

## **Shíráz : Áqá Mírzá Áqá <sup>1</sup>**

### **Childhood**

In a letter to His wife written while He was imprisoned in Máhkú, the Báb writes:

Do not expect any assistance from thy brothers. They will not help; it is enough that they refrain from insults. Overlook their faults. .... God grant that when the light of thine eyes, Mírzá Áqá reacheth maturity, he will be thy help and support. O God! Preserve him from all the evil of the envious and the contumacious.

This child “the light of thine eyes, Mírzá Áqá” was the Báb’s wife’s nephew. The Báb’s wife (Khadíjih Bagum) was very close to her only sister, Zahrá Bagum, who was married and had two sons. In the summer of 1846, events had reached a point that the Báb had to leave Shíráz. He therefore visited His family members to say His farewells. When the Báb visited Zahrá Bagum’s household to say good-bye, both sons had got smallpox. The younger son, Mírzá Áqá, was four years old at the time, and his older brother, Mírzá ‘Alí-Ridá, was seven years old. The two children, both very ill, were asleep on a couch in the courtyard, when the Báb visited. The older child seemed to be doing much better than the younger one (Mírzá Áqá) who was so ill that everyone thought he would surely die. At the visit, the Báb lifted the sheet on the bed of Mírzá Áqá and prayed over him, but He paid no attention to the elder brother. The elder brother died that very night, and to everyone’s surprise, Mírzá Áqá recovered. He became the only surviving child of Zahrá Bagum.

Mírzá Áqá was four years old when the above event transpired. Khadíjih Bagum had special love for this only child of her sister, and what the Báb had said about him, made her pay even greater attention to his education and upbringing. His spiritual insight showed early. When he was just thirteen years old (in 1855 - five years after the martyrdom of the Báb), seeing the persecution of the Bábís and what was happening in his own family, he turned to his blessed aunt to get answers. Khadíjih Bagum recognized his spiritual readiness and taught him the message of the Báb. In spite of his young age, he recognized the station of the Báb, and became the third Afnán to recognize the Báb [the first being Khadíjih Bagum, and the second being the maternal middle uncle who had raised the Báb (Khál-i-A’zam Hájí Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí)].

### **Adolescence and the Báb’s Eldest Uncle and the Kitáb-i-Íqán**

Although still an adolescent, Mírzá Áqá was on fire with the love of the Báb and he became an active teacher of the Cause. He first taught his own parents and helped them recognize the station of the Báb. He then took on the challenge of teaching the Báb’s Eldest Uncle. This was possible, because Mírzá Áqá was very good friends with the Eldest Uncle’s son, Mírzá Buzurg, who was the same age as Mírzá Áqá. They all lived in Shíráz. The two boys had decided to go into the merchant business together. The boys were seventeen years old at that time, and they had asked Mírzá Buzurg’s

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<sup>1</sup> He is usually known as Áqá Mírzá Áqá, but for ease of reading, we will refer to him simply as Mírzá Áqá in this mini-portrait.

dad (the Eldest Uncle) and one of Mírzá Áqá's maternal uncles (who lived in Yazd), to help them get started. Mírzá Áqá describes that during this period he had many discussions with the Eldest Uncle regarding the station of the Báb. It was spiritual struggle between a boy of seventeen and the venerable Eldest Uncle of the Báb. Years later, Mírzá Áqá told his own son about this time and what transpired:

At the beginning when I broached the subject, the uncle expressed total refusal. I went on presenting proofs supporting my argument. We went through several meetings until one day, when I was strenuously following my line, he said with great amazement: "Mírzá Áqá! Do you mean to say that the son of my sister is the Qá'im of the House of Muhammad?" I replied: "Why not?" Then he showed still more amazement and said: "It is strange, very strange." I replied: "There is nothing strange about it!". Then he became very pensive. That made me smile. He asked me: "Why do you smile?" I answered: "It will not be polite if I say why." He said: "Don't be shy, tell me." I replied: "Now that you allow me, I will say it. What you said just now is exactly what Abú-Lahab<sup>1</sup> exclaimed: "Is it possible for my nephew to be a Prophet!". Indeed it is possible, and the Nephew of Abú-Lahab was the Messenger of God. Now, will you investigate and find out for yourself? The Sun has arisen from your house, this Light has shone from your abode; you must feel proud. Don't be amazed, don't seek avoidance. God the Almighty has the power to have made the Son of your sister the Qá'im of the House of Muhammad. The hand of God is not tied. As the Qur'án declares: 'His hand is free!'<sup>2</sup> "

Then he [the uncle of the Báb] said: "Núr-i-Chashm<sup>3</sup>, you gave me an answer which is unanswerable! What can I say and what should I do now?" I replied: "Firstly, it is necessary that you go on pilgrimage to 'Iráq and meet your sister who is there [the mother of the Báb]<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, Íshán<sup>5</sup> [the Blessed Beauty] is in Baghdád. Stop there for a few days. Present your difficulties to Him. Try, endeavour, put your trust in God. Let us hope that you shall attain and reach faith. Man has to strive<sup>6</sup>. Having listened to me, he commented: "It is good what you say. It touched my heart."

It was therefore Mírzá Áqá's suggestion that eventually led to the Eldest Uncle meeting with Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád (in 1862), and to the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Iqán (which was in response to the questions the Eldest Uncle posed to Bahá'u'lláh).

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<sup>1</sup> The Prophet Muhammad's father ('Abdulláh) had two full brothers (Abu-Talib and Az-Zubayr) and many half-brothers. One of these paternal half-uncles of the Prophet was Abú-Laháb who rejected and opposed Muhammad to the end of his life.

<sup>2</sup> See Qur'án 5:64

<sup>3</sup> A Fársí term of endearment, often used to refer to a loved child (means light of my eyes)

<sup>4</sup> By this time, the mother of the Báb had moved from Shíráz and was living in Karbalá'. The pilgrimage referred to is to the Shrine of Imám Husayn which is in Karbalá'.

<sup>5</sup> Fársí – respectful form of referring to person in the third person. The believers often used this term to refer to Bahá'u'lláh, out of respect and reverence.

<sup>6</sup> See Qur'án 53:39

The meeting with Bahá'u'lláh and the Kitáb-i-Íqán transformed the Eldest Uncle and confirmed his faith in the Báb. Mírzá Áqá' told his son about the Eldest Uncle's response:

After attaining His [Bahá'u'lláh] presence, he thanked me most profoundly and told me: "Although considering age, you are as my own son, but in the realm of the Spirit you are as my father, because if it were not for your insistence, I would never have attained the measure of faith which is the utmost desideratum of those who seek nearness to God."

### **First Tablet from Bahá'u'lláh**

Shortly after the Eldest Uncle had returned, Mírzá Áqá' and his father wrote to Bahá'u'lláh asking permission to visit Him. Bahá'u'lláh in those days had still not publicly declared His Mission and that He was the One promised by the Báb. This happened soon after (in 1863 in the Garden of Najíbíyyih) and with it Bahá'u'lláh's banishment from 'Iráq. As He was about to leave the Garden of Najíbíyyih, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a Tablet in His own handwriting addressed to Mírzá Áqá':

"Áqá in Shín<sup>1</sup>

He is the Glorious!

Hearken to what the departing Dove revealeth unto thee, as He prepareth to leave the realm of 'Iráq – such are the methods of God decreed for His Messengers. Let this not cause thee sorrow. Put thy trust in thy Lord and the Lord of thy forefathers ... .. Those who are endowed with the insight of the spirit are independent of all that was and shall be created, and are able to behold the mysteries of the Cause behind the thickest veils. Say, O beloved of God! Fear none and let nothing grieve thee; be steadfast in the Cause. By God, those who have drunk of the love of God, the Glorious, the Effulgent, have no fear of anyone and show patience in calamity, like unto the patience of the lover toward the good-pleasure of the beloved. With them affliction ranketh greater than that which the lovers perceive in the countenance of the beloved. Say, O concourse of evil-doers! Ere long the Cause of God will, in truth, be exalted, and the standards of those who join partners with God will perish, and the people shall enter the Faith of God, the Sovereign, the Supreme, the Ancient of Days. Well is it with those who have now hastened forth in the love of God and received the tidings of the breath of the Holy Spirit. Glory be unto you, O concourse of believers in the unity of God.

Know then that thy letter hath reached Us, and We have given thee this reply to create in your heart the warmth of yearning, to cause thee to turn to the paradise of this resplendent Name, to make thee detached from all, and to enable thee to soar to such heights as have not been attained by the wings of he worldly-wise who are not under the shadow of God's countenance and who are indeed of the perplexed."

### **Activities and travels after recognition of Bahá'u'lláh**

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to Shíráz, whose first letter is sh which in the Fársí alphabet is pronounced as shin.

Mírzá Áqá recognized and accepted the station of Bahá'u'lláh as soon as word reached Shíráz about the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh. Through his teaching activities over the years many embraced the Faith in Shíráz and pillar of the community of believers there. In his endeavours he met not just ones who responded to the Call, but also those who remained spiritually blind in spite of all his efforts. One such example, was his effort to teach his paternal relatives (who were also related to the Báb from the Báb's father's side). It is reported that one day, Mírzá Áqá was locked in argument about the claims of the Báb with one of these paternal cousins, named Mírzá 'Abbás. It got to the point, that this cousin said: "If there be truth in this claim of the Báb, let me fall down when mounting my horse outside this house, and let the bone in my right thigh crack." Mírzá Áqá replied: "Ask God to illumine your heart with the light of faith, not maim you." But the cousin refused to change his plea, and sure enough, he met with the accident he had asked for, exactly at the place he had named. The rest of his life, this cousin had to hobble with a stick, but to faith he obstinately remained alien to the very end. This part of Mírzá Áqá's family showed such hostility, which they retained down the generations, that all family association eventually snapped.

Besides his many teaching activities, Mírzá Áqá also developed not just a business relationship but an intimate friendship with the two brothers in Isfáhán, who would become the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs. Because the two martyr brothers had commercial dealings with Mírzá Áqá, there was a danger that the corrupt governor of Fárs (the province of Shíráz) may try and do the same thing with Bahá'í merchants in Shíráz to get their money. So Mírzá Áqá was forced to leave Shíráz immediately. He went to Búshíhr and then by boat to Bombay, where he established a trading house. While residing in Bombay, as was his wont, he arose to propagate the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. After some years in Bombay, he transferred his residence to Egypt.

Although away from Shíráz, Mírzá Áqá was constantly attending to the welfare of his beloved aunt, the wife of the Báb, writing to her and sending on her letters to Bahá'u'lláh. Over the years, he received several tablets from Bahá'u'lláh, including this one, conferring on him the title of *Núri'd-Dín* ﴿﴾ (the Light of Faith):

"O My Afná, upon thee rest My Glory, My Bounty and My Mercy. Verily, the Servant-in-Attendance [Mírzá Áqá Ján] came and made mention of thee in Our presence. We therefore extolled thee in such wise as to cause the cities of remembrance and utterance to be set ablaze. Verily thy Lord is the Supreme Ruler over all things. We have named thee, at this moment, Núri'd-Dín. We beseech God that He may ordain for thee that which will draw thee near unto Him and be of profit to thee. He verily is the All-Gracious, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."

### **Custodianship of the House of the Báb**

In 1882, the wife of the Báb passed away, and her sister, Zahrá Bagum (the mother of Mírzá Áqá), on the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh took up residence in the House of the Báb. Later Bahá'u'lláh made the custodianship of the House of the Báb a hereditary office among her descendants. Zahrá Bagum passed away in 1889 and the

custodianship became the responsibility of Mírzá Áqá, although he was at that time resident in Egypt, where he had established his trading-house in Port Sa'íd.



Mírzá Áqá, Núri'd-Dín (holding the Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh in which his family are nominated as custodians of the House of the Báb in Shíráz)

### **Meetings with Bahá'u'lláh and Lawh-i-Dunyá**

It was after he had moved to Beirut, in January 1888, that Mírzá Áqá and his eldest son got permission to go on pilgrimage to meet Bahá'u'lláh. After that he was granted permission to return once annually, which he did. He came to visit Bahá'u'lláh in 1889, 1890 and finally in July 1891, less than a year before the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. On this last pilgrimage, Mírzá Áqá came with several members of his family including his wife (Mírzá Áqá had five sons and one daughter). Accounts of this visit have been left in the memoirs of the Mírzá Áqá's son. It was during this visit, that the *Lawh-i-Dunyá* (Tablet of the World) was revealed in honour of Mírzá Áqá.

### **Passing**

In 1903, 'Abdu'l-Bahá issued instructions for the restoration of the House of the Báb exactly as it was in the time of the Báb. Mírzá Áqá (who was the only living person who remembered the details of the House as it had been) came to Shíráz and, with the

assistance of the believers there, undertook the task even though these were difficult times for the Bahá'ís and persecutions had erupted in many parts of the land. The restoration was almost complete when Mírzá Áqá took ill and passed away on 15 November 1903.

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Sources:

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