

Baha'i Studies in Iran: A Preliminary Survey

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Abstract

Religions can transmit their culture by means of community religious education, writing, publication, formal scholarship and scriptural studies. This is especially important in the Baha'i Faith which is a lay religion. This essay is a preliminary survey of the history of the cultivation and evolution of religious education in the Baha'i Faith in Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Key individuals who played a role in these educational processes are briefly introduced and discussed.

Historical Context

Systematic study of any subject, including religion, can take on diverse forms, contain various degrees of depth and breadth, and be aimed at achieving different goals. The study of the Baha'i religion is no exception. The history, teachings, principles, and ultimate aims of this religion – as well as its relationship with eastern and western religious traditions – have been the subject of study in Baha'i communities for many decades. Early attempts ranged from regular classes held for children and youth to deepen their knowledge of the Baha'i tradition, to teacher training classes for preparing Baha'i teachers to promote the religion, to research and publication of treatises by Baha'i scholars in defense of the nascent religion against those who considered it a heresy.



Mirza Abu'l-Fadl

Earliest attempts at formalizing the study of the Baha'i religion were first aimed at Baha'i children and youth – a tradition that began in 1894 when, during a 10-month stay in Haifa, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani (1844–1914), the renowned Persian Baha'i scholar, started teaching the youth and children of Baha'i pilgrims and Baha'i residents of the Haifa-Akka regions.¹ In the early 1900s, similar classes were held by Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali Isfahani (ca. 1830–1920) who, at 'Abdu'l-Baha's (1844–1921) instruction, began holding informal Baha'i study classes for the children of 'Abdu'l-Baha's household – a group that included Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), who later succeeded 'Abdu'l-Baha as the head of the religion.² These early study classes slowly expanded to regions outside the Holy Land. For instance, in 1903, shortly after his conversion, Siyyid Ahmad Musavi Sadru'l-Ulama-yi Hamadani (1868–1908), known as Sadr al-Sudur³ –

another prominent Persian Baha'i scholar and a contemporary of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl – began holding study classes for select Baha'i youth in Tehran. 'Abdu'l-Baha had instructed Sadr al-Sudur to write a rational treatise in defence of the new religion. As he began working on the treatise, he developed the idea of sharing the content with some of the bright young Baha'is. After getting approval from veteran Baha'is, as well as the original Hands of the Cause appointed by Baha'u'llah himself, Sadr al-Sudur organized what essentially became the *Lama'at-i Khams va Tajalliyat-i Shams* (The Five Flashes and the Effulgences of the Sun).⁴



Sadr al-Sudur (middle row, at the center) and some of his students.

His classes were held on Friday mornings. Interestingly, among those who attended Sadr al-Sudur's classes for a few weeks in 1906 were Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney (1878–1928) and Laura Clifford-Barney (1879–1974). The couple, who were engaged at the time, received permission from 'Abdu'l-Baha to travel to Persia and spend time with Persian believers so that eastern and western Baha'is could experience companionship with each other and begin to break down cultural and language barriers. In his biography of Sadr al-Sudur, Nasrullah Rastigar, one of Sadr al-Sudur's students,⁵ provides a detailed account of the visit by this western couple and their participation in Sadr al-Sudur's classes.⁶ Rastigar also provides another version of the account, along with the picture below, in an issue of the Persian magazine *Ahang-i Badi'* (The New Melody).⁷ Dreyfus-Barney had become the first French Baha'i in 1901, and later wrote and translated a great number of Baha'i writings into French. During this visit, Laura Clifford Barney also presented a series of questions to Sadr al-Sudur, which she compiled – along with Sadr al-Sudur's responses – into a treatise of just over a hundred pages that became known as *Istidlaliyyih-i Mukhtasar-i Sadr al-Sudur* (Sadr al-Sudur's Brief Rational Treatise).⁸ Barney's questions concerned Islam and how the divine origin of the Babi and Baha'i revelations could be proven through the Qur'an and Muslim hadith (traditions). Upon her return to Haifa, she presented a copy of this treatise to 'Abdu'l-Baha. She had previously attempted the same approach with 'Abdu'l-Baha himself. During her 1904–1906 'Akka (Acre) stay, she had conducted a series of interviews with 'Abdu'l-Baha during lunch breaks. She later compiled her accounts of those interviews into a book called *Some Answered Questions*.



Sitting from left to right: Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney, Sadr al-Sudur, Madame Lacheney of France and Laura Clifford-Barney.

In 1906, study classes for Baha'i children were expanded beyond the Palestine region into 'Ishqabad, which had a significant Baha'i population. 'Abdul-Baha had sent Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini (1861/62–1924)⁹ to that city and asked him to take charge of the education of Baha'i children there. The Ishqabad Baha'i community had established the first Baha'i school in the world some ten years earlier.¹⁰ Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali later expanded these into fully-fledged classes for Baha'i youth as well, when he began teaching at Ishqabad Baha'i Schools for boys and girls. These schools were adjacent to the Baha'i Temple there.¹¹ The textbook he used was called *al-Durus al-Diyanah* (Lessons on [the Baha'i] Religion), which was in his own handwriting.¹² In 1908, Sadr al-Sudur's untimely death at the young age of 40 left a void for Baha'i youth training in Tehran. However, in that same year, 'Abdu'l-Baha sent the well-known Baha'i poet, Mirza Muhammad Sidihi – known as Na'im (Delight) – a tablet in which he invited Na'im to continue the tradition that Sadr al-Sudur had started. Na'im, author of several treatises himself, accepted the invitation and hand-picked sixty Baha'i youth for his classes. These were held at his own home and focused on the fulfilment of Biblical and Qur'anic prophecies by the Bab and Baha'u'llah. Na'im also offered similar classes for Baha'i girls and women.¹³



Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini.

Baha'i Studies as Apologia

By the start of 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl had already established himself as the most distinguished Persian Baha'i scholar of his time. He was the recipient of about ten tablets from Baha'u'llah and over one hundred from 'Abdu'l-Baha.¹⁴ Mirza Abu'l-Fadl was highly respected by both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, so much so that the latter had invited Baha'is to follow Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's example¹⁵ and once proclaimed that Mirza Abu'l-Fadl was like 'Abdu'l-Baha's own self.¹⁶ Though erudite, early Baha'i scholars such as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl often came from the ranks of Shi'ite clerics. Thus, their education and publications differed significantly from what is today the standard in the modern Western field of religious studies. Most of the early works of such scholars were written in the form of apologias for the newly founded religion.¹⁷ Thus, they were unambiguous in their commitment to the Baha'i religion. This made their publications and compilations enormously popular among the Baha'is of their era and future generations of Baha'is. In fact, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's rational treatises in defence of the nascent religion began a tradition of essays that contained a wide range of logical presentations of the Baha'i religion to Jewish, Christian and Muslim audiences. Soon, his works became the foundation for more rigorous studies of the Babi and Baha'i religions and their truth-claims. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's writings continue to play a significant role in Baha'i Studies to this day. He also remains the only early Persian Baha'i scholar whose works have been translated into English.¹⁸ In addition to writing apologetic works, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl also travelled widely throughout his life. At Baha'u'llah's instruction, he travelled throughout Persia for about a decade. Between 1888–1891, he also travelled to Central Asian countries, including Turkmenistan.¹⁹ Later, at 'Abdu'l-Baha's instruction, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl also traveled to Egypt and the United States to give presentations on the Baha'i religion.

After Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, Mirza Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani (1881–1957) and 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari (1902–1972) are generally considered to be next in rank of the distinguished Iranian Baha'i scholars. Fadil Mazandarani, whose mammoth nine-volume history of the Babi and Baha'i religions, known as *Zuhūr al-Haqq* (The Manifestation of Truth); five-volume Babi and Baha'i dictionary, entitled *Asrār al-Āthār* (Mysteries in the Writings [of the Faith]); and four-volume compilation of hitherto unpublished writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, known as *Amr va Khalq* ([The Kingdoms of] Revelation and Creation), have provided students and academicians of Baha'i Studies with a wealth of knowledge and information about the early history and teachings of these religions. Mazandarani was also instructed by 'Abdu'l-Baha – and later by Shoghi Effendi – to travel widely and make presentations on the teachings of these religions. Among the countries he travelled to were Iraq, India, the United States and Canada. In the early 1920s, Mazandarani delivered a series of pioneering presentations in the US on gender equality, racial harmony, religious tolerance, globalization and constructive collaboration among the nations of the world.²⁰



Fadil Mazandarani.

'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari is the last of the three most accomplished Persian scholars. He received his religious education at a seminary in Mashhad and was gaining prominence as a Shi'ite cleric when he converted to the Baha'i religion in 1927. He devoted the rest of his life to Baha'i research and activities until his death in 1972. This included compiling large volumes on Baha'i history, teachings, laws, and ordinances. Many of his works, particularly his nine-volume *Mā'idih-yi Āsmānī* (Heavenly Sustenance) – which, much like Mazandarani's *Amr va Khalq*, made a host of previously inaccessible writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha available to Baha'is – and the four-volume *Qāmūs-i Īqān* (A Dictionary of [the Book of] Certitude), are still among the most influential sources of research for Baha'i Studies in Persian.²¹ A long list of Ishraq-Khavari's writings remains unpublished to this day.²²



'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari.

Baha'i Studies Classes for Teacher Training

Sadr al-Sudur's classes and those held by Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini in Isfahābad offered a great model for other capable Baha'i teachers to follow in the ensuing decades. For instance, in the early 1940s, a Baha'i Studies class known as *Kilās-i Ālī-yi Dars-i Tablīgh* (The Institute for Teacher Training) was established at the National Baha'i Administrative Centre in Tehran, known as *Hazīrat al-Quds-i Millī*. The class, which ran well into the 1960s, was taught by such eminent Baha'is as Ishraq-Khavari, 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani (1901–1985), 'Ali-Akbar Furutan (1905–2003), Ahmad Yazdani (1891–1978) and Siyyid 'Abbas 'Alavi (1893–1961). Among the students was Dr Heshmat Moayyad (1926/7–), who later became Professor of Persian at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at the University of Chicago.²³ In 1959, Dr Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini (1935–) began a three-year class in Advanced Baha'i Studies that covered selections from the works of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, as well as materials on Babi and Baha'i history. Muhammad Hosseini's classes were among the first in Baha'i history to include non-traditional subjects, such as Arabic syntax and grammar, the Qur'an and courses on world religions, including Jainism, Sikhism and Manichaeism.²⁴ Among the graduates of this programme was Baha'i scholar Dr Vahid Ra'fati (1945–), who has been at the Research Department of the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel since 1980. In the 1960s and 70s, several other prominent scholars held rigorous Baha'i Studies classes in different Iranian cities, including the prolific Ishraq-Khavari in Isfahan, as well as Dr Riaz Ghadimi (1927–2006) and Dr Farhang Holakouee (1944–) in Tehran. Ghadimi designed and conducted a four-year programme of Advanced Baha'i Studies, during which students memorized selected Baha'i writings, learned Arabic grammar to improve their reading and understanding of the Arabic Baha'i writings, and studied oratory. Ghadimi's students also studied the histories and sacred texts of other religions as well as the development of philosophy as a field of study, beginning from ancient Greek philosophy to the modern schools.²⁵

Baha'i Studies as Rigorous Academic Programme: The Institute for Advanced Baha'i Studies (IABS)

In September 1974, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran received a letter from the Universal House of Justice encouraging them to begin educating a select few talented Baha'i youth in the rigorous study of the Baha'i religion, as well as traditional religious and mystical subjects. A year later, the establishment of an institute that would accomplish this goal became one of the objectives of the Five Year Plan (1974–1979) for the Iranian Baha'i community. In April 1976, the institute officially opened its doors and began operation under the title of *Mu'assisih-yi 'Ālī-yi Ma'ārif-i Amr* (The Institute for Advanced Baha'i Studies, henceforth IABS).²⁶ IABS started with five faculty members and 20 students, mostly college-age, who were hand-picked by the faculty or other prominent Baha'is. The five instructors were Dr 'Ali Murad Davudi, Mr Badi'u'llah Farid, Dr Muhammad Afnan, Mr Muhammad Muvahhid (a former Shi'ite cleric), and Colonel Jalal Dini. Those who selected the initial students were expected to be familiar with candidates' potential and dedication to Baha'i Studies. At first, classes were focused on teaching Baha'u'llah's *Kitāb-i Aqdas* (the Most Holy Book), the Bab's the Persian Bayan, the Qur'an, Islamic Studies, the English works of Shoghi Effendi and Arabic syntax and grammar. Research areas students could focus on were also defined and a library was established. The plan was to eventually transform the institute beyond a mere centre for academic study of the Baha'i religion into an organization, the goals of which would include arranging and holding scientific, scholarly conferences, as well as conventions for consultation and discussion on religious and spiritual subjects. IABS started its educational activities with a three-cycle curriculum:

Cycle 1: The first cycle consisted of a two-year introductory programme in Persian, Arabic, and English. The goal of the first cycle was to provide a foundation in basic Baha'i Studies and prepare the students for more advanced topics. Subjects for this two-year programme were divided into four semesters:

Semester 1

- Baha'i Works in Persian
- A Short History of the Baha'i Religion
- Short Histories of World Religions
- The Baha'i Administrative Order
- Arabic Syntax
- Ancillary Subjects

Semester 2

- Baha'i Works in Arabic
- The *Kitāb-i Aqdas*
- Baha'i Works in English
- A Short History of the Baha'i Religion
- Baha'i Laws
- A Brief History of World Religions
- Arabic Syntax
- Ancillary Subjects

Semester 3

- The Study of the Works of the Bab
- Baha'i Works in English
- Logical Reasoning
- Ancient Greek Logic
- General Topics on the Social Teachings of the Faith
- The History of Western Philosophy
- Supplementary Arabic
- Ancillary Subjects

Semester 4

- The Study of the Works of the Bab
- The Qur'an and Qur'anic Exegesis
- Baha'i Works in English
- Scriptural Reasoning
- The Study of Wisdom
- The History of Eastern Philosophy
- Supplementary Arabic
- Ancillary Subjects

Cycle 2: The second cycle was a year-long specialization programme that initially started with only one area of focus – Islamic Studies. Future plans included the addition of other specializations in Eastern philosophy, world religions and jurisprudence. The specialization in Islamic Studies included the following two divisions:

Semester 1

- The Qur'an and Qur'anic Exegesis
- The Science of Discourse ('ilm al-kalām)²⁷
- The Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (Usūl-i fiqh)
- Qur'anic Studies
- The Works of the Bab
- Gnosis and Mysticism
- Islamic and Shi'ite Sciences and Idioms
- Ancillary Studies

Semester 2

- The Qur'an and Qur'anic Exegesis
- The Science of Discourse
- The History of Islam
- Qur'anic Studies
- The Works of the Bab
- Gnosis and Mysticism
- Muslim Sects and Their Beliefs
- Ancillary Subjects

Cycle 3: The third and last cycle was an advanced studies programme which was to last a minimum of one year. During this time, students who had completed the previous two cycles would engage in intensive research on a subject selected in consultation with a faculty member. The outcome of the research was to be published as a thesis. The faculty for all three cycles was to be selected from among Baha'i instructors inside and outside Iran. Some of the most prominent Iranian scholars of the Baha'i religion were asked to serve as faculty at IABS. Below are brief accounts of their lives and descriptions of the capacities in which they served at that institute.

Dr 'Ali Murad Davudi (1922–1979?)

Davudi was the first student in Iran to receive a doctoral degree in philosophy. His doctoral dissertation won an award from Empress Farah Pahlavi's Cultural Foundation.²⁸ Davudi went on to become one of the most prominent professors of philosophy in Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. He eventually became the chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tehran. In addition to writing many works on the history of Greek and Islamic philosophies, Davudi also became an expert translator of great works of philosophy from French into Persian.²⁹ His works also included numerous books, treatises, and audiotaped talks on Baha'i philosophy, theology and metaphysics. Many of these talks were later published in print by others, including Vahid Ra'fati, one of Davudi's students. With the recent translation of his book, *Insān dar Ā'īn-i Bahā'ī*, from Persian into English by Riaz Masrouf under the title 'Human Station in the Baha'i Faith', Davudi became only the second prominent Baha'i scholar (along with Mirza Abu'l-Fadl) to have his works translated into English. At IABS, he focused on gnosis ('irfān), particularly Islamic and Baha'i mysticism. For Islamic mysticism, the main textbook he used was the classic *Misbāh al-Hidāya wa Miftāh al-Kifāya*

(The Light of Guidance and the Key to Sufficiency) by the eminent Muslim philosopher and mystic Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (1154–1191), the founder of the School of Illumination (Ishraq).³⁰ For Baha'i mysticism, the primary text was Baha'u'llah's *Seven Valleys*. Davudi also gave regular Baha'i study classes to the youth in Tehran and in summer schools across the country. He frequently visited a local recording studio and taped lectures on various subjects, such as prayer, the station of man, and free will. These were later distributed on cassette tapes to the Baha'i community.

On 11 November 1979, while he was walking alone in a park near his home in Tehran, Davudi was abducted and never seen again. He has since been presumed dead and was more than likely a victim of state kidnapping and execution. The Iranian government denied any involvement, but three revolutionary guards later admitted that they had been ordered to kidnap Davudi.³¹



Dr. 'Ali Murad Davudi.

Badi'u'llah Farid (1927–1981)

Farid was instrumental in the establishment of IABS. Even though he had obtained a law degree in the 1950s, he was a teacher by profession and served in that capacity for many years. From a rather young age, Farid had developed great interest in Baha'i Studies and developed a thorough knowledge of the Arabic language, syntax and grammar. He published several works on those subjects and was also familiar with logic, philosophy, Islamic jurisprudence, theology, Persian literature, and the sacred writings of various religions, particularly the Qur'an, the *Kitab-i Aqdas* and the *Kitab-i Iqan* (the Book of Certitude).

After the passing of Fadil Mazandarani, Farid began gathering, collating and publishing his works. He also prepared and organized materials for the *Majallih-yi Akhbār-i Amrī* (Baha'i News Magazine), which was a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran and contained various kinds of Baha'i news. Following the establishment of IABS, Iran's National Spiritual Assembly chose Farid to manage and supervise the institute. He invested all of his time in the growth and development of this institute and served in that capacity until his arrest. Farid also served as a teacher at IABS and taught classes on the *Kitab-i Aqdas* and *Kitab-i Iqan*. Additionally, for a number of years, he served on Iran's Baha'i Publications Approval Committee as well as the committee for finalizing the vocalization³² of words in the *Kitab-i Aqdas*. Towards the end of his life, Farid was elected to Tehran's Spiritual Assembly.

On 7 February 1980, while in his car along with his personal driver, Farid was stopped, arrested and transferred to Evin Prison. On 24 June 1981, after more than 16 months of imprisonment, Farid was executed on fabricated charges along with three other Baha'is. Among his posthumous publications is *An Essay on the Kitab-i Aqdas*.³³

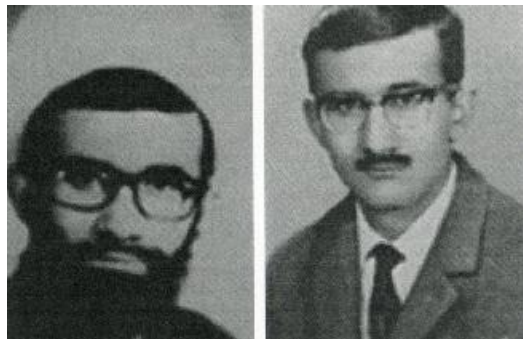


Badi'u'llah Farid and His Wife Mahin.

Muhammad Muvahhid (1937–1979?)

Muvahhid was born in Shiraz. The son of a renowned cleric, he himself was six years into his religious education at a seminary when he came across Baha'i writings at a city library and was deeply attracted to them. He eventually converted to the religion in 1957 and practised it in secret for eight years. In September 1965, Muvahhid revealed his conversion to his seminary students and his brothers. Upon hearing the news, some of his students became enraged and threatened to kill him. To protect him from harm, others declared Muvahhid mentally unsound and sent him to a mental asylum, where he remained in custody for 95 days. His doctors, however, stated that he was in perfect mental health and subsequently released him. Muvahhid then moved to Tehran, where he began studying and arranging classes for teaching the Baha'i religion.

He was asked to teach at IABS in 1977, where he held classes on the Bab's Arabic Bayan as well as Arabic syntax and etymology, for which he used *Jāmi' al-Muqaddamāt* (A Comprehensive Introduction [to Arabic Syntax and Etymology]). In May 1979, Muvahhid was abducted and never heard from again. He is presumed dead.³⁴



Muhammad Muvahhid.

'Azizu'llah Sulaymani (1901–1985)

Sulaymani was born on 10 November 1901 into a prominent Baha'i family in the village of Kelateh Yazd-Abad in Khurasan. His maternal grandfather was Shatir-Rida, who had travelled to Baghdad and owned a bakery there that provided bread for Baha'u'llah's household. When Sulaymani was 5 or 6 years old, his family moved to Ishqabad, Turkmenistan, which had one of the most vibrant Baha'i communities in the world at the time and eventually became home to the first Baha'i House of Worship in 1908. It was there that, as a youth, Sulaymani attended a Baha'i school and received education from such eminent Baha'i teachers as Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini.

Later, Sulaymani studied the Arabic language and Islamic Studies, and eventually settled in Iran. In the 1940s, he began collecting biographical information about prominent early Babis and Baha'is. In 1955, he met Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i religion, who advised him to travel across Iran. Therefore, Sulaymani further expanded his travels and, in the process, continued to compile and publish life stories of

early Babis and Baha'is – something he continued to do until the early 1970s. The result was a huge 10-volume series of more than 5,600 pages that covered the lives of 99 prominent Babi and Baha'i figures. The collection became known as *Masābīh-i Hidāyat* (Lamps of Guidance). The first nine volumes were gradually published from 1948 to 1976. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 prevented print publication of the tenth and last volume. However, that volume was eventually published digitally in 2007.³⁵ What makes this collection unique is the fact that Sulaymani gathered the materials for these biographies through his travels across Iran, where he conducted personal interviews with descendants of his subjects or others who had intimate knowledge about them. In the process, he also collected a great number of primary source documents and manuscripts. *Masābīh-i Hidāyat* remains one of the most comprehensive biographies of early Babis and Baha'is to date.

As noted above, by 1961, Sulaymani was teaching at the Institute for Teacher Training at the National Baha'i Administrative Center in Tehran with other distinguished Baha'i scholars. He was eventually asked by Iran's National Spiritual Assembly to manage this institute. At IABS, Sulaymani taught ancient Greek logic for which he used his own textbook, *Mantiq-i Sulaymānī* (Sulaymani Logic). He passed away on 24 October 1985 in the city of Gunbad-i Kavus, Mazandaran.³⁶



'Azizu'llah Sulaymani.

Dr Muhammad Afnan (1930–2017)

Dr Afnan was a descendant of the family of the Bab and an expert on the Babi religion and the Bab's works, particularly the Persian Bayan, which he taught at IABS. He was one of the five original instructors and a key member of the faculty at IABS. After the Islamic revolution, Afnan moved to Canada and later to Israel, where he served at the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice for many years. He eventually relocated to Canada, where he passed away in August 2017. Two volumes of his essays on Babi and Baha'i studies, entitled *Majmū'ih-yi Maqālāt* (The Collected Essays of Dr. Muhammad Afnan), have been published by Andalib (Dundas, Ontario, Canada).



Dr Muhammad Afnan.

'Inayatu'llah Fananapazir (1921/22–1978)

Fananapazir was born around 1921–1922 into a Baha'i family in Isfahan. Fananapazir was a prominent scholar and teacher of the Baha'i religion who specialized in Islam, particularly Qur'anic and hadith prophecy, which were some of the subjects he taught at IABS.

From a young age, he taught Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and *Kitab-i-Iqan*, often travelling from Isfahan to Najafabad to deepen other Baha'is in those books. Later in life, he was appointed as an itinerant teacher (*muballigh-i sayyār*). Throughout his life, he transcribed tablets and works of the Central Figures of the Baha'i religion. With his calligraphy, he copied the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* 95 times. In April 1957, he left Iran for the Gambia to serve as a Baha'i pioneer. He stayed there until 1977, when he returned to Iran to be of help to his mother-in-law. Around the same time, he started serving as a teacher at IABS until he passed away in April 1978.³⁷



'Inayatu'llah Fananapazir.

Jalal Dini (1910–1978)

Jalal Dini was born in 1910 into a Muslim family in Zanjan. During his childhood and youth, he exhibited great interest in Islamic hadith and had a strong desire to learn Arabic – two qualities for which he became known during his life as he engaged in deep study of the Baha'i writings. When Dini was 16 years old, he attended a religious school to become a cleric. About two years later, his father, Aqa Khalil Dini, learned about the Baha'i religion and became a devout follower. For over two years, the young Dini vehemently

opposed his father about converting to a 'heretical sect' and attempted to persuade his younger brothers and sisters to defy their father and sever ties with him, even though they all lived under the same roof. About a year later, Dini attended a fireside by a respected Baha'i teacher named Mr Mouhebat, who was traveling through Zanzan. He deliberated on what he had learned at that fireside and converted to the Baha'i religion the next day. From that point on, he and his father remained under constant surveillance. They were often taken to the police department for questioning and interrogation, and were occasionally imprisoned for days and weeks at a time.

A few years after his conversion to the Baha'i religion, Dini moved to Tehran and enrolled in a military school, where he eventually became an officer. While continuing to participate in various Baha'i activities in Tehran, he married and started a family with Esmat Mahdi. In 1953, he was transferred to Kermanshah for a military post as a colonel. He continued teaching the Baha'i religion in Kermanshah and held regular study classes on the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha for the Baha'i community there.

In 1961, Dini was transferred back to Tehran and, among other things, worked with Ahmad Yazdani to prepare some Arabic Baha'i texts for publication.

Like Fananapazir, Dini was also a scholar of the Qur'an and Muslim hadith. He taught Qur'an classes at IABS using *Tafsīr-i Sāf ī*, a well-known Shi'ite exegesis of the Qur'an. Dini passed away on 14 January 1978 at the age of 68.³⁸



Jalal Dini.

Other IABS Faculty

In addition to the regular teachers, several other individuals also served as adjunct faculty. Among these were:

- Dr Mashallah Moshrefzadeh (1930–2015), who taught Western philosophy
- Mr Hesam al-Din Nuqaba'i (1927–1986), who taught world religions
- Dr Jamshid Fanaian (1937–), who taught the English writings of Shoghi Effendi

Conclusion

The seeds of Baha'i scholarship germinated in Persia with the efforts and works of a handful of Persian scholars, who were primarily concerned with defence of their faith against attacks by Shi'ite clerics, Christian missionaries and others who considered the religion a heresy. Their publications provided ample resources for the establishment of Baha'i Studies and teacher training classes. From the 1950s, the scope of these classes began to gradually widen and include such subjects as world religions, Islamic Studies,

mysticism, Qur'anic studies and Arabic language and grammar. In the mid-1970s, thanks primarily to the pioneering work of Dr 'Ali Murad Davudi and his colleagues, Baha'i studies gained the rigour of an academic institution through the establishment of IABS in 1976. This institute was specifically established to prepare and nurture the next generation of Baha'i scholars in Iran. While students who initially attended IABS were mostly college students from different institutions of higher education in Tehran, the ultimate goal was to transform IABS into a full-blown Baha'i college or university that students across the country could choose as an alternative – rather than a complement – to a secular school. There were also plans to facilitate the travel and residency of some Baha'i students from other cities to Tehran so they could attend IABS.

Although the Islamic Revolution of 1979 resulted in the closure of IABS as a public Baha'i institution of higher education, IABS did succeed in bringing together some of the greatest scholars and teachers of the Baha'i religion in Iran for about three years. Moreover, despite the fact that the Revolution interrupted the development of what could have been the first Baha'i college or university in Iran, IABS managed to cultivate a love for Baha'i scholarship in the hearts of some of the Baha'i youth in Iran. To this day, some of the former students of IABS are still pursuing Baha'i scholarship in different parts of the globe. Additionally, after the Islamic Revolution, the pursuit of the goals of IABS continued inside and outside Iran. For the next 20 years, a post-secondary institution offering advanced Baha'i Studies operated inside Iran. A large number of young Baha'i students attended the rigorous classes of this new institution. Many finished the structured curricula and published their own theses.³⁹

Additionally, thanks to a personal initiative by Dr Muhammad Afnan, the former IABS faculty member – and with the approval of the Universal House of Justice – the Persian Institute for Baha'i Studies, which operates under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, was established in Dundas, Ontario in 1985.

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Endnotes

¹ 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani, *Masābih-i Hidāyat* [Lamps of Guidance], Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1950, Vol. 2, 274–5. Unabridged PDF Edition Digitally republished, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2006, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih2/masabih2.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)

² Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali. *Stories from the Delight of Hearts*, Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1995, 162.

³ He was given the title of Sadr al-Sudūr (Foremost Among the Distinguished) by 'Abdu'l- Baha. It took many months of rigorous discussions with numerous Baha'is in two cities (Hamadan and Tehran) to eventually win over Sadr al-Sudūr to the new religion. In his *Tārikh-i Had. rat-i Sadr al-Sudūr* [The Chronicle of the Esteemed, Sadr al-Sudūr], Unpublished Manuscript, Mu'assih-yi Millī-yi Mat. bu'āt-i Amrī (The National Baha'i Publishing Trust of Iran), 108 BE/1951, 21–37, a digital copy is available through Iran's online Parliament Library: <http://www.icnc.ir/index.aspx?pid=289&metadataId=131f4eccd-e477-4c4c-8552-96eb2606c5ec>. Rastigar notes that Sadr al-Sudūr first learned of the new religion through a certain Hajī Hakīm Mūsā, who was a Baha'i of Jewish origin and served as Sadr al-Sudūr's family physician. Hakīm, who had himself been converted by Gulpāygānī, held a teaching session with Sadr al-Sudūr at the home of Hājī Mihdī Arjmand in Hamadan. Later, when Sadr al-Sudūr moved to Tehran to continue his religious education, he met other Baha'is through Mīrzā Sulaymān Semsār, who was recommended by Hakīm and – after months of investigation – joined the new religion. Rastigar evidently heard the conversion story from Mīrzā Na'im Sidihi, the well-known Baha'i poet who resided in Tehran at the time. Na'im – along with some of the Hands of the Cause and brothers Nayyir and Sinā, also poets – were all engaged in teaching the Faith to Sadr al-Sudūr. On the night of conversion, the three aforementioned Baha'i poets and Shaykh Muhammad-'Alī Qā'inī (see below) were present in a private teaching session with Sadr al-Sudūr. After long discussions, the final turning point for Sadr al-Sudūr was apparently hearing the recitation of sections of 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Lawh-i Khurāsān* chanted by Qa'inī in a melodious tone. However, Yūnis Khān-i Afrūkhtih, in *Khātirāt-i Nuh-Sālih-yi 'Akkā*, Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1983 125–132, gives a different story of the night of conversion. Afrūkhtih indicates that Mīrzā 'Abdu'llāh Farāhānī, the famous Qājār court musician who had become a Baha'i as a youth, had also held talks with Sadr al-Sudūr in Tehran. Due to his notoriety as a court musician, Farāhānī was presumably hiding his religious identity from most people. Later, Arastou Khān-i Hakīm, a Baha'i physician in Tehran, contacted Afrūkhtih and invited him to hold additional teaching sessions with Sadr al-Sudūr along with Mīrzā 'Abdu'llāh. Afrūkhtih agreed and met with Sadr al-Sudūr at the home of Mīrzā 'Abdu'llāh, where Sadr al-Sudūr eventually accepted the new religion after a moving experience that led all three individuals to burst into tears. What seems clear from these conflicting reports of Sadr al-Sudūr's conversion is that it took efforts by numerous individuals over a relatively long period of time to win him over. This is not surprising, considering the fact that Sadr al-Sudūr was an erudite man who practiced unfettered search after the truth. Therefore, his initial interest, perhaps even one of these confirmations of faith, may have come across to some Baha'is as wholehearted acceptance of the new religion. However, for a while in Tehran, Sadr al-Sudūr was also attracted to Sufism, and went so far as being 'initiated into the Ni'matu'llahi Sufi order, rising to the position of pīr-i dalīl [a station in the Sufi order reserved for individuals who serve as intermediary between the Sufi guide and his disciples]. See Moojan Momen, *The Baha'i Communities of Iran, 1851–1921*, Vol 1: The North of Iran, Oxford: George Ronald, 2015, 97.

⁴ Anon. *Rōhāniyūn-i Musalmānī kih bih Diyānat-i Bābī va Bahā'ī Mu'min Shudand* (Muslim Clerics who Became Believers in the Babi and Baha'i religions), <http://negah.org/758>. (Accessed 12 June 2017.)

⁵ Moojan Momen, 'Tarikh-i Diyanat-i Baha'i dar Tehran' [History of the Faith in Tehran], Payam-i Bahā'ī, July 2011, 37.

⁶ Nasrullah Rastigar, *Tarikh-i Hadrat-i Sadr al-Sudur* (n.p., n.d.), 189–191.

⁷ Nasrullah Rastigar, *Irībat-i Sharq va Gharb* [Association of the East with the West]. *Ahang-i Badī* [The New Melody]. No. 182, 17(2), Ordibehesht 1341, May 1961, 40–42

⁸ Sadr al-Sudūr, *Istidlāliyyih-yi Mukhtasar*, a facsimile of the original manuscript, published in Tehran, Iran: Mu'assih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'āt-i Amrī, 132 BE. For a digitally scanned copy, see here: <http://www.afnanlibrary.org/docs/persian-arabic-mss/inba/inba-vol-025/>.

⁹ The Shaykh was a nephew and close companion of Aqa Muhammad-i Qa'ini (1829–1892), also known as Fadil-i Qa'ini and Nabil-i Akbar.

¹⁰ Building a school for the boys started in 1894–1895 and was completed in 1897. Ten years later, a separate school for girls was also established. For details see, Moojan Momen, 'The Bahā'ī Community Of Ashkhabad; Its Social Basis And Importance In Baha'ī History' in Shirin Akiner (ed.), *Cultural Change and Continuity in Central Asia*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1991, 278–305.

¹¹ Hasan Balyuzi. *Eminent Bahā'īs in the Time of Bahā'u'llāh*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1985, 274.

¹² Azizu'llah Sulaymani, *Masabih-i Hidayat*, Volume 6. Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 125 BE/ 1969. PDF Edition digitally republished, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2006, 93, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih6/masabih6.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)

¹³ *ibid*, Vol 3. Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 106 BE/ 1950. Digitally republished, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2006, 163–4, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih3/masabih3.htm>. Na'im's most popular treatise was *Ahsan al-Taqwīm* [the Best of Compositions], also known as *Jannat al-Na'im* [Na'im's Paradise], which consisted entirely of poems.

- 14 Vahid Ra'fati, *Nukāfī chand dar bārih-yi alvāh-i sādīrih bih i'zāz-i Jināb-i Abu'l-Fadā'il* [Some Points on the Tablets Issued in Honour of Jinab-i Abu'l-Fada'il], *Payam-i-Bahā'ī*, January 1990, 13–19.
- 15 Dr Ezzatullah Jazayeri, 'Hadrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahā wa Mīrzā Abu'l-Fadā'il', *Payam-i-Bahā'ī*, January 1990, 25.
- 16 See Mahmud Zarqani, *Kitāb badā'ī al-āthār fī asfār Mawlā al-Akhyār ilā mamālik al-gharb bial-'azzah wa-al-iqtidār*, Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i Verlag, 1982, 2:107. Abu'l-Fadl spent the last few years of his life in Egypt. Some of this time coincided with 'Abdu'l-Baha's western travels. In a telegram to Aqa Muhammad Taqi Isfahani in Egypt, 'Abdu'l-Baha instructs him to prepare the utmost means of comfort for Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, as 'He is my own self'. (In Persian: 'asbāb-i rāhat-i Abu'l-Fadā'il rā mohayā namāyīd. Ū rā 'ebārat az nafs-i man ast.')
- 17 Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's *Farā'id* [Peerless Gems], Egypt: n.p., n.d. Digitally republished, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2006, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/gulpaygani/faraid.htm>, written in 1898 in response to an attack on Baha'u'llah's *Kitāb-i-Iqan* [Book of Certitude], soon became the de facto Baha'i apologia in teaching the new religion and defending it against its assailants.
- 18 These translated works include *Hujaj al-Bahā'īyyih* [The Behai Proofs], New York: J.W. Pratt Co, 1902 repr, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983], *ad-Duraru'l-Bahīyyih* [The Shining Pearls] trans. as *Miracles and Metaphors*, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1981, *Rasā'il wa Raqā'im* [Treatises and Letters], trans. as *Letters and Essays*, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1985 and *Burhan-i-Lamī* [The Brilliant Proof], Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1998.
- 19 When Haji Muhammad Rida Isfahani – a prominent Baha'i – was assassinated in Ishqabad, Abu'l-Fadl represented the Baha'i community at the trial of the murderers. His eloquent defence helped establish the independence of the Baha'i Faith from Islam before the Russian government. For details, see Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, 296–300; Gulpāyghānī, Abū'l-Fadl and Ahang Rabbani, 'The Martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida'. *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*. Ann Arbor, MI, H-Bahai. 4, 2000, <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/trans/vol4/mrida.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
- 20 For more information, refer to the following website dedicated to chronicling Fadil Mazandarani's travels to the United States: Jinab-i-Fadil Mazandarani's Travels to the U.S. <https://sites.google.com/site/fadilmazandarani/>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
- 21 For a more detailed account of Ishraq-Khavari's life, refer to *The Bahá'í World*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, Vol. XV, 518–20.
- 22 These include a 19-volume Baha'i Encyclopedia and a 5-volume series on Na'im's poetry, entitled *Tafsīl al-Durr* [Commentary on [Poetic] Pearls].
- 23 Personal correspondence with Dr. Iraj Ayman, March 2014.
- 24 Personal correspondence with Dr Nosratullah Muhammad Hosseini, March 2014. A more complete biography of Muhammad Hosseini can be found in Todd Lawson, *A Most Noble Pattern*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2012, 291.
- 25 Personal correspondence with Jiyan Ghadimi, the son of Riaz Ghadimi, March 2014.
- 26 The *Āhang-i Badī' magazine*, 1978, No. 45, 7. Online copy available at: [http://www.bahaiprojects.org/sites/bahaiprojects/files/resource_center/root/Magazines/Ahang_Badee/\[32\]/5.pdf](http://www.bahaiprojects.org/sites/bahaiprojects/files/resource_center/root/Magazines/Ahang_Badee/[32]/5.pdf). (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
- 27 This refers to the Islamic discipline of seeking theological knowledge through dialectic (debate and argument).
- 28 Malekeh Afagh Iranpour-Davudi, 'Hamsaram Duktur 'Ali Murad Davudi' [My Spouse, Dr. 'Ali Murad Davudi], Part 1, *Payam-i Bahá'ī*, March 2011, 25.
- 29 Ibid, 26.
- 30 Suhrawardi's 'Illuminationism' is an important school in Islamic mysticism that was founded on Zoroastrian and Platonic ideas. The concept of "light" as a divine and metaphysical source of knowledge is central to Suhrawardi's philosophy. See Hossein Ziai, 'Illuminationism' Encyclopaedia Iranica Online, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/illuminationism>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
- 31 Novin Doostdar, 'Obituaries: Alimurad Davudi (1922–1979 [kidnapped, presumed dead]) Professor of Philosophy, Bahá'í Administrator, Probable Victim of State Execution', *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9(1), 1999/2000, 241–245.
- 32 The process of adding supplementary diacritical marks to indicate short vowels in Arabic.
- 33 Badi'u'llah Farid, *An Essay on the Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, 2nd ed., Wilmette, IL: Persian-American Affairs Office, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1993. Available online at: http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/farid/Essay_Kitab-i-Aqdas.pdf. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
- 34 A Persian-language account of Mr Muvahhid's life, which he himself recounted, currently exists as an audio recording on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzbXlv8AiG4>. This recording was digitized from a cassette tape. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
- 35 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani. *Masabih-i Hidayat*. [Lamps of Guidance], Vol.10, Unpublished Manuscript.1st ed., East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2007. Available at: <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih10/masabih10.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.) The original manuscript of this volume is currently in private hands.
- 36 Koumarth Sulaymani, 'A brief biography of 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani'. *Payam-i Baha'ī*, No. 99. (trans. Adel Shafipour; ed. Rob Stauffer), available online at: http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/Sulaymani_Biography.PDF. (Accessed 31 August 2017.) In addition, a more detailed account of Sulaymani's life in Persian can be found in A. Sadeghian, Zindigī, Khadamāt, va Āthār-i 'Azizu'llāh-i Sulaymānī-yi Ardakānī, *Khūshih-hā'ī az kharman-i adab va hunar*, Wienacht: Anjuman-i Adab va Hunar, Vol.13 [Dawrih-yi Nabīl Akbar Qā'inī], 213–228.
- 37 Personal correspondence with Khazeh Fananapazir, the son of 'Inayatu'llah Fananapazir, September 2009. An 'in memoriam' article on Fananapazir can be found in *The Bahá'í World*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, Vol. XVII, 453.

³⁸ Personal correspondence with Said Dini, the son of Colonel Dini, October 2009.

³⁹ One of the present authors (Bijan Masumian) saw an example of one such thesis from a graduate of this institution in a 2004 visit to Iran.

⁴⁰ Mahmeh Golestaneh, *Parvāz-ha va Yādigar-hā* [Tribute to the Faithful] [Dallas, TX]: Supreme Publications, 1371 [1992].