscat and a separate one that was addressed to my honored sister, though they arrived after His own arrival. When I first opened the envelope, I did not notice that it was addressed to my dear and honored sister and only noticed that there was a short letter addressed to the sister of Áqá Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim, which was forwarded.⁹ Now that I have determined it was meant separately for my sister, that one has been sent as well. Study them all.

All eyes be solaced. In truth, His grace-bestowing Self brings light to the eyes of this world and of the next. He is the source of our pride. Praised be God, a thousand praises be upon God, the Gracious, the Benevolent. God willing, you have remained steadfast in His Cause and have not allowed the idle talk of the people to introduce doubt or uncertainty into your hearts. Permit no fear or anxiety about what you may hear. The Lord of creation is His protector and His support.

I have no other matter to present to you. With infinite longing, I stand eager to serve Him. I beseech your prayers. Peace, tranquility, and blessings of God rest upon you all. My children convey their warm greetings, saying, "May your eyes be solaced by His arrival." The mother¹⁰ of my children, the lights of my eyes, also joins

6. "Tárikh-i Amry-i Fárs va Shíráz," ms. 21-23; this translation is from the forthcoming book by Ahang Rabbani and Maryam Afnan-Rabbani, "In the Land of Refuge," 145-46, to be published by Oneworld Press; the present translation has benefited from an earlier rendering appearing in Balyuzi, *The Báb* 39-40.

7. Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, *A History of the Báb* (London: Oneworld Press, 1999) 20 (forthcoming).

8. For a discussion of the dates associated with the Báb's pilgrimage, see Denis MacEoin, *Sources for the Early Bábí Doctrine and History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 48.

9. A reference to Khadíjih Bagum, the wife of the Báb.

10. A reference to Khál-i Akbar's wife.

in conveying her greetings and further adds her good wishes and informs my honored sister, "Would that I could be there to tell the mother of Áqá Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim, 'Praised be God that she has a son-in-law [the Báb] Who is peerless in the world and all the inhabitants of the earth must obey His command."¹¹

Khál-i Akbar's letter clearly indicates the extent to which he had come to believe, in some fashion, in his nephew's Cause (*amr*). By urging his mother and his sister, the Báb's mother, to remain firm in their belief of these claims as well, it can be inferred that at least some members of the Báb's family had given their allegiance to Him and recognized Him as the instrument of a divine Cause, though they still perceived His station as being within the scope of Islam.

Khál-i Akbar's Letter to His Brother

ABOUT the same time that *Khál-i Akbar* wrote to his mother and his sister, he sent another dispatch to his second brother, Hájí Mírzá

11. The original of this letter in the hand of Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad (*Khál-i Akbar*) is among the private papers of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan. The text can be found in Faizi, *Khándań-i Afnán* 25-27.

12. After the death of the Báb's father, *Khál-i A'zam* had served as his nephew's guardian and had raised him until the age of fifteen, at which time the Báb moved to Bushire.

13. A brother-in-law of the Báb in Shiraz who shielded the Báb from the attacks of the governor and remained loyal to Him throughout his life. He is the paternal great-grandfather of Shoghi Effendi, whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed in His will and testament to be the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith after His death.

14. Hájí 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn was the paternal grandfather of *Khál-i Akbar's* wife and an influential merchant in Fárs.

15. Presumably a reference to Quddús, whose full name was Hájí Mullah Muḥammad-'Alí-i Bárfurúshí. *Khál-i Akbar* is advising that both the Báb and Quddús be prevented from advancing the Báb's claims.

16. Mullah Ḥusayn-i Bushrú'í was the first to believe in the Báb when He declared His mission on 22 May 1844.

Sayyid 'Alí, known as *Khál-i A'zam* (the most great uncle).¹² From the content of this communication it is evident that the Báb's claim had provoked considerable commotion. While many, including some of the Báb's immediate family, were exerting pressure on Him to abandon His claims, the letter provides evidence that *Khál-i Akbar* was by then a devoted follower of the Báb, though he was yet unaware of the full magnitude of the Báb's revelation.

... a letter was received about the Cause of the honored Sayyid and my Master [the Báb], may His station be exalted by the Almighty. Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim has written about it as well.¹³ Also, Hájí 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn has written, though his first letter did not arrive, but the second one did, and they contained the same.¹⁴ From what has been received, it is apparent that they have not deemed this matter [the claim of the Báb] to be the truth and have suggested that we conceal these imaginings and prevent Hájí Mullah Muḥammad from departing and spreading this claim of both.¹⁵ [Further, they have suggested that we] wait some time so that gradually this talk will be erased from people's memory, as they fear that because of this [claim] we would all suffer injuries or major losses.

My view, however, is that, if we were to consider the matter from the worldly point of view, it would be, indeed, as they have stated. After reading these missives, my Master, the honored Hájí [the Báb] became greatly saddened over the infirmity [lack of steadfastness] of those who had penned these [letters]. Nevertheless, He stated, "Regarding the teaching of the Cause, what Akhund Mullah Ḥusayn initially had spread to the King, the ulama, and the people should have sufficed, and this second time was only because of Our grace, as there was no need for it.¹⁶ Now that such reactions have been observed and will be discerned, for [the next] five

years I have forbidden unto Myself the revelation of verses. This, indeed, is the most grievous punishment for those who have denied, and they will comprehend its effect only after they have been left with no recourse. After My arrival in Shiraz, as had been My practice in the past, I will remain in My house and will not associate with anyone and will not allow others to attain unto My presence. I will have no dealings with anyone and will leave people to themselves. Meanwhile should anyone be found who seeks the truth and be willing to embrace it, I shall designate one to answer his questions. Once I decline to associate with others, others will not bother with Me as well. If it were not because of My esteemed mother and grandmother, I would never return to Shiraz and single and alone would establish My home in this very city [Bushire], or would go in a direction that none would know."

If our honored mother desires to visit the sacred city of Mashhad, she can proceed with you. Accordingly, please arrange for her journey. And if by then the Hájí [the Báb] were to arrive [in Shiraz], they would be together for a few days, and she would depart afterwards. In any case, may they journey in peace.

In short, though they manifest His [the Báb's] wishes, the above utterances indicate His honored Person's sadness over the event. God willing, once He has arrived in Shiraz, He would not associate with anyone, and the same has been His practice while in this place. And should anyone ask of this matter, the answer is the

same, and it is incumbent upon him to show obedience and seek the explanation of what he does not understand of His laws from the one designated by Him. He Himself will not associate with anyone. The reason for designating another person is that, should people be found who in sincerity would recognize Him and seek to understand [His Revelation], they would make their inquires from this designate, who, otherwise, will not associate with anyone either. For five years it will thus continue, until He decrees what will occur.

He [the Báb] states, "We have nothing to do with anyone, and you are to continue with your business as before and fear no one. If you dislike My coming to Shiraz, I will not come." Thus His affairs will unfold as described above.

However, about what you had written, "These writings are not proof," and your inquiry as to how this servant attained certitude [in the Báb's claims], I respond that, besides the fact that these writings are in themselves proof, consider how a Person like Him, Who is unschooled, now without consulting a book or referring to any text, is able to lift the pen and reveal such mighty verses. Is this not a proof? Moreover, your own self has written, and the esteemed mother of Hájí 'Abdu'l-Husayn wrote the same, that through ascetic practices, He [the Báb] has attained spiritual advancement. Should one be the recipient of divine favors and be blessed to receive such [heavenly] grace, surely God will protect Him from satanic delusions. His honored person [the Báb] has written in many places, "If anyone is certain in his own ways and denies My Cause, let him come forth and engage Me in *mubáhilih*."¹⁷ I take refuge in God! How could One Who is so self-assured, be not of truth? If you claim that He suffers from mental disturbance, I do not share your assess-

17. *Mubáhilih* is the practice of opponents challenging one another to mutual cursing, expecting the truthful one to be safe and the wicked to receive divine chastisement. For example, while in Edirne, Bahá'u'lláh invited Mírzá Yahyá, His rebellious half-brother, to a public *mubáhilih*, but Yahyá did not appear.

ment, as how could it be that a person is unlettered while he is sane, but then when he is mentally disturbed he becomes so erudite?

In short, that which must have been said has been repeatedly said. You know best how to act. Convey my greetings to our mother and our sister and kindly tell them of my condition. For me, no doubt remains. I have no proof, but my conscience directs me to see and perceive that this Cause is the truth. What they [my mother and my sister] wish to believe is up to them. Further, they should be aware that when the honored Hájí [the Báb] arrives in the city [of Shiraz], He will dismount and walk to the house alone. Therefore, it is best not to inform the people, so that He may be left to Himself. Until now it had been incumbent upon Him to obey the wishes [of the Báb's grandmother and mother], but now it is the opposite, and they must strive to obey

His every command. Under no circumstance should they disobey Him.

I have no other matter to present to you. I have written a letter to Hájí 'Abdu'l-Husayn, which you will also see, and perchance some things said here will be repeated there as well. He requested the appearance of some extraordinary event, such as revealing people's inner thoughts. Sanctified be God! Repeatedly we have beheld that people [fortune tellers], for a couple of small coins, reveal other people's thoughts, and that was nothing but satanic deeds. But if one's heart does not attain certitude by [His] knowledge and erudition, of what use is conveying such stories?¹⁸

From *Khál-i Akbar's* letter to his younger brother, *Khál-i A'zam*, it is clear that the Báb was deeply affected by the lukewarm reception to His call. Although He had initially vowed to remain silent for five years and to cease revealing verses, He later reversed this decision while in Shiraz and continued to reveal many treatises, prayers, homilies, and books. It can readily be inferred that *Khál-i Akbar* counted himself among the Báb's followers and was urging his younger brother to embrace the new Message.¹⁹

However, one must ponder what *Khál-i Akbar* understood about the Báb's claim and station in May 1845. The uncles of the Báb were able to occupy their professions as merchants by receiving the type of education—accounting and economics—and training readily available to the business class in Iran in the middle of the nineteenth century. Their education also exposed them to widely known poetic and literary works, particularly Hafez and Sadi. *Khál-i Akbar* himself was educated for a few years at the same school in the *Masjid-i Naw* (the New Mosque) that, years later, the Báb would attend. Although he had been given a rudimentary religious education (which consisted of reading the Koran and a general history of Islam and its

18. The original of this letter, in *Khál-i Akbar's* hand, is in the private library of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, while a typed version appears in Faizi, *Khándán-i Afnán* 27–31. The first part of the letter, which has not been translated, deals with the family commercial business. Amanat, in his *Resurrection and Renewal* 355, n. 127, questions the attribution of this letter to *Khál-i Akbar*, suggesting that it was penned by his brother, *Khál-i A'zam*. However, not only the original text of the letter clearly indicates that *Khál-i Akbar* authored it, but the narrative of his son, Vakílu'd-Dawlih, quoted later in this study, confirms that *Khál-i Akbar* was, indeed, in Bushire at this time.

19. It seems likely that this petition paved the way, some days later, for *Khál-i A'zam* to listen to Quddús and enabled him to accept, unreservedly, the revelation of the Báb (see Nabil-i A'zam [Muhammad-i Zarándí], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. Shoghi Effendi [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1921] 143). *Khál-i A'zam* had been deeply impressed by the devotion of his nephew and through his contacts with the Shaykhi community was already expecting the Manifestation of the Promised One.

basic jurisprudence), Khál-i Akbar did not receive the rigorous seminarian education that many early Bábí converts had mastered through devoting years to acquiring incredibly detailed learning. While it is not clear, by the time Khál-i Akbar wrote the letters above, whether he had seen any of the writings of the Báb, such as the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* and the Commentary on the Surih of the Cow (which are filled with subtle and complex allusions to the Báb's prophetic mission and employ very sophisticated symbolism), in all probability, he would have been unable to discern their significance. One might assert that the central claim of the Báb—to *Qá'imíyyat* (Messiah-hood) and Prophethood—had remained, therefore, essentially inaccessible to Khál-i Akbar. This assertion is further supported by two important documents written by Khál-i Akbar's son, which clearly show that those who knew about the Báb's claim generally thought Him to be simply a saintly figure, perhaps the gate to the Hidden Imam, but no more. This misunderstanding stemmed from the inaccessibility of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, in which the Báb advances a claim to be a Manifestation of God but in language decipherable only to those with substantial training and Shaykhi background. While the possibility remains that the Báb may have apprised His uncle of His mission orally, no such evidence is known. His instructing Quddús to speak to Khál-i Akbar about His mission indicates

that He did not wish to introduce it to His family directly.

*Two Documents Written by
Khál-i Akbar's Son*

Khál-i Akbar's eldest son, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí, known as *Vakilu'd-Dawlih* (the trustee of the government), was born in 1830 and by 1845 had joined his father's trading business in Bushire, occupying the former office of the Báb.²⁰ He has written several important narratives, the first of which to be considered here was composed in July 1906:

In J-2 [Jamádíy'th-Thání, a lunar month] A.H. 1324 [July 1906 C.E.]²¹

The honored and revered Áqá Mírzá 'Alí-Akbar-i Rafsanjání, who is numbered among the foremost teachers of the Cause, has come to 'Ishqábád accompanied by Áqá Mírzá Tarázu'lláh Qazvíní, the son of the illustrious Samandar, for the purpose of the Faith's propagation. The former has asked that I write for him what I recall of the dawning of the Manifestation of the Báb and those kinsmen who have been named the Afnán by the Ancient Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh]. Although because of the passage of time, diminished memory, and advanced age, not all the details are recalled; however, to fulfill his wish, the following is noted:

What this servant remembers of the decreed events is that before His declaration, the deeds, manners, and associations of His Holiness [the Báb] differed from those of other people. In the proximity of Shiraz's Masjid-i Naw, Masjid-i Fath [the Victory Mosque] and the Jewish neighborhood, His exalted mother, who was an aunt to this servant [Vakilu'd-Dawlih], resided in the blessed house on the Shamshígarhá Street, situated between Masjid-i Naw, near the Fath Mosque and the Jewish quarter of Shiraz—a house that is now the celestial *Kaaba* [Point of Adoration] of the Supreme Concourse.²² Her

20. Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí was the architect of the Bahá'í House of Worship in 'Ishqábád.

21. A.H. is the abbreviation for *anno Hegirae* (in the year of [Muhammad's] Hegira); C.E. (of the common era) is the alternative designation equivalent to A.D. (*anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord).

22. In the Tablet of Carmel, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the Shrine of the Báb as "the celestial Kaaba." (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Jus-

sole offspring was that Sanctified Effulgence [the Báb], Whose father, Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-Riḍá, had passed away during His childhood.

This servant was a mere child when I attained His blessed presence, and a little

tice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al., 1st ps ed. [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988] 4). Many Bahá'í writers have adopted the same phrase to refer to the House of the Báb in Shiraz. It should be further noted that in Islam the Kaaba is the building in the court of the great Mosque in Mecca containing the sacred black stone and is the object of Islamic pilgrimage and the point toward which Muslims turn during their daily prayers. The Bábís turned toward the House of the Báb in Shiraz as their Kaaba and the focal point of their prayers.

23. Commonly known as *al-Ṣahífat al-Kalimát as-Sajjádiyya*, it is the collection of supplications of the Fourth Shia Imam, 'Alí ibn Ḥusayn, surnamed Zaynu'l-'Ábidín, who is also known as Sayyid-i as-Sájidín—hence, the title of the book. The collection was translated into English by William C. Chittick and published under the title of *The Psalms of Islam*. In his introduction the translator notes that “al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyya is the oldest prayer manual in Islamic sources and one of the most seminal works of Islamic spirituality of the early period. . . . Shi'ite tradition considers the Sahifa a book worthy of the utmost veneration, ranking it behind only the Qur'an and 'Alí's Nahj al-balagha. . . . The Sahifa has been called by various honorifics, such as 'Sister of the Qur'an', 'Gospel of the Folk of the House', and 'Psalms of the Household of Muhammad.' . . . According to Shi'ite tradition, Zayn al-'Abidin had collected his supplications and taught them to his children, especially [the fifth Imam] Muhammad-Baqir and Zayd. In later times the text became widely disseminated among Shi'ites of all persuasions. The specialists in the science of *hadith* maintain that the text is *mutawatir*; in other words, it was generally known from earliest times and has been handed down by numerous chains of transmission, while its authenticity has never been questioned.” This collection contains fifty-four supplications, which make up the main body of the text, and the additional supplications, which make up the fourteen addenda (including the prayers for the days of the week) and the fifteen *munájját* or “whispered prayers.”

24. Shaykh Ḥasan is the brother of Shaykh Ḥusayn-i 'Uṣfúrí, the great-grandfather of Vahíd-i Dárábí. The Báb mentions Shaykh Ḥasan in chapter 27 of His *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*.

of that time I recall, though other details have been forgotten. I remember that on Sundays I would go into the presence of my exalted aunt. It was in A.H. 1260 [1844 C.E.], but I cannot be certain which month, that one morning I attained the presence of the Báb. He was occupied with writing prayers. Melon was placed before Him, and with the tip of a knife, He graciously offered me a piece. I ate it. He handed me a page of a prayer, and, after I had read it, He asked, “What manner of supplication do you perceive this to be?” I was familiar with the *Ṣahífiḥ-yi Sajjádiyyih*, recited each day of the week and, therefore, replied, “It is similar to the prayer of *Ṣahífiḥ*.”²³

I remember that at that time the majority of mystics and ascetics of Shiraz were anticipating the nearness of the Manifestation (*Zuhúr*). However, He had appeared but was concealed from all, except from the believers and devotees from the Shaykhi faction, who upon the passing of the late Ḥájí Sayyid Kázim had dispersed in search of Him. It was rumored that a certain Person had appeared, claiming to be the representative of the imam (*náyib-i imam*), and His command forbidding the use of water pipes was circulating among the populace. This servant asked Him [the Báb], “Is this true?” He replied, “Yes, it is indeed so, and the use of water pipes is forbidden.”

A few days later, He departed for Mecca and left us. My late father was in Bushire. In Bushire the Báb had ordered the teaching of Shaykh Ḥasan of the 'Uṣfúrí family, the *Imam Jum'ih* [chief imam] of that city. Shaykh Ḥasan had neither accepted nor rejected His claim.²⁴

He boarded a sail boat, revealed a sermon, and then departed. In Muscat He won over the allegiance of that city's imam and revealed homilies.

Some two months after His departure,

this servant left Shiraz for Bushire as well and was living with my late father when the Báb returned from Mecca. In Shiraz news about Him was spreading exceedingly fast, but in accordance with His instructions His blessed name was not known. The muezzin [the one who sounds the Muslim call to prayer] who ranked as His believers, were instructed to change the *adhán* formula [Muslim call to prayer] to "I testify that 'Alí [the Báb] is a servant of *Baqíyyatu'lláh* [the Remnant of God; Bahá'u'lláh], as recorded in all the preserved Books."²⁵ Because of this, the ulama had issued a *fatwá* [legal ruling] declaring the author of this command an infidel and had beaten and expelled from the city the prayer leaders—namely, the late Mullah Muḥammad-Šádiq [Khurásání] and Mullah Muḥammad-'Alí [Quddús], may my spirit be a sacrifice unto them both.

When the news of His [the Báb's] return from Mecca reached Shiraz, the governor sent ten soldiers to arrest His Holiness. The period of His stay in Bushire was ten or twelve days, and my late father and this servant would regularly attain His presence. One afternoon He said to my father, "Arrange for a mount, as I must journey [to Shiraz]." My father pleaded with Him to stay longer, but it was to no avail. My late father arranged for a mount, and He left. En route from Burázján He had arrived at [the village of] Dálakí, where the soldiers charged with His arrest had passed Him by. His Holiness sent His ser-

vant, Mubárák, to their chief, and he was brought before the Báb, Who asked him, "Why are you going to Bushire? State your purpose so that your troubles may be lessened." He had stated their charge and was told, "The Person that you seek is none other than I." Together they had left for Shiraz, and were I to tell of the events of the city, it would require a mighty book, which is beyond the abilities of this servant.²⁶

Several important points in Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí's recollections should be emphasized:

1. Abrogation of the use of water pipe: Within the Shiite system of jurisprudence, it is solely the *mujtahid* [Islamic legal scholar] who is authorized to pronounce on matters of personal law, and all others must defer to him. Clearly, the Báb was not certified as a mujtahid. Therefore, the fact that He had forbidden the use of such a commonly practiced habit as the water pipe illustrates that He had assumed the right of law-giving. In an important way this pronouncement was tantamount to innovation in matters of Islamic jurisprudence, signaling the abrogation of Shiite law.

2. The station of the Báb and how it was understood by his contemporaries: Even at the time of the Báb's explicit claim to be a Manifestation of God in such early writings as the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, such statements could initially be deciphered only by those sufficiently trained. It is of interest that Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí reports that the Báb was known at that time as the Representative of the Imam. This suggests that the Báb had not yet chosen to divulge completely the full implications of His station.

3. The presence of *Khál-i Akbar* in Bushire when the Báb returned from pilgrimage: Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí's recollections, written in 1906, clearly confirm that *Khál-i Akbar* was in Bushire when the Báb returned from pilgrimage, providing further support to the

25. Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 144, gives the verse of the *Khasá'il-i Sab'ih* as, "I bear witness that He whose name is 'Alí qabl-i Muḥammad [Alí before Muḥammad; the Báb] is the servant of *Baqíyyatu'lláh* [the Remnant of God; Bahá'u'lláh]." Almost without exception, all the Báb's writings are dedicated to extolling the station of Bahá'u'lláh; this verse is one such example.

26. A typed version of this passage appears in Faizi, *Khándán-i Afán* 113-17.

notion that Khál-i Akbar's second letter was written from that city.

The following account by Khál-i Akbar's son was written some time after the one quoted above, possibly in 1906, and provides further insight into the early days of the Báb and the reaction of Khál-i Akbar to the events of that period:

1-5-2²⁷

After confessing my inability to thank the Almighty for His ever-present favors, the illustrious Mírzá 'Alí-Akbar [Rafsanjání] has recently come to 'Ishqábád to propagate and spread the Cause of God and has asked this feeble servant to record all that is recalled of the days of the Primal Point and to present the same to him. Although due to infirmity and being seventy-nine years of age, my memory is no longer precise, but in order to have obeyed his wish, I pen the following brief account.

I remember that in the years [A.H.] 1259 until [12]60 [1843-44 C.E.] many ascetics and holy men were anticipating the Manifestation (*Zubúr*). [For example,] an unknown person had written on the pulpit of the Masjid-i Jámí' before the year 60 that within three years the *Qá'im* [He Who Shall Arise; the title designating the Promised One of Islam] would appear. Also, my esteemed uncle, the martyred Hájí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí, who attained the supreme station of martyrdom in Tehran, quit his trading some four years before the advent of the year 60 and secluded himself, expecting the Manifestation.²⁸ Upon the appearance [of the Báb], he [my uncle] readily accepted, but I was in Bushire and did not witness the great sufferings that

were inflicted upon him by the governor-general of Fárs.

In the year 60, it was broadcast throughout Shiraz that a beloved Sayyid had advanced the claim to be the Representative of the [Hidden] *Qá'im* (*Náyib-i Qá'im*). However, His blessed name was not known.

I remember that on Sundays I would attain the presence of my illustrious aunt, the mother of His Holiness [the Báb]. During such visits I gained admittance unto His presence as well. One Sunday during the month of Rajab, or perhaps it was *Sha'bán* [July or August 1844 C.E.] I attained such blessing, and He was sitting on the terrace of the House. After I received permission to sit, I noticed that melon was being served. With the tip of a knife, He offered me a piece. The Báb was occupied with writing certain verses and prayers. He showed me a page upon which a prayer for the days of the week was revealed and instructed me to read it. After I had recited that piece, He asked, "What manner of prayer do you perceive this to be?" I replied, "It is similar to the *Šahífí-yi Sajjádíyyih*," a prayer that was well known to me.

It was rumored that the Representative of the Imam (*Náyib-i Imám*) had forbidden the use of water pipes. Therefore, I asked whether, indeed, this was true.

He replied, "Yes, that is correct."

That week, or perhaps the next, He departed for Mecca and left by way of Bushire. Two or three months later, in accordance with the wishes of my father (who was in Bushire), I, too, left for that city. While in Bushire we heard that Shiraz was filled with commotion as the muezzins of two disciples of the late Hájí Sayyid Kázim [Rashtí] who were the Imam Jum'íhs had added this verse to the call for prayer: "I testify that 'Alí is the servant of *Baqíyatu'lláh* [the Remnant of God; Bahá'u'lláh] as has been sent down in every

27. The numbers 1-5-2 stand for the three letters A-H-B, which make up the word *Bahá* (lit., *glory*; the title of Bahá'u'lláh [the Glory of God]).

28. Afán family records clearly demonstrate that the second uncle of the Báb continued with his trading business well into 1845.

hidden Tablet." The divines of the city had heard of this incident and gathered to issue a ruling against these two Imám Jum'íhs—namely, the honored [Mullah Sádiq] Muqaddas and the honored Mullah Muḥammad-'Alí [Quddús]. These two esteemed personages were seized by the authorities and subjected to punishment, including burning of their beards and expulsion from the city.

The officials were eager to seize the Representative of the Imam [the Báb]. When He returned from Mecca, I was in Bushire. Day and night I would attain His august presence. All His time was devoted to revelation of verses and prayers. One night it was the opportune moment for me to beseech Him fervently and tearfully to pray on my behalf that I would have a good end. He responded, "Your end is good."

During this period in Bushire, my late mother observed two or three miracles from Him. During the days before His declaration, when He was engaged in trading in Bushire, He would frequently come to the home of my late father and would shower him with His favors.

His demeanor was very different from that of others. I do not recall Him smiling. I do not recall His exact utterances so that I could record them. In one of His tablets it is revealed: "All things will perish, except His countenance." He also stated, "Our kinsmen have been reckoned among the 'Letters of the Exalted.'"²⁹ But not because they were deserving, nay, because of Our love for them." In the course of the next Manifestation, this

matter was asked of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] presence. He responded, "By 'Afnán,' it is meant the kinsmen of the Primal Point, may the spirit of all be a sacrifice unto Him."³⁰

Repressive Actions Following the Declaration of the Báb

WHEN Khál-i Akbar returned from Bushire to Shiraz in 1846, he fell under the cloud of suspicion that had been cast over the members of the Báb's family. In fact, some time before his return and shortly after the Báb's departure for Isfahan in 1846, the family felt the threat of the vengeful governor and was compelled to destroy a large quantity of the Báb's writings. Mírzá Ḥabíb Afnán's reports on this matter are based on stories told to him by an eyewitness—Zahrá Bagum, the Báb's sister-in-law:

He [Husayn Khán, the governor of Fárs] further issued a command that henceforth should any piece of paper be found in that city bearing the Báb's handwriting or a verse revealed by Him, the members of that household would be punished by having their home demolished. Being a thoroughly ill-tempered person, he rounded up all the believers and devotees of His Holiness and, after administering severe beatings with sticks and causing them much injury, he extracted from the victims whatever sum they could muster. . . .

After the governor's order was broadcast in the city, whoever had received such writings [revealed by the Báb] would bring them in bundles and deposit the packs in a long vestibule in the house of Ḥájí Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim. On one side of the courtyard all such writings were stacked high, all penned on large exquisite cashmere papers in the hand of His Holiness. Were even a page of those precious writings available today, it would surely be worth an immense fortune. Those papers all contained innumerable commentaries,

29. The original speaks of "*hurúf-i vajh*," which literally means "the Letters turned to Him," or "the Letters exalted by Him."

30. This passage and the typed text appear in Faizi, *Khándán-i Afnán* 110-13.

prayers, homilies, and learned scientific treatises on diverse themes. The illustrious uncle of the Báb³¹ was asked in what manner we were to dispose of those writings, and he replied, "These are all revelations from God and as such cannot be treated disrespectfully. Wash the papers, and throw the water in the well of the courtyard."

We placed four large wash tubs on the ground of the courtyard, and the four of us—that is, the mother [of the Báb];³² *Khadíjih Bagum* [the wife of the Báb]; the wife of *Hájí Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim*;³³ and I began to place stacks of these papers in the tubs and wash them much as clothes are washed by hands. Page by page, the ink was washed away from all the sheets, and the wash water thrown down the well.³⁴

Khál-i Akbar's Visit with Bahá'u'lláh

THE repressive environment following the Báb's declaration became more restrictive and arduous with the passage of time. The real difficulty must have been, however, in trying to determine the exact nature of the Báb's newly founded religion. It is likely that the Báb's uncle was never fully apprised of the exact claims of the Báb, which included the abrogation of the Islamic precepts and a new mission from God. Or, if he heard about the Báb's claims, the full implication of the evidence remained, by virtue of his training, beyond his grasp. To understand the basis for this assertion one must consider a number of events.

With the martyrdom of the Báb and the systematic persecution of the Bab's followers,

the family of the Báb and, indeed, the vast majority of the Bábí community was overcome with disillusion and disappointment. By the late 1850s only one member of the Báb's family, His widow, *Khadíjih Bagum*, remained firm in her convictions about the Bab's mission. She kindled the faith of her nephew, the young *Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i Núri'd-Dín*, who, in turn, taught his parents about the Báb's claim. Afterward, *Núri'd-Dín* began urging *Khál-i Akbar* to renew his commitment to the Bábí Faith by visiting *Bahá'u'lláh*, the most prominent Bábí, Who was in Baghdad educating the remnant of the Bábí community and winning new converts to the Cause. *Núri'd-Dín's* son, *Mírzá Habib-i Afnán*, reports the following recollections spoken by his father:

At the beginning, when I broached the subject with *Khál[-i Akbar]*, he would persistently refuse, and yet I would put forth more evidences and proofs [in support of the Báb's claim]. It proceeded in such wise for several meetings.

One day during our discussion, I was strenuously enumerating proofs, when, with amazement, *Khál* exclaimed, "*Áqá Mírzá Áqá*, are you saying that my nephew is the *Qá'im* of the house of Muhammad?"

"And what if He is?" I responded.

Thoroughly astounded, he said, "That would be most extraordinary."

To which I replied, "There is nothing strange about it!"

After this comment, he became most reflective. Considering his condition, I smiled.

He asked, "Why do you smile?"

At first I refused to answer and replied, "It might not be polite on my part, and, therefore, it is best for me not to say."

However, he insisted, "Do not be reticent. Say what you are thinking."

"Since you wish," I responded, "I will comment. The objection that you have raised is the very same one that *Abú-Lahab*

31. Presumably a reference to *Hájí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí*.

32. The text simply states *válidih* (mother); it is interpreted to be the mother of the Báb.

33. Her name was *Sultán Bagum*; she was from *Jahrum*.

34. *Mírzá Habib Afnán*, *Tárikh-i Amry-i Fárs va Shíráz* 113-15.

raised of old.³⁵ He, too, exclaimed, 'Is it possible for my nephew to be the Messenger of God?' Yet it was. Therefore, you must also exert yourself and investigate this matter. Know, assuredly, that this Sun has risen from your house, and this Light has become manifest in your family. You should be proud! Do not be surprised, and do not separate yourself therefrom. The Almighty is well able to have appointed your nephew as the Qá'im of the house of Muhammad. 'The Hand of God is free.'

Then the honored uncle responded, "The light of mine eye! What an irrefutable answer! There is no further room for objection. What am I to do now?"

I said to him, "First, it is obligatory upon you to go on pilgrimage to the *Atabát* [Shiite shrines in present-day Iraq] and there to visit your exalted sister—namely, the mother of the Báb—just as she, after the news of the martyrdom, proceeded to that land. Second, *Íshán* [Bahá'u'lláh] now resides in Baghdad,³⁶ and it behooves you to journey there for a few days and to inquire of your perplexities. You must endeavor to place your reliance in God. I hope that the veils will be lifted and certitude will be attained. 'Nothing shall be

reckoned to a man but that for which he hath made efforts.'³⁷

After hearing these remarks, he responded, "Your words have penetrated my heart. I will do as you say."³⁸

He wrote his [youngest] brother, Hájí Mírzá Hasan-'Alí, who was then a merchant in Yazd, of his intention to go to the 'Atabát and visit their sister and invited him to come to Shiraz so they might journey together.³⁹ On seeing this letter, the honored Hájí Mírzá Hasan-'Alí wrote, "I stand ready to join you on this journey. Kindly remain in Shiraz until my arrival, and from there we will travel to the 'Atabát."

Therefore, *Khál-i Akbar* began to prepare for the journey and awaited the arrival of his brother. A month later Hájí Mírzá Hasan-'Alí arrived in Shiraz, and together they set out for Bushire and the 'Atabát. En route Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muhammad [*Khál-i Akbar*] did not divulge the true object of this expedition and waited until they arrived at the Abode of Peace [Baghdad] when he informed his brother, "The principal purpose of this journey was to make a religious inquiry of capital importance, and only secondarily did I wish to visit our sister in the 'Atabát. With your consent, we will tarry for a while in Baghdad and meet with His Holiness [Bahá'u'lláh], and after completing our investigation we will then proceed to the 'Atabát." Upon hearing these words, Hájí Mírzá Hasan-'Alí was moved with great indignation and, notwithstanding his brother's seniority, spoke harshly: "I will not stay for one moment and have no wish to hear of such discussions." That very day, true to his word, he departed from Baghdad.

Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muhammad remained behind and tried to meet with Hájí Sayyid Javád-i Karbilá'í [a friend and business associate of the Báb's uncles]. Upon their encounter, he informed the latter, "The

35. An uncle of Muhammad who rejected and opposed His mission and participated in several armed battles against the Prophet. See the Koran, sura 111.

36. *Íshán*, a formal pronoun meaning "They," is a term of respect used for an exalted personage. The Bábís and the Bahá'ís used it, as a precaution, to avoid mentioning Bahá'u'lláh's name.

37. The Koran, the Star (*an-Najm*), 53:39.

38. A slightly different translation of the above four paragraphs appears in H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh with Some Historical Background* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) 220–21.

39. Hájí Mírzá Hasan-'Alí, the youngest of the three maternal uncles of the Báb, was known as *Khál-i Asghar* (the junior uncle). He resided in Yazd most of his life. In the late-1860s he became a believer in the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

purpose of my journey to Baghdad is to meet with His Holiness and make certain spiritual inquiries of Him. As you [regularly] attain His presence, kindly inform Him [of my request] and ask on my behalf for an appointment that I may gain the blessing of His presence." In the light of their long friendship and association, Hájí Sayyid Javád was deeply moved with Khál-i Akbar's stated purpose and expressed his profound joy and felicitation over this matter.

Thereupon, Áqá Sayyid Javád attained the presence of the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] and stated, "The honored uncle of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad, has come from Shiraz to Baghdad and wishes to gain the bliss of attendance. May permission be granted?" Out of divine favor, Bahá'u'lláh expressed His joy and fixed the hour for such a meeting.

At the appointed time, Khál-i Akbar together with Hájí Sayyid Javád attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, at which time he [Khál-i Akbar] expressed some of his understanding surrounding the issue of the appearance of the Qá'im, prophecies associated with this event, and certain other matters. In response Bahá'u'lláh addressed some of these difficulties, but then, as a grace upon all, the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] said, "Commit to paper all that you have in mind about such propositions so that sufficient response may be written as well." On hearing this, the uncle

of the Báb [Khál-i Akbar] was exceedingly happy and that night wrote in detail all the complex questions he had in mind regarding the appearance of the promised Qá'im and the proofs associated with such a Manifestation and sent forth these queries into the presence of the Blessed Perfection.⁴⁰

The actual sheets of paper on which Khál-i Akbar wrote the questions that he presented to Bahá'u'lláh were found by Abu'l-Qasim Afnán, when he organized and classified the Afnán family papers in the 1950s and 1960s. He gave a facsimile of the document to Muhammad-Ali Faizi, who published it in *Khándán-i Afnán*.⁴¹ The following is a translation of Khál-i Akbar's questions, which occasioned Bahá'u'lláh's revealing the Kitáb-i Íqán:

One: What previously was believed is that the promised resurrection will take place in another world. The raising of the dead, the Bridge, the reckoning of the deeds of all creatures, and the reward or punishment of those deeds will take place in that world.⁴² However, if, [as the Bábís claim], it is all in this world, and it has taken place, and, moreover, the days of the advent of every Manifestation of the Truth constitute the very Day of Resurrection for the period preceding it, in this new Revelation there has been no punishment for man's deeds. Nay, the insurgence and corruption of the people of tyranny and oppression have increased. If the real meaning of reward and punishment is nearness or remoteness from the Divine Court [of God], this would be the same, regardless of which world it occurs in. The People of Truth [believers] in this world, since they exist in God's good pleasure, are in a state of fortune; but they are outwardly caught in the grip of the people of oppression [the ungodly] and are persecuted by them. The people of oppression, although they are tormented by being far

40. Mírzá Ḥabíb-i Afnán, *Tárikh-i Amry-i Fárs va Shíráz*, ms. 157-64. The remarks represent what Núrí'd-Dín recalled of his own comments.

41. See Faizi, *Khándán-i Afnán* unnumbered page after 41.

42. The Shiite orthodoxy holds that on the day of Resurrection people will pass over a bridge of judgment, which is thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword. The faithless will fall into hell, and the righteous will pass safely over the bridge to the gate of heaven.

from the threshold of God, are outwardly in a state of comfort and by reason of their ignorance are unaware of that torment. If the requital for people's deeds and the promised reward and punishment be as described above, and there be no other world than this one, where will the oppressed seek vengeance from the one who oppressed him and where will the people of punishment receive their justice? This is none but denial of the promised resurrection. I have not fathomed this subject fully, yet it is among the most important of matters to understand.

Two: From the inception of Islam until now it has been a belief of all the followers of the Shiite creed—a matter that no one has ever denied or even doubted, and concerning which traditions,⁴³ prayers, and tablets of visitation have been revealed by the imams—that the Twelfth Imam was born from the womb of His glorious mother and that He was outwardly alive in this world and shall remain alive in it until He reappears. This is something that cannot be denied. Yet what we have now witnessed does not conform to this. I seek elucidation of this claim so that I may, God willing, attain complete certainty, nay the essence of certitude.

Three: The appearance of this new Cause is not in conformity or agreement with what has been understood from the accounts and traditions in the past nor with what all men have believed. We cannot

reject all traditions of the past nor interpret away what the imams have said, nor will men's hearts believe in such a thing. The manner and custom of the sanctified imams is to guide and give directions to men. To interpret their words in such a way as to say they did not intend the outward meaning is without foundation, for it will not prove the cause of men's guidance; rather, it will cause them bewilderment. In some cases a tradition has come down that is not to be taken literally; but to interpret all the traditions other than by their outward meaning is in contradiction to the way in which the imams guided humankind. I would ask You to favor me with a clear explanation of this topic in such a manner that it will create certainty in men's hearts and so that no one will be able to open up a path of doubt.

Four: According to those traditions that have come down to us from the sanctified imams concerning the time of the appearance of the Qá'im, such as: "An enemy will raise an army in Syria and will battle Him at a place whose name They [the imams] have specified as being between Syria and Mecca"; "The ground shall be divided in two, and the army of eight hundred thousand shall disappear in the ground, except for two men, who shall remain behind"; "They shall go to the army of the Qá'im and give him tidings"; "and that He [the Qá'im] shall rule and shall make Kúfa His capital"; "The size of His army shall be so great that they will demolish the mosque of Kúfa and shall build a new one with one thousand doors"; etc. There are many such accounts in the reliable books of traditions. Yet not one of these things has happened. I beseech You to provide a full explanation of this matter that it may be a cause of certainty for my heart, and, God willing, lead me to perfect faith.⁴⁴

43. *Hadiths*, or traditions, refer to the utterances of Muhammad or the imams that have been transmitted to the posterity. The science of hadiths is concerned with the chain of transmission of these sayings and their accuracy.

44. A summary translation of Khál-i Akbar's questions was published in H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh* 164–65. Denis MacEoin first attempted a full translation of the questions on the H-Bahai Internet discussion group. My present translation has benefited from MacEoin's earlier effort.

Bahá'u'lláh describes Khál-i Akbar's visit in a tablet dated 27 Muḥarram A.H. 1306 [3 October 1888 C.E.], revealed in honor of Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd-i Shírází, a prominent Bahá'í in Fárs:

The Kitáb-i Íqán was revealed in Iraq especially for the honored Afnán, the illustrious Khál-i Akbar, upon him rest all My glory. The details are so: After he had attained the 'Atabat and completed his pilgrimage, he arrived in Baghdad. The exalted Hájí Sayyid Javád, upon him be the Glory of God, came into Our presence and said, "Two of the uncles of the Báb, may the spirit of all be a sacrifice unto Him, at present have arrived in this city and soon will depart for Shiraz."

We inquired, "Have you spoken with them about this Cause?"

He responded negatively.

Upon hearing this response, We were saddened and said unto him, "Go and convey the greetings of this Wronged One to them and say further, "Though We have not previously cherished meeting with others, We do desire meeting with you."

The illustrious Javád completed the entrusted mission and that afternoon returned forthwith with the celebrated Khál-i Akbar, who was able to attain Our presence. We said unto him, "It is hard for this Wronged One to see that you and the other members of the Afnán family have remained deprived of the sacred Tree that has appeared and flourished amongst you."

He responded, "There are certain con-

siderations that have prevented us from such acceptance."

We replied: "What are those things that have caused you to hold back from the Exalted Horizon and the recognition of the Sacred Tree? Present your questions."

Another day he [Khál-i Akbar] returned, and, single and alone We met with him in the inner quarters of the house, and at that time he spoke those questions that had prevented his recognition.

In Our presence answers [the Kitáb-i Íqán] were revealed from the heaven of the Divine Will. That beloved and other friends of course know such details.

On another day he came into Our presence and said, "Ill-fated is the one who would peruse this Book, and yet desist in his belief."⁴⁵

Fortunately, Khál-i Akbar's letter, dated 17 January 1861, to his son, Vakílu'd-Dawlih, and written only a few days after Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Kitáb-i Íqán, has survived. Based on the letter's date, it is possible to place the time of the revelation of the Kitáb-i Íqán in early January 1861:

O the best of the Protectors!

In the city of Yazd, Saráy-i Khán, please deliver this letter to my esteemed son, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, the Shirazi merchant, may he ever be prosperous!⁴⁶

The loving light of mine eye, the one who is more precious to me than my soul [Khál-i Akbar's son], may God preserve you! I hope that you continue to live under the care of Almighty God and to be protected from all ills and wickedness and succeed in attaining your desired goals. If you wonder over our state, praised be God and His grace, on the night of the first of Rajab [12 January 1861] we attained the threshold of the Shrines of the twin imams at Kázimayn, upon them be a thousand, thousand salutations and blessings. Your place was, indeed, empty. On your behalf we offered pilgrimage and prayers. God

45. This is a provisional translation made from the text in Núri'd-Dín's collection of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets, pp. 97-98. Faizi, *Khándaq-i Afnán*, 35-37, quotes a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh revealed in honor of the same Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd-i Shírází that closely correlates with the first half of the above quoted tablet but differs drastically in the second half. It is not known to the present writer why these two texts differ so markedly.

46. Saráy-i Khán was the business district for the major merchants of Yazd.

willing, the day after next—that is, on the seventh of the month—we will depart this location.

We had a pleasant journey en route, and snow did not come while we were traveling, except for one night, and it rained for two days. However, we stopped at an inn, and the cold was not intolerable and caused no harm. Praised be God. I do not have much to write. I attained unto the presence of His Holiness *Bahá* [Bahá'u'lláh], upon Him be God's peace. Your place was, indeed, empty. He showered us with utmost affection and kindness and asked that we stay for the night, and we remained in His presence. The evident truth is that to be deprived of the blessing of His presence is a mighty and evident loss. May God bestow His grace upon me so that I would everlastingly attain unto the blessing of His presence.

Kindly convey our greetings to the exalted Hájí Muhammad-Ibráhím;⁴⁷ his place is, indeed, empty. Also convey our best wishes to all the honored friends. Peace be upon you!

5 Rajab A.H. 1277 [17 January 1861 C.E.]⁴⁸

The *Kitáb-i Íqán*, which Bahá'u'lláh revealed in the span of two days and nights, was initially known as the *Risálih-yi Khálawíyyih* [the Treatise for the Uncle]. Later

Bahá'u'lláh changed the title to the *Kitáb-i Íqán*, or the Book of Certitude. Shoghi Effendi, in his history of the first one hundred years of the Bahá'í Faith, describes Bahá'u'lláh's work as follows: "A model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence, this Book, setting forth in outline the Grand Redemptive Scheme of God, occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahá'í literature, except the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book." The copy of the *Íqán* given to *Khál-i Akbar* was in the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh. In a few margins Bahá'u'lláh had added comments or made alterations. The Afnán family presented that copy to Shoghi Effendi; it now on display at the Bahá'í International Archives Building in Haifa, Israel.⁴⁹

In weaving together several strands, it seems reasonable to conclude that the purpose of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* was not to convince *Khál-i Akbar* that the Báb was the originator of a "Cause," for *Khál-i Akbar* had already accepted that He was the author of divinely inspired tablets, treatises, and homilies. Rather, its goal was to disclose to the Báb's uncle the full station of the young Prophet, thereby effecting *Khál-i Akbar*'s complete conversion in which he would recognize the same power and majesty that was manifested by all the Prophets of old.

After meeting Bahá'u'lláh, *Khál-i Akbar* proceeded to the 'Atabát and, after having met with his sister, returned to Shiraz. There the Bábís came to meet him and to inquire about what had transpired in Baghdad. Having met with Núri'd-Dín, a nephew of the Báb, *Khál-i Akbar* asked him also to enlighten his sons about the true station of the Báb as an independent Manifestation of God. It continued in the same manner for several years, and the Bábí community of Shiraz began to flourish once again.

47. A famous and untiring teacher titled *Muballigh* (teacher) by Bahá'u'lláh. At a later time, mostly through Muballigh's efforts, the Afnáns of Yazd became Bahá'ís.

48. A copy of the original manuscript was published in Faizi, *Khandán-i Afnán* 42–43.

49. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, intro. George Townshend, new ed. (Wilmette, Ill., Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) 138–39. See also Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory* 165; Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi: Recollections* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973) 149–50; and Faizi, *Khandán-i Afnán* 49–56 for a discussion of the fate of the original copy of the Book of Certitude.

Khál-i Akbar and the Bahá'í Faith

EVENTUALLY, in the fall of 1866, Nabíl-i A'zam, an itinerant teacher of the Faith, was instructed to proclaim the new Cause of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the length and breadth of Iran. He came from Baghdad by way of Ardistan to Shiraz and established his residence in the house of Núrí'd-Dín. Before anything else, as bidden by Bahá'u'lláh, Nabíl made a pilgrimage to the House of the Báb. Afterward, the Bábís were informed and with great enthusiasm gathered around Nabíl. At first he spoke with great circumspection. Mírzá Ḥabíb Afnán, a son of Núrí'd-Dín and a person knowledgeable about the early days of the Bahá'í Faith in Shiraz, reports the following recollection of Núrí'd-Dín:

One morning, Nabíl said to me, "Instruct all the believers to gather at a suitable location and to bring with them whatever writings they possess. You bring all the writings in your possession as well, as I wish to divide them into separate groups. I have a particular charge that I must announce and desire to leave Shiraz shortly as I must travel to other areas."

Complying with Nabíl's request, I asked the friends to assemble in the home of Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím [a prominent believer in Shiraz] and emphasized especially their bringing with them all the writings and tablets in their possession. At the appointed hour the friends gathered, bearing the tablets and sacred writings. After partaking of tea, Nabíl gathered all the writings and read each with great care. All the papers were separated into three groups and set apart each from the others. Having divided all the writings, Nabíl announced, "The first group includes the tablets of the Exalted One [the Báb]. The second group includes the writings of 'Him

Whom God shall make manifest' [Bahá'u'lláh], the very Person Whose advent was promised by the Primal Point [the Báb] to the concourse of the Bayán and made the acceptance or rejection of all that He had revealed in the Bayán dependent upon His good pleasure. With great clarity the Báb said, 'O people of the Bayán! The appearance of Him Whom God shall manifest is well nigh. Suffer not that the Bayán and all therein may deprive thee from His Manifestation.' 'The Bayán is like a leaf before Him. Were He to accept it, it is of His grace. And were He to reject it, it is a sign of His justice.' In another passage the time of His appearance has been fixed with precision: 'In the year nine, all good will be realized.'⁵⁰ He has now proclaimed His Cause and invites all people and the followers of the Bayán to His divine recognition. Whosoever accepts Him is considered of those that dwell in paradise. And whosoever rejects Him is of the people of fire and through fire they shall perish. The third group consists of the polemical writings, which are unworthy of consideration."⁵¹ Nabíl then picked up the third group of papers and threw them into the stove where a fire was burning.

Upon such pronouncements, a tumult was precipitated among the friends. For example, greatly agitated, the honored *Khál-i Akbar*, Ḥájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad, protested vociferously, "What manner of scheme is this? What sort of talk is this? Do you take faith to be like a weed; you cut it in the daytime, and it grows again during the night?" He went on in the same vein.

It was then that I [intervened and] spoke calmly to *Khál[-i Akbar]*, stating, "Assuredly, we must investigate and determine the actual veracity of such a mighty claim as this [the fulfillment of the promise of the Bayán]. It surely must rest on reality as none except the True One [Bahá'u'lláh]

50. Arabic Bayán.

51. Nabíl may be referring to Azalí writings.

has the temerity to advance such an assertion. Consider the time when the Báb was in Shiraz and proclaimed His divine mission. Was He not the Truth, and was He not sent by the exalted God to guide humankind? How was it, then, that all people rejected Him, vast multitudes rose in opposition to Him, and you yourself denied Him until you investigated, determined the truth of His claim, and drank from the chalice of assurance? Further, you hastened unto the Abode of Peace and there met His Holiness Íshán [Bahá'u'lláh], and the sublime book of *Khálwíyyih* [the *Kitáb-i Íqán*] was revealed specifically in honor of your good self. While in that city did you meet any person [worthy of such august claim] other than Íshán [Bahá'u'lláh]? Of a certainty, He, alone, is the essence of Truth. 'Beyond Truth, there is naught except waywardness.'⁵²

After hearing such reasoning, the uncle of the Báb grew reflective and responded, "We must investigate this matter thoroughly as the question of such a claim is not a trifling matter."

In this manner the disputation among the believers subsided on that day, and the honored Nabíl was able to proceed toward Isfahan.

Afterward, the friends in Fárs, one and all, embraced the claim of Him Whom God will manifest—namely, the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh]—and became firm and steadfast in their allegiance unto Him.⁵³

One question remains: In addition to the family's claim as reported above, is there any

evidence from *Khál-i Akbar* himself to suggest that he actually believed in Bahá'u'lláh? And, if so, did he recognize Him as the one prophesied by the Báb? The answer can be found in the final will and testament of the uncle of the Báb:

In the Name of God, the Glorious, the Most Glorious.

These few words are written as my will in the middle of *Dhi'l-Qa'dih* A.H. 1291 [circa 24 December 1874 C.E.]

First, I testify to the oneness and singleness of God. He is supreme and sanctified from having a partner. I further testify that the exalted and hallowed Person [the Báb] Who declared Himself in A.H. 1260 [1844 C.E.] is, indeed, of truth and manifested the glory and ascendancy of the Almighty God. Whatsoever He decreed in His religion and all that He revealed of the divine spiritual stations are all manifest truth, and whosoever obeyed Him is among those that were saved, and those that opposed Him, indeed, rank as the ones who perished. Today the one true religion of God is that which His Holiness [the Báb] ordained. And further, today, the master of the Faith and the propagator of this luminous community is the exalted and elevated Bahá [Bahá'u'lláh], may my spirit and the spirit of the world be a sacrifice unto Him. His Manifestation is the same as the Báb's Manifestation. Obedience unto Him is obedience unto God, and opposing Him is opposing God.

Immersed in an ocean of sin, because of infirmities of self, this servant concealed his convictions from all, even from his children and kinsmen. But now I have committed them to paper so that after my passing they may become aware of their condition and strive to understand the matter. God willing, they too will be numbered among those who believe.

I ask those who may come upon these pages, whether my children or kinsmen,

52. A different translation of this paragraph and the three preceding it appear in Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís* 226–27.

53. As Nabíl explained Bahá'u'lláh's claim and station, *Khadíjih Bagum* listened behind a curtain separating the two rooms and immediately accepted Him as her Lord (see H. M. Balyuzi, *Khadíjih Bagum: The Wife of the Báb* [Oxford: George Ronald, 1981] 31).

or others, that, after my passing, in accordance with the laws of the Bayán, to prepare me for burial by washing [my body] and wrapping [it] in cloth, and, if I am in Shiraz, to bury my remains in the sacred shrine of . . . , which is the nearest cemetery to my house. And should those who claim to be Muslims but in truth have not benefitted from Islam keep you from burying me in a Muslim cemetery, it matters not; bury me anywhere possible, whether inside or outside the city. And should I pass somewhere other than in Shiraz, wherever I have expired, bury me at that spot.

Of earthly possessions, let it be known that I have none that would require disposition through a will. For some time now I have been meeting expenses through the support of my children. I do not possess anything myself. I owe the equivalent of a sum of 750 *túmáns* [discontinued unit of Iranian currency] that I cannot repay. However, my sons are aware of the details, and if they are able to meet this obligation to the creditor, I pray that the Lord of creation would recompense them through His benevolence. And if they are not able to do so, they know best.

At the time of writing of this page, God is aware that if I were to list the furniture of the house and other posses-

sions, it would add up to about 40 *túmáns*, nay, 30. This residence was paid in full at first, but gradually the equivalent of a third of its value has been spent on it [that house] by Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí.⁵⁴ Let this be known to all. Peace.

Some monies are owed me, but it remains beyond collection. The borrowers, much like myself, do not have the funds to repay me. And should they be able to repay, certainly my creditors must be paid first. However, even if all the debts were paid in full, they would still not meet the amount that I owe.⁵⁵

Khál-i Akbar, the great-uncle of the Báb, died in Shiraz in 1876 and, in accordance with his will and testament, was buried where he wished. Bahá'u'lláh revealed a tablet of visitation in his honor, which forever will immortalize his radiant memory.⁵⁶

Conclusion

RELIGIOUS conversion is a process that often takes a lifetime of education and spiritualization. For Khál-i Akbar, with all his advantages—being related to and a business partner of the Báb and having the special privilege of meeting Bahá'u'lláh and of having a major work revealed in his honor—the process was no less arduous and slow than that for anyone else who had not met the Twin Manifestations of the Bahá'í era or who had lived in a different age. In the end, what proved beneficial for Khál-i Akbar was his constancy of purpose in striving to learn the truth about the mission of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and the dedication with which he pursued this goal. His example in this regard will no doubt remain a shining beacon for all who thirst for certitude.

54. Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí was a son of Khál-i Akbar and a well-known merchant in Tehran. He is best remembered for his many generous contributions to the Bahá'í endowments.

55. As printed in Faizi, *Khándán-i Afnán* 43–46.

56. Faizi, *Khándán-i Afnán* unnumbered pages between 42–43.