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FADL-I-SHIRAZI, GUIDED BY DREAMS

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WINDOWS TO THE PAST
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Guided by dreams...

Is a dream real, or what we call real only a passing dream, an illusive experience measured only by one thing, time. Is time a phenomenon for assessing a losing battle? Every moment passing bring us that much closer to the end! How pitiful those who put their trust in this illusive world. How neglectful we could be of a lasting and only reality called the soul; the soul capable of comprehending the difference between reality and illusion.

Is a dream only for the lover to see the beloved,
or for the adored one to commune with the seeker?
Is it of the spirit or material in nature?
Whichever, tell me who is the matchmaker?
O Matchmaker, guide us even in our dreams.
We pray you find us worthy of such a favor.

To reveal another inspiring as well as entertaining story, this window from these Windows to the Past will open to the life-story of Shaykh Muhammad-Ibrahim from Shiraz, honored by Abdu'l-Baha with the title of Fadl, meaning the learned one. Throughout this talk, he will be referred to as Fadl. The contents of this story were extracted from Masabih-i-Hidayat Volume I in Persian language by Aziz'u'llah Sulaymani.

Was Fadl a mystic or a faith healer? To tell you he dreamt often and was a great scholar would be an understatement. Do you know why? Because of the fascinating accounts of his life awaiting to inspire you.

This great scholar lived in the time of Abdu'l-Baha and the early

part of Shoghi Effendi's ministry. The years of his service to the Cause extended to four decades, the last fifteen years of which were during the ministry of the Guardian.

To summarize his life:

An unusual beginning, an unusual ending, and unusual everything in between. His ancestors were Zoroastrians who tried to escape the onslaught of Arab invasion of Iran and forced conversion to Islam. As all Zoroastrians who could afford to do so, Fadl's ancestors decided to migrate to India. No doubt you know that the Persian Zoroastrians who settled in India are the prosperous and industrious Parsees of today.

On the way to India, Fadl's ancestors went through Bahrayn, an island in the Persian Gulf. As fate had it, once there they were converted by Muslim teachers and voluntarily embraced Islam. Some centuries later, attacks by another sect of Islam chased them out so they returned home and settled in the southern province in Iran called Fars with its capital Shiraz, the birthplace of the Bab.

Fadl came from a family of the learned. His father was a mujtahid or doctor of Islamic law. The father had one wife, but after his brother died, he sheltered his brother's widow and the children. As it was the custom, he had to marry her to be able to have her in his household. The name of his second wife was Maryam or Mary.

Here comes the extraordinary beginning of Fadl's life, a dream even before his birth. No, he did not see that dream, but his father did. Both wives of this mujtahid (Fadl's father) were expecting. The mujtahid had an unusual dream. He saw Abraham, the father of all prophets, in the form of a child, sitting on his lap, and suddenly he appeared in form of an adult overshadowing the mujtahid. Abraham told him that he wished to be part of the mujtahid's family. When he woke up, after long meditation, he interpreted the meaning to be that one of his wives would bear a boy with a great destiny. Shortly the first wife delivered a girl. He told the family that if the second wife, Mary, would deliver a boy, he must be notified at once to feed the newborn his first feeding. Not too long after that, being happily surprised with the news, he rushed to Mary. The newborn, washed and bundled was handed over to him. He kissed the baby and gave him his first

feeding which by custom was a dab of honey and butter. In amazement he kept staring at the newborn as it resembled the child seen in his dream. This occurred in Buraz-jan, a village near Shiraz some-time in 1863 which should ring a bell. Indeed the year of the Declaration of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad. The name chosen for him was, of course, Muhammad-Ibrahim. The mujtahid became very attached to this son and treated him very special. Now listen to this.

When Fadl was only seven, his father put a turban on his head, which was unusual, and sent him to school. In two short years he learned to read and write Persian. When nine years old, he went to another school and in three years mastered the Arabic language. This is something. You know it takes some of us eternity to learn both languages. Then Fadl was sent to Shiraz to room with an older brother to study Islamic knowledge. In four years at the age of sixteen he was ready to learn philosophy which took him two years followed by two more years in science and studies of the Illuminati. Just the names are enough to stagger one's mind, how much more the speed of his learning. Well, by the age of twenty, he acquired every knowledge within his grasp but one mystery stayed a challenge to him. . . how to become a prophet!

Before going to that phase of his life, you like to know that such talent and genius could not escape the attention of dignitaries, particularly the ones with a qualified young lady in their household.

The governor of Shiraz was also the owner of the school where Fadl and his brother attended and had their room. At times the governor used to check on the students but his visits to Fadl were different. He would bring precious gifts of expensively bound books, nice furniture and so on for Fadl. The governor had a young sister-in-law who appeared perfect for Fadl, but getting married was the last thing on Fadl's mind. The governor continued his generous gestures, and at times would remark to Fadl that now you have everything in your possession except a wife.

In those days there was a Baha'i who used to carry a bundle of cloth shoes called giveh to the school to sell to the students. They are very comfortable and wonderful for summer. Fadl, not knowing about this man's religion, used to enjoy his company whose

philosophical and mystic thoughts would touch Fadl's heart. Of course, if Fadl knew he was a Baha'i, he would avoid breathing the same air, so severe was his prejudice. He, according to himself, was so fanatically against Baha'is that even the name would repulse him and if ever the thought of a Baha'i occurred in his mind he would beg God for forgiveness. Fadl states that the company of that blessed soul had a certain influence on him even though at that time they never talked about religion. This is the proof that with purity and sincerity one can become a channel permitting the spirit to flow and without speaking a word about the Faith guide the non-believer. Baha'i writings over and over emphasize this fact.

To Fadl, all the prophets of God were ordinary but accomplished people. He wanted to see what it took to become worthy of that station. Of course, the first step would be knowledge. He read as much as he could, many times missing meals but got nowhere. Distraught with disappointment, he decided that his attachments to books was the obstacle. So one day in the courtyard he made a mound of his books, poured kerosene on them and set them on fire...no response from heaven! Now what? In deep despair it occurred to him that maybe the obstacle was his physical body. No he did not burn that one. We really do not know how he was planning to intentionally detach himself from his body, or, so to speak, get rid of the obstacle to his goal of prophethood. We will never know his plan, but it is reported that he achieved it. However, he was instructed to repossess his body as it was the only means for perfecting his soul. No doubt you badly want to know how he did it. Maybe in a little while!

You see, no one can hasten maturation of the soul by destroying the body. The price for such an act is high. Not only is it forbidden by Baha'u'llah, but also it is important to realize that our body is the temple for our soul and truly a gift from God. Such a gift should be well-taken care of and not abused as it is the only instrument at the command of our faculties to take steps for the advancement of our soul. What about those who die very young, even as young as in embryonic stage? Their souls will be immersed in the ocean of the mercy of God, compensated for the loss of opportunity and shall continue to progress in the worlds of God.

Somehow this digression was made to distract you from curiosity of how did he do it. The secret will be shared with you only under one condition and that is, please don't try it even if you don't like your body.

Now the secret. One afternoon Fadl, now close to his mid-twenties, gave his room key to his brother and said that that evening he was invited out and might not return. Whether the brother thought he was the private guest of the governor with possibility of wedding we don't know. The biographer has not found any record of Fadl taking any unusual object for achieving his purpose. We know that when the celebrated Ahmad left his parents he took a bundle with him, but Fadl - nothing. Just his normal outfit and maybe a little money. Soon he left the school grounds and after some distance, the city of Shiraz was behind him. He preferred to walk instead of riding as it was another self-denial, preparing him for prophethood. Did he know where he was going? I wish I could tell you. The answer is maybe yes and maybe no. We don't know what was in his mind, but for sure we know that the sun was about to set when all of a sudden out of nowhere a few vicious stray dogs came towards him. Quite frightened, Fadl took off as fast as he could but tripped and fell unconscious. Possibly hit his head against a rock or something like it.

The following is his description of his out-of-body experience parts of which resemble some recent descriptions of near-death experiences. It is amazing how some parts of all descriptions appear like a copy of another one while many of these people have never read or heard the other people's accounts. It must be a true experience awaiting each one of us. This commentary is purely my own and not from Baha'i writings.

Anyway, in a flash Fadl found himself on top of a nearby tree, watching with disgust, his body lying in the meadow below. Again in a flash he ascended higher to a delightful realm but suddenly remembered his body. He returned to check it, but again it repulsed him so he ascended even higher, trying to go as high as he could. All of a sudden he heard a voice! "Fadl, this is your station and no higher. Don't even try it." Fadl states when I looked around it was a most beautiful and breathtaking scene way, way beyond description. Then the voice resounded again. "Fadl, you

are rushing. Your time has not come yet. You must return to your physical form, and only after perfecting yourself at the age of seventy-two you shall ascend to your station." Well, that was it. He found himself sitting up in the meadow and the morning sun was shining. He located his turban and shoes and returned to town. That was quite a party he attended. No doubt, he never told his brother how he spent that night.

What else to try? Why not suffering with severe self-denial and a life of seclusion? First he avoided meat and prayed constantly. Then he decided more suffering was necessary. When the governor used to throw a banquet for the theological students he would check the dormitory before dinner. If any door was open or light was on, he would ask the student why he was not attending his banquet. Fadl, at one such evening, shut his door and kept the room dark as not to be bothered by the governor. Soon Fadl decided that it was not true suffering because he was not seeing the food. It would be more meritorious if he attended the banquet and practiced self-denial there. So at such banquets he would pass the delicious dishes and limit himself to only bread and vegetables.

Well, still no trumpet blast appointing him as a prophet, but he attained certain clarity of vision and purity of heart. In those days there was a mystic from Shiraz who had left his home and wealth to escape the cruelty of the previous governor. He was living in an isolated room by an old cemetery not too far from Shiraz. A few dervishes had joined him as their leader. This mystic man, being a psychic, sensed Fadl's inner yearning and sent one of his followers to invite Fadl for a visit so he could guide him to all truth. The messenger visited Fadl, pretending he wanted Fadl to write a letter for him, but Fadl sensed it and told him this is an excuse, what are you really here for? The messenger extended the invitation of the mystic leader. This mystic man had seen Baha'u'llah when Baha'u'llah was in seclusion in the mountains of Sulaymaniyih.

Fadl arrived at the forsaken room where the dervishes had gathered. After an hour or so, he saw a holy-appearing man with a long white beard, and dressed in the long garb of dervishes, returning from the desert. He was the mystic leader who did not utter a word, but through telepathy communicated with Fadl. Within one year,

Fadl, off and on, attended such meetings, and a few times the mystic man brought to Fadl's mind the appearance of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. Was the mystic man a Baha'i ? We will never know. After one year the mystic spoke in words and said, "You have reached the stage of completion." One of the gifts from this mystic was the knowledge of faith-healing.

Leaving all of that behind, Fadl headed home for Boraz-jan and asked his father, the mujtahid, to send him to the holy cities in Iraq to further his learning. His father, as usual, went along with whatever his precious son requested and provided the means. For two years he studied there and received the degree of ijti^had. During his stay there his father had sent another son to keep Fadl company.

One night in a dream Fadl heard a voice saying, "The goal of your heart is in Khurasan." (A province in northeast Iran.) Next morning Fadl took off on foot with very little provisions. It took him six months to get there. On the way he met a band of highway robbers who fed him a delicious lamb stew and gave him some tea and sugar for his trip. Apparently, he never forgot the taste of that stew to the end of his life.

For your information, the provincial capital of Khurasan is the city of Mashhad. Of the eleven Imams, only one is buried in Iran, and he is Imam Rida who is buried in Mashhad. There, he dreamt that in the company of Imam Rida he went to the celestial world where he saw God with two heavenly beings, one on each side. One of them, on behalf of God, gave Fadl a heavy book to correct. Fadl said, "The book is large and I don't have enough time." He was told to keep the book and that eventually he would do it. Then he woke up. About two months later he saw one of the prophets in a dream telling him that in this life he will find the source of truth and the way will be shown to him in his own little village of Boraz-jan.

Now you know why the sentence 'guided by dreams' is in the title of this tape. He really crisscrossed vast distances to be guided by dream after dream. We are not finished yet.

In the middle of the hot summer, he tackled the dusty road on foot

again, traversing mountains and deserts to return to his village. Imagine how happy his parents were to see their lost son. After the last message of his brother from the holy cities about his sudden departure they had not heard a word for almost a year. Everybody from far and near came to visit the pride and joy of the family.

In that village there was another mujtahid, who was a rival of Fadl's father. Pretending friendliness, he also came and paid them a visit. As customs were and maybe still are, every visit had to be repaid. At his earliest convenience, Fadl went to pay his respect to that mujtahid. He entered the house and sat nearly half an hour, but no sign of that mujtahid. When he showed up, his desperate look indicated something was wrong. Apologizing for the delay, he stated that his only daughter was ill with no hope of recovery. Fadl for the first time used the magic faith healing, a gift from the mystic man of Shiraz. He asked for ink, paper and pen. On each of the four corners he wrote Abbas in separate letters. Abbas is the given name of Abdu'l-Baha. He told the grieving father to soak the paper in water and give that water to her to drink. Fadl left the house. To everyone's surprise the girl's fever broke and she recovered.

Please hold it. I know you badly want to know what was the color of the ink, and if English letters work as effective as Arabic, and also if capital letters are more potent. Let us not practice medicine without a license.

The mujtahid, thrilled with the miraculous recovery of his daughter, approached Fadl's father to put the past behind and begin a union. He said he had pledged to God that whoever would cure his daughter, he would give her in marriage to him. Fadl's father was delighted about such a proposal. In beauty and wealth that girl was matchless, and more than, that it would stabilize the roaming life of his son. He presented Fadl with the proposal which he accepted. You should have seen the preparation for that wedding which was the talk of the town. For the first time the whole village was happy about such a union between the families of two rival mujtahids. The very last step for the wedding was sending the ring and special items to the bride's house.

The night before this took place, another . . .by this time you should guess what. Well, Fadl in his dream heard a voice repeating three times, "Do not get married. It will be an obstacle."

Before sunrise Fadl was on his horse speeding away with no trace. Imagine the effect on everyone, particularly the bride and her family. No doubt the war of rivalry intensified worse than ever. After some time a merchant friend of Fadl's family, while travelling in Bushihr, a port city by the Persian Gulf, sighted Fadl and immediately notified his father. The father communicated with Fadl that if his sudden departure was to avoid the wedding, he should return home as it was called off forever. So he returned home.

Before the wedding was planned, Fadl had seen a dream but had forgotten all about it. In that dream he saw a young man handing him a book and telling him "Your answer is in this book.".... In those days, the houses of the divines were open to the public and no knocking was required to enter. Nowadays I have no doubt they are bolted and locked with heavy duty locks because people do not consider them divine anymore. One afternoon while Fadl was alone at home meditating on his past and his endless chain of dreams, he heard a knock at the door. This was unusual as knocking was not necessary. He approached the door and said "Who is it?" A pleasant voice answered, "It is me." That voice had an unusual effect on Fadl, possibly it sounded like the voice of the youth in his dream handing him a book. Fadl asked, "Who do you want?" The answer was, "You, the Fadl. Aren't you Shaykh Muhammad-Ibrahim?" Then at the doorway Fadl found a young man who appeared to be just arriving at the village. Fadl asked, "Where are you from?" He said, "I am from Shiraz and on my way to Bushihr."

Fadl helped him take his horse to the stable and showed him in. The young man brought his saddle bag with him into the house. They spent the rest of the day covering every subject except religion. He spent the night as Fadl's guest. After breakfast, Fadl could not contain his curiosity any longer. No, not about having seen the man in his dream, but about the two heavy duty padlocks on the saddle bag which was unusual.

Fadl said, "May I ask, with these locks, how much gold are you carrying?" The traveler answered, "I have something much more precious than gold." Fadl asked, "Like what?" The answer was, "It is a book." "May I see it?" Fadl asked. The traveler unlocked the bag and reverently took The Book of Certitude, or the Kitab-i-Iqan, out, kissed it and handed it to Fadl. The traveler said, "While I go to market to buy some provisions, you may read it. I shall be leaving after lunch." Fadl insisted that he should stay longer, but the answer was no. The traveler left for the market. Fadl instructed the cook to make a special lunch and also some food for the traveler to take on his journey.

After lunch as the traveler prepared for leaving, Fadl begged him to leave the book for a short while, because in the short time he had it he barely could scan its more than two hundred pages. No doubt, the dazzle of truth already caught his attention, and he wanted more time to feast his eyes. The guest answered, "This is my only true wealth and I cannot part with it." Then reaching into his pockets he gave a few tablets and the long obligatory prayer to Fadl to keep. None of these writings or the book had any indication about the author.

Soon Fadl accepted the divine origin of what he read and memorized the obligatory prayer, reciting it every day for the rest of his life. After reading those writings, the style of his speech showed such obvious change that every one recognized the influence of the young traveler as possibly causing Fadl to become a Baha'i. Those who were rivals to that family used some members of Fadl's own family in plotting to kill him. Some family members now considered Fadl to be a disgrace to the family. When a deranged and low-life member of Fadl's own family attempted three times to kill him, Fadl's mother begged him to escape the danger. His father obviously had mixed feelings, but the love of his mother prevailed over the misgivings about him being a Baha'i. Fadl decided to take a double purpose step. Number one, to leave Boraz-jan and the enemies behind; and, second, under pretext of going to the center of Islamic learning once again, try to investigate the source of his recent discovery.

His father could not agree more, hoping Fadl by learning more about Islam, would get over his temporary deviation. It is interesting

that Tahirih's father thought the same way, agreeing to send her to the holy cities. If only both of those fathers knew that they provided the means for the salvation of the souls of the whole family. You see, Baha'u'llah has assured us that even the relatives of a Baha'i are forgiven their heedlessness conditioned that they have not harmed the Faith. (Rev. of Baha'u'llah, Vol II, p. 401)

He joined his brother already in Najaf, one of the holy cities in Iraq. The last time he went there he was a seeker of learning, this time his education and receiving his doctorate in Islamic law was behind him; but now he was the seeker of the real truth.

During his stay in Najaf, Fadl began to teach classes in philosophy, incorporating as much divine philosophy as he had acquired from reading those tablets given to him by the young traveler in his home-town. He states that such new ideas were very appealing to the theological students. In all of his activities during those two years in that city, he was all eyes and ears to see or hear any indication about where the object of his quest was. He also attended all gatherings, trying to meet as many people as he could. As soon as he ascertained that the source was in Akka, he decided to leave at once for his point of adoration. Fadl's age at this time was in mid-thirties, nearly fifteen years in the valley of search.

On that winter day very early in the morning he woke his brother up to tell him he was joining a caravan. The brother in disbelief said, "To where?" The answer was to Akka. Quite surprised the brother said, "Now, I see. All of the new concepts in your philosophy classes were Babi concepts." Fadl said, "No, they were Baha'i concepts, because I am a Baha'i." His brother, stunned, asked, "What should I tell our father?" Fadl answered, "Tell him that I took the road of no return." The brother apparently woke up well enough to take advantage of the situation. He told Fadl since this is the final goodbye, might as well give your seal and property documents to me so I can manage them for you. Fadl, whose mind was set on his glorious journey and was very detached, handed them over to his brother, only to learn later that the brother's intention was nothing but to transfer all of Fadl's assets to his own name. What a brother! You can tell he did not have a single vein worthy of becoming a Baha'i.

Fadl did not even take time to buy comfortable walking shoes. He left with his clerical shoes which were not fit for long walking. He took very little money with him and decided to walk all the way. In one of the stops, he purchased a pair of comfortable shoes.

The next part is about another dream, but not Fadl's.... At one stop, the caravan leader decided to camp for two nights. After a poor night's sleep on the hard ground, when he woke up in the morning, he saw a village at a distance. He went to buy some provisions. As he entered the village, passing through some streets, he saw the headman walking towards him, bow in respect, and call him an angel. Fadl was at a loss about the whole thing and was sure he was mistaken for someone else.

The headman relieved Fadl's puzzlement by saying, "Last night I saw you in my dream exactly as you are, and here you are in the flesh. My daughter is in serious trouble. For a number of days a leech has attached itself in her throat. And now she is constantly spitting blood and her throat is closing. No one in the village has been able to remove the leech. In my despair last night I cried and prayed hard for relief. When I fell asleep, in my dream you were shown to me as the one who would cure her. I beg you to come to my house and do something."

(You should know that such a thing is possible in people and animals when a tiny leech on vegetables attaches itself to the lining of the mouth or throat and will not let go until it is gorged with blood.)

Fadl, quite bewildered, started to walk with the headman towards his house, trying hard to think what he should do. Suddenly the answer came to him. Yes, you folks guessed it right. The same prescription of writing Abbas on each corner of a paper and washing the ink. When they arrived he did not even have to examine the patient. His faith-healing prescription was a generic cure-all prescription. However, he told the headman, "I will write a prayer prescription, and your daughter must drink the water of the ink, but in return I want you to provide me with a mattress so I can sleep for a few hours. I am part of a caravan camped nearby and have not had a good night's sleep."

That did it. The daughter drank the ink water and coughed up the

gorged leech. Meanwhile, Fadl fell into a deep sleep on a mattress in the large room of that house. After a couple hours, the murmuring sound of a crowd woke him up. Barely opening his eyes, he saw the room was filled with people of every affliction, all having a small gift with them, expecting a cure. The headman was hushing them to stay quiet so the angel could sleep. Soon Fadl realized that the courtyard was also filled with deformed, blind, or paralyzed people. He began to worry that he could never make it back to the caravan. As soon as he stood up, people swarmed towards him, but were kept back by the headman's attendants. Fadl asked for the headman to come close to him. Fadl whispered in his ears, "I will write a number of prescriptions, leaving them with you only under the condition that you distribute them after I have cleared the village, or I will miss the caravan." He did exactly that and took a few gifts with him, but I don't think he had time to buy what he wanted.

Fadl joined the caravan, and at a certain point he left it and directed his steps towards Beirut. In Beirut he found a Baha'i whose name he had obtained. This was during the peak of activities of the covenant-breakers against Abdu'l-Baha. The talk on the Covenant in this series explains it in detail. This Baha'i man was very kind to Fadl, gave him some money and warned him not to fall in the trap of the covenant-breakers who were on the lookout for newcomers to Akka to mislead them. With his ears filled with warnings, he arrived in Akka and was cautiously looking for the Baha'i guest house.

As he was walking through the narrow streets trying to locate the house, he saw at a distance a group of people following Abdu'l-Baha. He recognized Abdu'l-Baha at once. Do you know how? He had seen him before. Didn't I tell you? Well, you know it now. In that dream of his in Khurasan when he saw God flanked by two holy beings, one of them was Abdu'l-Baha. No doubt you have met believers who have seen Abdu'l-Baha in their dream long before hearing about the Faith. As badly as he wanted to run after Him, he found it would be irreverent and improper. He contained his emotions and went to the direction of the guest house.

Another exciting experience in the life of Fadl is ready to unfold.

Before we go any further with this chapter, you should know that Fadl, who usually had a tense nature, was even more uptight by having his ears filled about traps of the covenant-breakers. Fadl located the Baha'i guest house, and saw a man standing at the door. Before Fadl could enter, the doorman told him, "My friend, you arrived a few minutes late. They locked the door and left. Please go to the coffee house." Fadl angrily said, "I have not come here to go to the coffee house" and pushed the doorman aside, thinking he was a covenant-breaker, and dashed up the stairs to find the door locked. The doorman said, "I told you the door was locked. Please go and rest a while in the coffee house. I will inform the Master about your arrival." Fadl hesitantly went to the coffee house with his guard up. Meanwhile, the doorman ran to Abdu'l-Baha's house and gave the news of the tense and peculiar new arrival.

Dr. Yunis Afrukhtih, the Herald of the Covenant, Haji Mirza Haydar-Ali, the Angel of Carmel, and the celebrated calligrapher, Mishkin-Qalam, and others were in Abdu'l-Baha's house and heard the description of the doorman. Fear struck them that most likely he was a bad-tempered Mulla sent by the clergy of the holy cities to investigate Abdu'l-Baha. You see, in those days the covenant-breakers did all in their power to undermine and discredit Abdu'l-Baha. Somehow, Abdu'l-Baha's words puzzled them about the identity of the newcomer. The Master told Haji Mirza Haydar-Ali, who was advanced in age with hunched back, "Please go and take good care of our dear guest and make him comfortable for the night."

Fadl, sitting on guard in the coffee house scanning every corner for sign of danger, looked out the window and saw an unusual sight; an old hunchbacked man walking fast towards the coffee house followed by the doorman. They soon appeared at the doorway where the old man, Haji, gave the key of the guest house to the doorman, and then he came and sat next to Fadl. After preliminary greeting words, Haji asked Fadl, "May I ask where do you come from?" The answer was "Najaf." That answer itself was enough to worry Haji even more, because it was the center of Islamic activity. "Where is your birthplace?" "Shiraz." "What is your religion?" "Baha'i."

"Who taught you the Faith ?"

"No one."

"Who do you know?"

"No one."

"Who sent you here?"

"Myself."

"Did you ride or by foot ?"

"I walked all the way."

"What is the purpose of your visit ?"

"To attain the presence of my Lord."

These abrupt answers did not satisfy Haji's interrogation and even made him more worried and suspicious. Haji took Fadl to the guest house. That evening those believers who had been in Abdu'l-Baha's house and had heard about this strange visitor, came to pay Fadl a visit, but really for the purpose of further interrogation. All they found was a cantankerous mulla quite dusty with unkempt hair and beard from his long journey. His answers to their questions did not satisfy them at all, but they could not be rude because of Abdu'l-Baha calling him our dear guest. This indicated that Abdu'l-Baha knew exactly who Fadl was without having physically met him. Soon you will know what I mean.

The next day after breakfast, Haji brought a clean outfit and hat and instructed the attendant to show Fadl the way to the public bath. After the bath, Haji told Fadl, "Make yourself comfortable. I must ask permission for you to attain the presence of Abdu'l-Baha." In a short while the doorman came and said, "Please follow me." That morning the Mufti of Akka (mufti is a prominent religious title) and a few of the divines had come to the presence of Abdu'l-Baha with their questions about successorship to Muhammad. The Master was explaining the rightful position of Imam Ali and the true successor to Muhammad. You like to know that the Muslims of Turkish Empire, including Akka, were of the Sunni sect who do not accept Ali and the Imams.

Abdu'l-Baha was speaking to a roomful of people when Fadl arrived. Out of twelve chairs in the room, eleven were occupied. The only empty one was on the right side of Abdu'l-Baha. Fadl appeared at the door not knowing what to do next. In that culture in such occasions, one does not automatically go and occupy the only empty seat, particularly the one on the right side of a prominent person, as it is considered the seat of honor.

As soon as Abdu'l-Baha saw Fadl at the door, He interrupted his talk and said, "Welcome, welcome. You have come a long way. Please take a seat," pointing to the chair next to Himself. Well, friends, if there is a heaven on earth that is where Fadl was. Tiredness from his long journey disappeared at once. Abdu'l-Baha continued His explanation, when at one point Fadl quoted an appropriate verse from the Qur'an. Abdu'l-Baha turned to Fadl and said, "It is true, Jinab-i-Fadl," (meaning your honor the learned) "but, unfortunately, these people have not read their own holy book."

Then Abdu'l-Baha showered Fadl with generous praise. Well, you can imagine the looks on the faces of the believers in attendance who considered him a miserable agent. From then on everyone addressed him as Jinab-i-Fadl. Abdu'l-Baha made some brief remarks after that, then dismissing the crowd, he told Fadl, "You must be very tired. Please go to the guest house and rest," and told Haji, "Our guest is your responsibility. Look after his comfort." As the believers and Fadl left Abdu'l-Baha's house, they all gathered around Fadl, who, until a short while ago, was thought to be an intruder. Now everyone wanted to embrace and kiss him, but Fadl, being quite uptight and upset with their interrogation the night before, said with anger, "It is not necessary to kiss me."

This is a good time to point out that it is very easy to judge a person's faith and sincerity from their appearance and our premature impression. How often this could prove to be wrong.

If you like to know what was the source for the numerous dreams of Fadl, you should hear this. The next day Abdu'l-Baha told Dr. Yunis Khan, "We converted Fadl. Let us see how he compares with your converts." Now we can easily see that Abdu'l-Baha had his sight on that great man. Dr. Yunis Khan answered, "My Lord, whatever you touch turns into gold, while ours becomes only copper."

In four months of his stay in Akka, under the instruction of Abdu'l-Baha, Fadl gave classes for the believers but in the mid-course, he discontinued teaching because his philosophical concepts were too advanced for the average people of Akka. Once Abdu'l-Baha asked the believers, "How are you spending your evening hours at the guest house?" meaning, "Are you attending Fadl's courses?"

No one dared to say that recently Fadl had discontinued his classes, but Abdu'l-Baha knew it. After everyone was dismissed, Abdu'l-Baha asked Fadl to stay and accompany Him for a walk. The Master told Fadl the story of the learned man and the idiot. He said once there was a learned man imprisoned in a cell with an idiot. The learned man sent a petition to the king saying, "I beg of you to give me any punishment except the company of this idiot." Then Abdu'l-Baha comforted Fadl not to get discouraged due to low capacity of the audience. Fadl remembered that gem of advice for the rest of his life. As we shall see, much of his life was spent teaching Arabic to the youth in Baha'i schools in Tehran and Hamadan. You can realize how this was less than proper use of a brilliant man like Fadl, and how he kept it up because of what Abdu'l-Baha had told him on that day.

There were a number of noteworthy events during Fadl's stay in Akka which speak for themselves. Fadl states, "One day, with a number of other believers, I was in the presence of Abdu'l-Baha. As the Master was talking, it came to my mind that I wish I could meet with the arch covenant-breaker, meaning Abdu'l-Baha's half-brother, and help him to understand his delusion." Suddenly Abdu'l-Baha interrupted His conversation, directed His blessed face towards me and said, "After the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, I had a number of face-to-face meetings with my brother, and told him how our purpose is nothing but the promotion of the Faith of Baha'u'llah. Such a purpose is best served only if we support each other. Then I counselled him, showed extreme kindness to him, even at one time cried, but of no avail." The rest of the believers present could not figure out why all of a sudden Abdu'l-Baha digressed to that issue, but Fadl realized his mind was read by Abdu'l-Baha, and being guided, he did not approach the arch-breaker.

Another time Fadl had planned that the next time when in the presence of Abdu'l-Baha he would ask Him to bless the soul of his father who had passed away. The next day he attended Abdu'l-Baha's presence at His home. After Fadl sat down, Abdu'l-Baha, while gazing at the sea through the window, said, "Jinab-i-Fadl, as a result of your embracing the Cause of Baha'u'llah, many people have been and will be blessed."

Fadl, in those four months had many other experiences which were extraordinary and exciting. In the interest of time, I will share only a couple more. Aren't these stories heart touching?

Now those precious days of closeness to the object of his love were drawing to a close. As close as the next day. Fadl made a wish that Abdu'l-Baha would write something for him in His own handwriting. You know that Abdu'l-Baha when having an audience, would also be writing letters, and at times dictating another letter to a scribe. Well, the next day would be the sad day which Fadl wished would never come. But the earth, to displeasure of Fadl, continued its rotation, and the sun rose on the day of departure. For the last time, He attained the presence of Abdu'l-Baha along with a number of other believers.

Abdu'l-Baha was writing and at times would speak to those thirsty souls in attendance. He finished writing a tablet, folded it, and put it in an envelope. Haji, the same blessed man who at Fadl's arrival brought the key to open the guest house, was sitting next to Fadl. Abdu'l-Baha beckoned Haji and told him, "Send this to Fadl after his departure." Haji returned back to his seat and told Fadl, "This tablet was written for you, but will be sent to you after your departure." Many such tablets by Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha would not be given to the believers while in attendance, but sent to them later. It is my personal feeling that the reason was to make sure it would arrive safely through a courier, as being robbed or searched during travel was not unusual in those days.

The night before, Fadl was also meditating on all of the suffering he had gone through, as well as his degree of learning and what to do next. At the end of that last precious hour he spent close to his beloved Master, Abdu'l-Baha dismissed everyone else and came to Fadl, put His blessed hand on his shoulder, and said these heartwarming and assuring last words, "Jinab-i-Fadl, ask whatever your heart desires and it shall be granted." Fadl answered, "My wish is none other than your well-being and pleasure with my servitude to your threshold." Abdu'l-Baha said, "Marhaba," indicating how pleased He was with the true understanding of that great man of learning. After all, what could be higher than humility and service. The Master Himself was the Exemplar of such an attribute.

Then He gave Fadl nineteen British pounds, a good sum of money, and instructed him to use an alternate entry to Iran through Russia. The last moving scene of that farewell was Abdu'l-Baha embracing and kissing Fadl. Then He said, "Fi Amanu'llah" meaning may God protect you. Doesn't it touch your heart, imagining that last hour, that last minute when a lover, finally having found his beloved, has to part, with the mission to galvanize the Baha'is far and near. Only if that embrace could have lasted a little longer!

After that emotional farewell when his tears stopped to flow, he asked Haji if he could look at the tablet Abdu'l-Baha had just revealed in his honor. He read it with such concentration as if memorizing every word. So charged with an unshakeable resolve and certitude, that spiritual giant returned to Iran, not for the glory of fame and wealth, but for the glory of servitude in the path of his Lord. He stayed for awhile as the guest of a dedicated believer in the northern city of Rasht. The local assembly there sent him around as a travel-teacher. A giant like him could not escape detection and hostility of the clergy.

When agitation of the public, fueled by the divines, was reaching its peak before outbreak of violence, a prominent dignitary who was a believer sent a message to the chief clergy saying **that**

When agitation of the public, fueled by the divines, was reaching its peak before outbreak of violence, a prominent dignitary who was a believer sent a message to the chief clergy saying that instead of all the clamour, it is more reasonable for you honorable people to meet Fadl face-to-face in a public debate. They used to hate that, knowing the outcome, but sometimes they were forced into it or lose face. A few confrontations took place, one of which was in a mosque. The truth of the Faith was publically proven and established, and the divines were badly defeated. Fadl's fame grew so much that on the streets people would point at him, that he is the one who defeated the clergy. Of course, the public having wished the opposite outcome began to show indications of their annoyance and hostility. Before anything serious happened, the local assembly asked Fadl to head for Tehran.

There the local assembly sent him to the fanatic city of Qum. As discreet as he tried to be in his teaching efforts in that beehive, the obnoxious divines plotted his assassination but he secretly slipped through their net. If you like to know what happened, I don't mind sharing it with you. There he did not contact

any Baha'is. Having a turban denoting his degree of ijtahid, he went to the seminary and began to teach courses. With his novel concepts, the students were highly impressed, and he became very popular. They would openly say that they had never seen anybody as learned and interesting as this new teacher. Somehow from the gist of his teaching, the more seasoned and clever divines recognized his being a Baha'i and intention to teach the Faith, and plotted to kill him.

You like to know that Fadl had an impressively large build and a stern look. Unfortunately, a good photo of him was not available. His photo on the insert is taken from a group photo of teachers in Tehran Baha'i School, in his later years.

With his charisma and unmatched knowledge, he was best of the Baha'i teachers, and also defense against the abusive and ruthless Islamic divines. When teaching in Baha'i schools, he wore a hat, but when teaching the Faith in firesides or debates he wore a turban denoting his Islamic rank. Whenever the Faith has needed or will need people of such caliber, God recreates those worthy of such a privilege. Fadl-i-Qa'ini, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, and this Fadl are some examples of the Will of the Almighty at work.

Fadl received a number of tablets from Abdu'l-Baha, but the reunion in his mortal life never took place.

Well, couple more interesting events, and you have heard the whole story. Let us give each one a title. The first will be 'The Hopping Mulla,' and the next, 'The Fighting Cock who Turned into a Pitiful Mouse.' I know you are imagining some wild scenes. Well, continue to imagine, but meanwhile a few words about his personal life. A tablet from Abdu'l-Baha instructed Fadl to make Tehran his headquarters and to do travel-teaching. Therefore, he settled in Tehran and got married. During the day he used to teach in full curriculum Baha'i school, and at night he taught the seekers. He had one son and two daughters. Later on, under the instruction of the Assembly of Tehran, he and his family moved to the city of Hamadan. There, his wife became the principal of a Baha'i school and Fadl kept up the same schedule. As a Muslim, he could have been a professor of a theological college, but he patiently taught Arabic to the young folks, way below his level. As said before,

the story of the wise man and the idiot in prison told by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Akka never escaped his mind, practicing the patience needed by all school teachers. This may have been one of his greatest tests because by nature he was a tense person. You should also know that he was very humble and detached.

Now the story of the wretched hopping Mulla. Once in Tehran, Fadl was confronted by two Mullas who were cousins. One was older and more learned so he did most of the talking. In the course of discussion, the senior Mulla said, "I wish I knew why a person like you has become a follower of Baha'u'llah. Give me a good proof." Fadl answered, "Proofs are many, but the greatest is His revealed words which flow like a spring downpour." Mulla asked for an example. Fadl recited part of the Tablet of Ahmad which he knew by heart. "Well, well," was the Mulla's answer, "if that is all, I can do the same." Fadl's retort was, "Go ahead and reveal right now so I become your follower." In those days particularly, Muslims used to sit on their knees. Chairs have been considered by Muslims a decadent Western influence. The same for eating utensils. Sitting on the floor and eating with right hand is righteous for a Muslim, but don't ever dare plunge your left hand into the main dish if you want to safely get back home. Left hand is considered dirty.

Sorry for the digression. So Fadl said, "Go ahead and reveal." The mulla straightened his posture, cleared his throat a few times and stroked his beard and said a certain common verse meaning salutation and praise be to Muhammad and his descendants. Such a verse is multipurpose and heard commonly in Muslim countries. It wards off evil as well as attracts bounty. How can I forget my travels in Iran from one city to another. Anytime the tire of the bus would hit a pothole which was often or the overloaded bus slightly tipped, the whole crowd in unison would shout that verse which surely would wake up the driver. That is a protection, isn't it ?

Unless you know these details the story has no spice. The mulla said the special verse loudly and waited and waited. No revelation descended. Most likely that spot was jinxed so he put his two hands on the floor and hopped a couple feet away. Got settled, cleared throat, stroked his beard and said the verse...again no

sign of any revelation. While Fadl was amused by the show, he kept watching the act with interest. The mulla hopped for the second and third time and went through the whole routine. On the fourth trial the other mulla could not contain his giggle any longer. He began laughing loud and said "Dear cousin, you seem to have no control over the revelation coming to you, but at least you could stop saying so many loud praise verses."

The other incident is slightly scary showing the courage of Fadl not thinking about his safety when the defense of the Faith was at stake. Tehran used to have a section which was known for being fanatically religious. Its name was Sangilach. I remember from my youth years in Tehran there was a large field in that section called Sangilach square. Every dawn and sunset during the fasting month of Ramadan, a cannon would be fired there for millions of inhabitants of Tehran to know when to stop or start eating. I cannot figure out if choosing that section for firing the cannon was really a favor to the faithful Muslims in Sangilach or not. We could clearly hear the blast in the opposite end of the city.

Two of the notorious divines of that section continued in their preaching to bad mouth the Faith and the believers. Repeatedly they called for public debate but such a confrontation did not appear safe and wise to the Baha'i assembly. Finally, a Baha'i teacher was appointed to respond. Before the debate began, the clergy and their entourage and the crowd intimidated that teacher. He decided not to debate. This added fuel to the fire of their attacks. The walls of the streets were covered with grafitti that the best Baha'i teacher proved to be empty and was defeated. The snowball effect of their vicious attacks, riling up the mob, became dangerous, but still the Local Assembly for protection of the believers decided against another confrontation.

That spiritual giant with his impressive appearance could no longer stand the abuse and put his life on the line. He and two prominent believers, one an officer, decided to arrange a meeting date at the home of the chief clergy. These three did not wish the risky outcome to reflect on the Tehran Assembly. The appointed day arrived. Before noon on that day, Fadl jotted down his assets and debts on a piece of paper. After lunch, he kissed his baby daughter and said goodbye to his wife. The three Baha'is joined

each other and began to walk towards Sangilach. The two divines had announced in the mosque about such a meeting. The people in that area were so riled up and sure of the defeat of the Baha'is, that they planned to literally tear them apart after the debate.

In such tense situation, the three continued their walk in the narrow, dusty and dirty streets of Sangilach. Hostile and curious women crowding the streets peeked through their chadors. No doubt men were inside sharpening their tools for the slaughter. Barely having any room to walk, passing through the masses of onlookers, would be enough to change the mind of an ordinary man, no matter how brave. But Fadl leading the trio was not an ordinary man. He was a determined lion resolved to clear the name of the Faith once and for all. They reached the house of the senior divine who was not at home. Possibly at the mosque giving his final instruction to his deputies. You can realize this was not another bee hive. It was a serpents' den.

Whether we like it or not, they were in the den. In the guest room, the younger divine who also was the brother of the chief was seated with a few Muslims and four armed soldiers. The junior divine was seated on the floor on one side of a special cushion denoting the seat of honor for the chief. Fadl as stern as a tower of strength went and sat on the other side of the cushion. After exchange of a few formalities, the mulla began the debate by questioning Fadl on certain aspect of Islam trying to discredit the Faith. Fadl rebuffed him severely on every point. You remember by custom they were all sitting on their knees. The mulla found himself at a dead end and brought book after book. Fadl used those books and pounded the mulla with proofs from his own books. Mulla in desperation was getting louder and more rude by the minute. He constantly was jerking his head, arms and body and on his knees was inching his way towards Fadl. We don't know if these jerky movements were involuntary spasm triggered by the tension or voluntary moves trying to intimidate Fadl, but we know one thing for sure, and that is, Fadl's moves were quite voluntary trying to neutralize such gestures of that vicious and miserable enemy of the Faith. Fadl also began to inch his way around that special cushion towards the mulla. A few times they came knee to knee after resuming their original seats. The attendees, particularly the soldiers, were fascinated. The soldiers,

highly impressed by the charisma, strength, and knowledge of Fadl, had to warn the mulla a few times when he was stooping to obscenities. This encounter lasted about one hour when that junior cock was totally defeated. Now his honor the chief clergy entered and everyone in respect stood up until he sat on that special cushion. The Muslims were anxiously waiting for the chief to give the fatal blow because he was their best man.

After exchanging some words, both he and Fadl realized that in a certain class in the holy cities they were classmates. Maybe it was not a pleasant surprise for the chief, since he realized the caliber of the opponent. Anyway, after a chilling silence, the chief asked a few questions about what had already been discussed. To the embarrassment of the defeated junior, Fadl said, "We already settled that question." Everyone, including the junior mulla, positively nodded their heads. Who wanted that scene repeated?

The chief brought up subjects which to himself were decisive blows, but each one was precisely answered by Fadl and rebuffed. This second round lasted three to four hours and was conducted in a more courteous atmosphere. After there was nothing more to say, Fadl looked at the people and said, "You be the witnesses," and then looking into the eyes of the chief, he said "And you concede to your defeat. You have no right to bad mouth the Faith or the believers in your preaching or on the walls of the streets." The two mullas were quieter than mice hearing the roar of that mighty lion. Fadl got up and said goodbye and with the company left that center of oppression. Fortunately, he returned home without a scratch. The proceedings of this encounter was written to Abdu'l-Baha who praised Fadl in a letter.

You recall before these two exciting experiences, you were told that he was teaching the youth in Baha'i school of city of Hamadan where his wife was the principal. After three years due to inattentiveness of the youth and lack of maturity of some of the adults, he was discouraged and returned to Tehran. While in Hamadan the news of the Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha reached him which undoubtedly broke his heart.

According to the writer of the history, Fadl's greatness was only

realized by the elite in the Baha'i community. To others, he was just another learned believer with a nice title from 'Abdu'l-Baha, oblivious of what it took to deserve such an honor. He was not adequately appreciated during his life time, neither was Socrates, the Father of Philosophy, or that musical genius, Mozart.

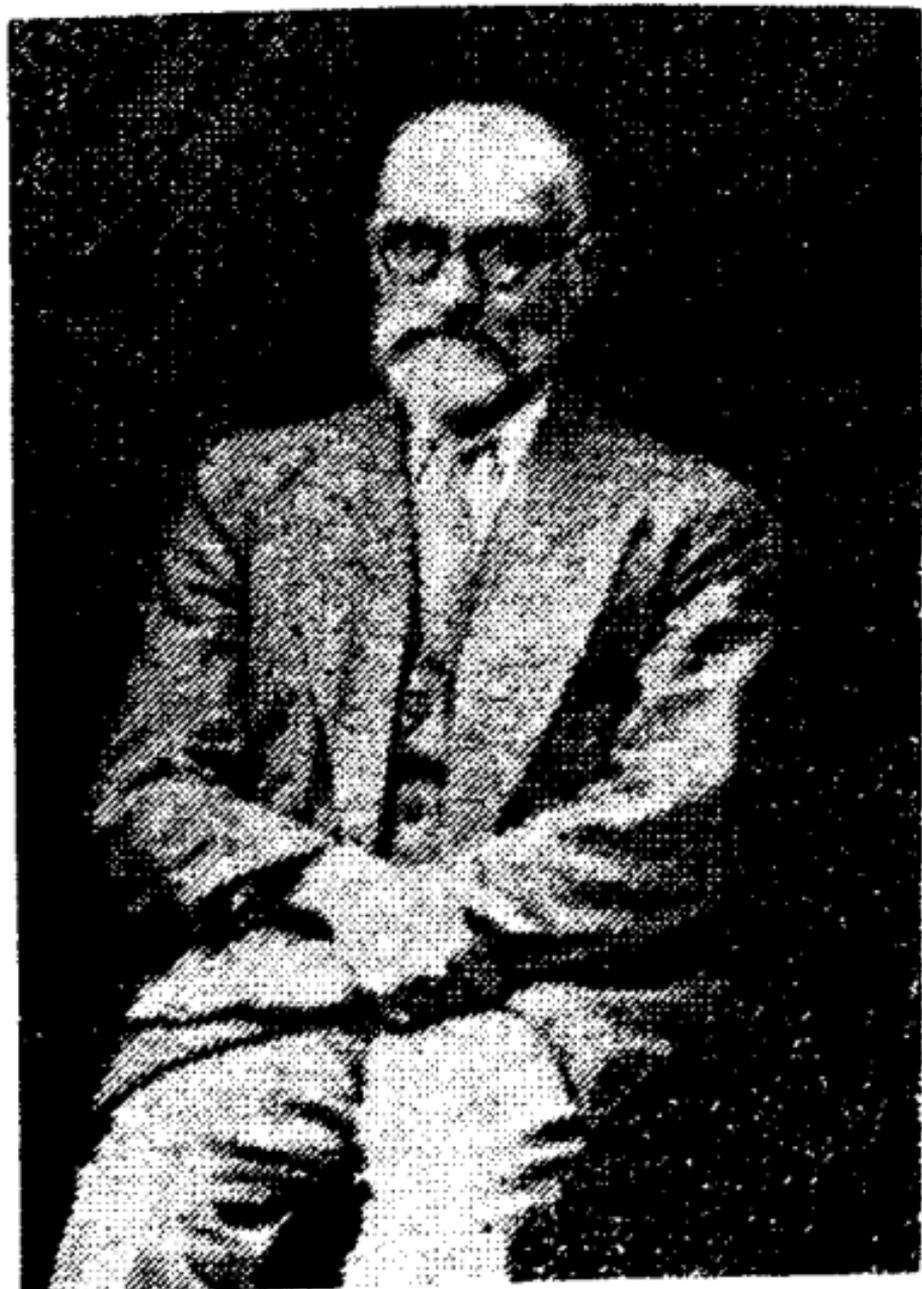
On that celebration of the 9th day of Ridvan in 1935, when this narator was only a little four year old Zoroastrian boy, Fadl gave a long speech at the Tehran Baha'i center called Haziratu'l-Quds. He was 72 years old....does age 72 ring a bell? Do you recall when in his early twenties during his out-of-body experience he was foretold about age 72 specifically? Well, his age was right, and he had perfected his qualities to the best of his ability. The hour of departure was fast approaching.

Following that speech, Fadl fell ill and was bedridden for four months. Against the advice of his physicians, visitors from all walks of life were pouring in. They had to see their Fadl and show their appreciation even though it was too late. One night Fadl told his wife, "I will be your guest only for a few more hours." After comforting her with assurance, he asked for the children. He kissed them and sent them to bed. Having never missed his obligatory prayer, as weak as he was, recited the long obligatory prayer while lying in bed. How could he miss his last opportunity. His last breath had to be used only to praise the Lord for the bounty of recognizing Baha'u'llah and testifying to his deep certitude and faith. You recall, that prayer was the first Baha'i writing he memorized while still a Muslim, not knowing the Author. Now as a believer, this was his final preparation for his departure. One hour after he finished his prayer, he serenely closed his eyes to this mortal world and ascended to that lofty station beyond words promised to him.

The Guardian, in his telegram about the passing of Shaykh Muhammad-Ibrahim-i-Shirazi, known as Fadl-i-Shirazi, stated Fadl's services shall not be forgotten with the passage of time.

May this humble contribution help to keep his memory alive. What you heard in this inspiring and eventful story was edited from the biography written by Azizu'llah-i-Sulaymani in Persian.

According to the writer, parts of it were directly spoken to him by Fadl himself, and the rest is from the written biography provided by Fadl's wife of many years, Naw-Zohur Khanum.



FĀDL-I-SHĪRĀZĪ
1863-1935