

## Stories and Reflections on the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár

### 1. Norah Crossley

When Norah Crossley, a young Bahá'í living in England, heard of the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette being built she longed to share in its construction. With no money to give she gave her long, beautiful hair. Sending it to Dr. Esslemont to be sold for the Temple she wrote in her letter:

You may think mine a very strange share, but I am very poor and cannot afford to send money, so I have cut off my hair.... It has been a sacrifice I admit, for it was the only beauty I possessed, but it is nothing compared with what the Master has given me....I will even give my life, if need be....

Her letter was sent to 'Abdu'l Bahá, Who wrote her the following letter:

O my well-beloved daughter of the Kingdom! The letter thou hadst written to Dr. Esslemont was forwarded by him to the Land of Desire [The Holy Land]. I read it all through with the greatest attention. On the one hand, I was deeply touched, for thou hadst sheared off those fair tresses of thine with the shears of detachment from this world and of self-sacrifice in the path of the Kingdom of God. And on the other, I was greatly pleased, for that dearly-beloved daughter has evinced so great a spirit of self-sacrifice as to offer up so precious a part of her body in the pathway of the Cause of God. Hadst thou sought my opinion, I would in no wise have consented that thou shouldst shear off even a single thread of thy comely and wavy locks; nay, I myself would have contributed in thy name for the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár. This deed of thine is, however, an eloquent testimony to thy noble spirit of self-sacrifice. Thou hast, verily, sacrificed thy life and great will be the spiritual results thou shalt obtain. Rest thou confident that day by day thou shalt progress and wax greater in firmness and in constancy. The bounties of Bahá'u'lláh shall compass thee about and the joyful tidings from on high shall time and again be imparted unto thee. And though it be thine hair that thou hast sacrificed, yet thou shalt be filled with the Spirit, and though it be this perishable member of thy body which thou hast laid down in the path of God, yet thou shalt find the Divine Gift, shalt behold the Celestial Beauty, obtain imperishable glory and attain unto everlasting life.

(Letters quoted in "Stories about Bahá'í Funds" page 5 – Gloria Faizi)

### 2. 'Azízí

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Tíhrán decided that they should hold a large meeting for the friends and invite them to contribute towards the construction of the Temple in 'Ishqábád. 'Azízí, a young man with a flourishing business, requested the Assembly to hold the meeting in his house. Having obtained permission, he set about preparing his garden to receive the friends. He washed the trees and hung lights among the branches. Then he borrowed enough carpets from friends and neighbours to cover the ground, and placed comfortable cushions for the guests to sit on, as was the custom in those days. The place looked heavenly when the meeting started.

After prayers had been chanted and the speaker had explained the purpose of the meeting, 'Azízí was the first to make a contribution. He had already calculated everything he owned and

divided it into three parts. He now donated it all, with the utmost joy, in the name of his wife, his daughter and himself.

At the time when he gave all he had for the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, 'Azízí could not have known that he was soon to become one of the richest men in Tíhrán.

(From "Stories about Bahá'í Funds" page 17, Gloria Faizi)

### 3. Corinne True

The day after Davis's [Corinne True's son] death Corinne was present at the Temple site at the corner of Linden Avenue and Sheridan Road in Wilmette. Being there was difficult. Her last son - gone. Would the human tragedy that seemed to stalk her ever cease, she wondered. But Corinne had to be there for the dedication ceremony, not because of its historical significance, but because 'Abdu'l-Bahá was coming. It was a cool, cloudy and windy day, not the kind of day one expects on the first day of May. Nearly 400 people were waiting for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival. He was to dedicate the Temple site in the tent behind the crowd. Some in attendance were surprised to see Corinne, for Davis had died the previous day. It simply wasn't customary to do something like that. But those who knew Corinne well weren't surprised. Certainly the Master wasn't. When His taxi drove up, a Persian stepped out of the vehicle, asking for Mrs. True. In a few minutes she appeared and was ushered into the car, the guest of her Beloved. The car didn't go far, only to the bridge on Sheridan Road that spans the canal bordering the Bahá'í property. Why the Master singled her out isn't officially known. Was it because He wanted to see the new bridge and canal locks at the end of Wilmette harbour? Or to inspect the Temple site's boundaries? He didn't need Corinne with Him to do that. Surely it was an act of compassion considering her loss of Davis the previous day. But was it more than that? Was it also a demonstration of faith in Corinne True, directed at those who questioned, even openly criticized, her ability to work on the Temple project? Though the trees on the site prevented the crowd from seeing what was happening on the bridge, a group of children playing behind the gathering spotted 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Corinne walking toward the back entrance of the tent. He greeted them warmly, gently patting all of them.

Inside the tent were about 300 people seated in a circle. There wasn't an empty seat. In fact, people were outside trying to catch a glimpse of the Master and straining to hear His voice. In His talk He cast His vision into the future, stating that there would be many other temples in America and elsewhere in the world; but the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* in the Chicago area would have special significance as the first one erected in the West.

There were snags in carrying out the dedication ceremony. The golden trowel given to the Master to dig a hole for the dedication stone wasn't strong enough to break through the ground. An axe, borrowed from someone across the street, was handed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who swung it powerfully, again and again, until He broke into the earth below. Finally, a shovel was produced by a young man who had borrowed it from a work crew near the village centre. When the shovel was handed to the Master, Corinne True reportedly suggested to Him to have women participate in the ceremony. 'Abdu'l-Bahá called on Lua Getsinger to come forward. It required a second urging by the Master to draw Lua to Him. Corinne was the second one to dig up a shovelful of earth. Following her, representatives from different races and nationalities took their turn with the shovel. After placing the stone in the hole, the Master pushed the earth around it and declared that 'The Temple is already built'.

To Corinne the Master's declaration meant that there was no question about whether the Temple would ever be built. It was simply a matter of the believers focusing faithfully on the

vision He had shared with them that chilly, grey, windy day in Wilmette. To her the burning question was when the Temple would be completed. It didn't matter that no foundation had been dug or design approved. She remained optimistic that the Temple would be built in a few years.

(Nathan Rutstein, 'Corinne True, Faithful Handmaid of 'Abdu'l-Bahá)

#### **4. Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Panama**

News of the construction of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Panama, in Central America, spread through the world and reached even the remotest villages where Bahá'ís lived.

At a meeting held in a village in the jungles of Africa, the friends discussed the importance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and spoke about the one being built in Panama. An old woman who longed to contribute something towards building that Temple, went to her hut and brought what she had — three eggs.

There was a pioneer in that meeting who realized that the eggs could not be used as a donation unless they were turned into cash. So she took the eggs and paid the price — a sum equivalent to twenty-five American cents. This money was then sent in the name of the old woman to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama. A receipt, thanking the old woman for her contribution, was sent from Panama and eventually reached her in the jungle village.

When the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum was travelling in Africa, she was received by many heads of state, amongst them the famous President Kaunda of Zambia. In the course of their conversation, she told him the story of the three eggs. He was very impressed by this touching demonstration of how Bahá'ís the world over are united in what they do.

(From "Stories about Bahá'í Funds" pages 19 - 20, Gloria Faizi)

#### **5. Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Panama**

Yet another precious donation to the Temple in Panama came from two African Bahá'ís who had nothing to give except two coconuts. They walked a very long distance to the place where contributions for the Temple were being gathered and offered their humble gift. The coconuts were sold, a receipt was issued, and the money added to the rest of the amount collected.

The story reached the President of Panama at the time of the dedication of the Temple. He, too, was much impressed at the respect shown for such a humble gift, and marvelled at how Bahá'ís from all walks of life and from all over the world had helped to build the beautiful Temple in his country.

(From "Stories about Bahá'í Funds" pages 20 - 21, Gloria Faizi)

## 6. Nettie Tobin

The first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Western Hemisphere was dedicated by 'Abdu'l Bahá in early May 1912. He chose from the Temple site a stone to be used at the ground breaking ceremony, as the "cornerstone" for the future House of Worship. Below is an account of how this special stone came to be transported to the Temple land:



*Figure 1: Nettie Tobin with the "stone refused by the builder" which became the foundation stone*

platform of the car. We made two changes and finally, after endless delays, we got the baby carriage to the corner of Central Street and Sheridan Road. Here, when we pushed the carriage over a broken pavement it collapsed. As we stood despairing of getting the stone to the Temple grounds in time, since the hour had passed for the service, two boys with an express wagon came along. The boys were quickly persuaded to lend their wagon for the transportation and so we finally came to the grounds. Imagine my joy when "the stone refused by the builder" was received and used by the Master!

(Annamarie Honnold, *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 42)

A major event during the Master's visit to America was the dedication of the land for the first Bahá'í House of Worship of the western hemisphere in Wilmette, Illinois. Mrs. Nettie Tobin lived nearby in Chicago and was anxious to contribute something, despite the fact that she was not well off. The following is her account of how she solved the problem. 'I had heard that the Master was to be at the Temple site on May first, and I thought that He should have a suitable stone to mark the location of the Temple. So I went to a building under construction near my home, and seeing a pile of stones at a wall, I asked the builder if I could get a stone. He said, "Sure, help yourself, these are rejected." So I went home, got an old, small, baby carriage, loaded the stone into it and wheeled it home. Early the next morning, with the help of a Persian friend, I wheeled the carriage to the car line, and against the protests of the conductor, we got the carriage onto the



*Figure 2: The Master with Nettie's stone*

## 7. Ardishír Rustampúr

The following story took place in 1953 following the approval from the Guardian for the purchase of a piece of land, for the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár, on the outskirts of Delhi:

Two of the members of the Assembly arrived one day at the modest restaurant of Ardishír Rustampúr in Hyderabad. Ardishír had left his native village in Irán when he was only ten years old, to seek his fortune in India. Besides the clothes he wore at the time, he had the equivalent of \$1.00 in his pocket and a few pieces of dry bread. He arrived in Bombay after a difficult journey and, as he was a Zoroastrian himself, he found a job in the restaurant of a Zoroastrian from Irán. He worked hard and saved every Paise he earned, dreaming of the day when he could have a restaurant of his own. Many years later, he finally managed to open a modest restaurant in Hyderabad, where he also learned about the Bahá'í Faith.

Ardishír lost his heart to Bahá'u'lláh and longed to serve Him with an ardour as fervent as he had felt when he yearned for a business of his own.

So this was the man at whose place the two members of the National Assembly found themselves in Hyderabad. From them Ardishír came to know about the land that was to be bought for the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár and the amount of money needed. Then he asked his guests to wait for him while he went to attend to an urgent matter. When he came back he placed before them his entire capital — in cash. He had drawn from his bank all the money he had saved in his life, plus whatever cash he had in his till which he had not yet counted. The total amount was Rs. 100,190.

The two visitors were astounded by this extraordinary response to their appeal. Their discreet inquiries revealed that Ardishír had not kept a single rupee for himself. “How will you manage your business?” they asked. “This money is not mine”, Ardishír replied. “It was given to me by Bahá'u'lláh and I have been keeping it in trust. I am happy I can give it back to Him now. If it pleases Him, He will again give me what I need.” It was useless to argue with him, but his two friends begged him to keep at least Rs. 190 for his immediate needs.

(From “Stories about Bahá'í Funds” pages 23 - 24, Gloria Faizi)