

## Áqá ‘Alíy-i-Qazvíní

This eminent man had high ambitions and aims. He was to a supreme degree constant, loyal and firmly rooted in his faith, and he was among the earliest and greatest of the believers. At the very dawn of the new Day of Guidance he became enamored of the Báb and began to teach. From morning till dark he worked at his craft, and almost every night he entertained the friends at supper. Being host in this way to friends in the spirit, he guided many seekers to the Faith, attracting them with the melody of the love of God. He was amazingly constant, energetic, and persevering.

Then the perfume-laden air began to stir from over the gardens of the All-Glorious, and he caught fire from the newly kindled flame. His illusions and fancies were burned away and he arose to proclaim the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Every night there was a meeting, a gathering that rivaled the flowers in their beds. The verses were read, the prayers chanted, the good news of the greatest of Advents was shared. He spent most of his time in showing kindness to friend and stranger alike; he was a magnanimous being, with open hand and heart.

The day came when he set out for the Most Great Prison, and arrived with his family at the Akká fortress. He had been afflicted with many a hardship on his journey, but his longing to see Bahá'u'lláh was such that he found the calamities easy to endure; and so he measured off the miles, looking for a home in God's sheltering grace.

At first he had means; life was comfortable and pleasant. Later on, however, he was destitute and subjected to terrible ordeals. Most of the

time his food was bread, nothing else; instead of tea, he drank from a running brook. Still, he remained happy and content. His great joy was to enter the presence of Bahá'u'lláh; reunion with his Beloved was bounty enough; his food was to look upon the beauty of the Manifestation; his wine, to be with Bahá'u'lláh. He was always smiling, always silent; but at the same time, his heart shouted, leapt and danced.

Often, he was in the company of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He was an excellent friend and comrade, happy, delightful; favored by Bahá'u'lláh, respected by the friends, shunning the world, trusting in God. There was no fickleness in him, his inner condition was always the same: stable, constant, firmly rooted as the hills.

Whenever I call him to mind, and remember that patience and serenity, that loyalty, that contentment, involuntarily I find myself asking God to shed His bounties upon Áqá 'Alí. Misfortunes and calamities were forever descending on that estimable man. He was always ill, continually subjected to unnumbered physical afflictions. The reason was that when at home and serving the Faith in Qazvín, he was caught by the malevolent and they beat him so brutally over the head that the effects stayed with him till his dying hour. They abused and tormented him in many ways and thought it permissible to inflict every kind of cruelty upon him; yet his only crime was to have become a believer, and his only sin, to have loved God. As the poet has written, in lines that illustrate the plight of Áqá 'Alí:

By owls the royal falcon is beset.  
They rend his wings, though he is free of sin.  
“Why”—so they mock—“do you remember yet  
That royal wrist, that palace you were in?”  
He is a kingly bird: this crime he did commit.  
Except for beauty, what was Joseph's sin?

Briefly, that great man spent his time in the Akká prison, praying, supplicating, turning his face toward God. Infinite bounty enfolded him; he was favored by Bahá'u'lláh, much of the time admitted to His presence and showered with endless grace. This was his joy and his delight, his great good fortune, his dearest wish.

Then the fixed hour was upon him, the daybreak of his hopes, and it came his turn to soar away, into the invisible realm. Sheltered under the protection of Bahá'u'lláh, he went swiftly forth to that mysterious land. To him be salutations and praise and mercy from the Lord of this world and the world to come. May God light up his resting-place with rays from the Companion on high. Áqá Muḥammad-Báqir and Áqá Muḥammad-Ismá'íl, the Tailor

These were two brothers who, in the path of God, captives along with the rest, were shut in the Akká fortress. They were brothers of the late Pahlaván Riḍá. They left Persia and emigrated to Adrianople, hastening to the loving-kindness of Bahá'u'lláh; and under His protection, they came to Akká.

Pahlaván Riḍá—God's mercy and blessings and splendors be upon him; praise and salutations be unto him—was a man to outward seeming untutored, devoid of learning. He was a tradesman, and like the others who came in at the start, he cast everything away out of love for God, attaining in one leap the highest reaches of knowledge. He is of those from the earlier time. So eloquent did he suddenly become that the people of Káshán were astounded. For example this man, to all appearances unschooled, betook himself to Hájí Muḥammad-Karím Khán in Káshán and propounded this question:

“Sir, are you the Fourth Pillar? I am a man who thirsts after spiritual truth and I yearn to know of the Fourth Pillar.”<sup>i</sup>

Since a number of political and military leaders were present, the Hájí replied: “Perish the thought! I shun all those who consider me the Fourth Pillar. Never have I made such a claim. Whoever says I have, speaks falsehood; may God’s curse be on him!”

A few days later Pahlaván Ridá again sought out the Hájí and told him: “Sir, I have just finished your book, *Irshadu’l-‘Avám* (Guidance unto the Ignorant); I have read it from cover to cover; in it you say that one is obligated to know the Fourth Pillar or Fourth Support; indeed, you account him a fellow knight of the Lord of the Age.<sup>ii</sup> Therefore I long to recognize and know him. I am certain that you are informed of him. Show him to me, I beg of you.”

The Hájí was wrathful. He said: “The Fourth Pillar is no figment. He is a being plainly visible to all. Like me, he has a turban on his head, he wears an ‘abá, and carries a cane in his hand.” Pahlaván Ridá smiled at him. “Meaning no discourtesy,” he said, “there is, then, a contradiction in Your Honor’s teaching. First you say one thing, then you say another.”

Furious, the Hájí replied: “I am busy now. Let us discuss this matter some other time. Today I must ask to be excused.”

The point is that Ridá, a man considered to be unlettered, was able, in an argument, to best such an erudite “Fourth Pillar.” In the phrase of Allámíy-i-Hillí, he downed him with the Fourth Support.<sup>iii</sup>

Whenever that lionhearted champion of knowledge began to speak, his listeners marveled; and he remained, till his last breath, the protector and helper of all seekers after truth. Ultimately he became known far and wide as a Bahá’í, was turned into a vagrant, and ascended to the Abhá Kingdom.

As for his two brothers: through the grace of the Blessed Beauty, after they were taken captive by the tyrants, they were shut in the Most Great Prison, where they shared the lot of these homeless wanderers. Here, during the early days at Akká, with complete detachment, with ardent love, they hastened away to the all-glorious Realm. For our ruthless oppressors, as soon as we arrived, imprisoned all of us inside the fortress in the soldiers' barracks, and they closed up every issue, so that none could come and go. At that time the air of Akká was poisonous, and every stranger, immediately following his arrival, would be taken ill. Muḥammad-Báqir and Muḥammad-Ismá'íl came down with a violent ailment and there was neither doctor nor medicine to be had; and those two embodied lights died on the same night, wrapped in each other's arms. They rose up to the undying Kingdom, leaving the friends to mourn them forever. There was none there but wept that night.

When morning came we wished to carry their sanctified bodies away. The oppressors told us: "You are forbidden to go out of the fortress. You must hand over these two corpses to us. We will wash them, shroud them and bury them. But first you must pay for it." It happened that we had no money. There was a prayer carpet which had been placed under the feet of Bahá'u'lláh. He took up this carpet and said, "Sell it. Give the money to the guards." The prayer carpet was sold for piasters<sup>iv</sup> and that sum was handed over. But the two were never washed for their burial nor wrapped in their winding sheets; the guards only dug a hole in the ground and thrust them in, as they were, in the clothes they had on; so that even now, their two graves are one, and just as their souls are joined in the Abhá Realm, their bodies are together here, under the earth, each holding the other in his close embrace.

The Blessed Beauty showered His blessings on these two brothers. In life, they were encompassed by His grace and favor; in death, they were

memorialized in His Tablets. Their grave is in Akká. Greetings be unto them, and praise. The glory of the All-Glorious be upon them, and God's mercy, and His benediction.

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<sup>i</sup>In Shaykhí terminology, the Fourth Support or Fourth Pillar was the perfect man or channel of grace, always to be sought. Hájí Muḥammad-Karím Khán regarded himself as such. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude), p. 184, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, A Traveller's Narrative, p. 4.

<sup>ii</sup>The promised Twelfth Imám.

<sup>iii</sup>Allámíy-i-Hillí, "the Very Erudite Doctor," title of the famed Shí'ih theologian, Jamálu'd-Dín Ḥasan ibn-i-Yúsuf ibn-i-'Alí of Hilla (1250–1325 A.D.).

<sup>iv</sup>The Turkish ghurúsh or piaster of the time was forty paras, the para one-ninth of a cent. These figures are approximate only.