

Hands of the Cause of God



Amelia Collins



Dorothy Baker



Tarāzu'llāh Samandarī

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Hands of the Cause of God

Volume I

Amelia Collins

Dorothy Baker

Tarázu'lláh Samandarí

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First Indian Edition: March 2014

ISBN: 978-81-7896-114-9



Bahá'í Publishing Trust

F-3/6, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase I, New Delhi - 110 020, India

Printed at: JK Offset Graphics Pvt. Ltd.

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Publications

eBook version: 1.0 - 2022

Dedication

To our daughter Amelia and our son Taraz: You both have been gifts to our family from the moment you were born. We pray you will always enrich the lives of those around you and follow in the footsteps of your namesakes, Amelia Collins and Tarázu'lláh Samandarí.

—Elika & Tarrant Mahony

To my children Jalal & Kiara. May you be inspired by the story of Dorothy.

—Vered Ehsani

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend their thanks to the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of India for assisting this project to become a reality.

A special thanks to Mr. Kiser Barnes for making the time to review and comment on the text for the story about Amelia Collins, and to Michelle Dammon Loyalka and Brent Poirier for their assistance in editing.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Bahá'í World Centre for providing and permitting the use of the photographs included in this book. Also thanks to Green Acre Bahá'í School for allowing the use of the photograph of Dorothy Baker on page 18.

Our gratitude to Nancy Wong who took the photograph of the room of Bahá'u'lláh in the Mansion of Bahji, and to Brigitte Aiff for graciously giving permission to use her lovely photograph of the Collins Gate. Our deepest thanks go to Alice Williams for her beautiful artistry in coloring the photographs that adorn this book.

Finally, our heartfelt love and appreciation to our families, in particular, to our children – Amelia, Taraz, Jalal and Kiara – for inspiring us to write these stories.

Introduction to the Hands of the Cause of God

The Hands of the Cause of God had a very special role in history: their lives were completely focused on spreading and protecting the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh gave this title to four wonderful believers in Persia (modern day Iran). By giving this title, He raised them to a high position of service. These four souls helped the friends in Persia to teach the Faith and expand its influence, even though there were great dangers and difficulties. They also prepared the way for the first administrative institution in the Bahá'í world: the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran.

Following the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the Hands helped the believers understand that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the Centre of the Covenant and that they needed to obey Him. In this way, the Hands protected the Faith from the forces of disunity and division.

'Abdu'l-Bahá did not appoint any living person as a Hand. However, He did mention that certain outstanding believers had reached that station; He only did this after they had died. Before passing away, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a very important document—His Will and Testament. In this document, 'Abdu'l-Bahá outlined the role and function of the Hands, and gave Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Faith, the authority to appoint new Hands and to direct their activities. In particular, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

“The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.”

During the time he was Guardian, Shoghi Effendi appointed thirty-two individuals as Hands of the Cause of God. When Shoghi Effendi passed away in 1957, twenty-seven Hands were still alive. These wonderful souls faithfully guided the Bahá'í world through one of the

most difficult periods in its history. They protected the Bahá'í Faith from people who tried to divide the believers, and they prepared the Bahá'ís to elect the Universal House of Justice in 1963. The House of Justice has best expressed the importance of that service:

“The entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline, such absolute loyalty, and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of a religion finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide. The debt of gratitude which mankind for generations, nay, ages to come, owes to this handful of grief-stricken, steadfast, heroic souls is beyond estimation.”

The following pages tell the stories of three of those beloved souls: Amelia Collins, Dorothy Baker, and Tarázu'lláh Samandarí.

Hand of the Cause of God Amelia Collins

by **Elika Mahony**

“... from the bounties of His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh, My hope is that thou mayest daily advance in the Kingdom, that thou mayest become a heavenly soul, confirmed by the breaths of the Holy Spirit, and may erect a structure that shall eternally remain firm and unshakable.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a letter written to Amelia Collins in 1919

What should she write?

Amelia Collins hardly slept the whole night as she wondered what to include in the letter. It was too much to imagine writing to the beloved Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá!

The year was 1919, and Amelia, or “Milly”, had just accepted the Bahá’í Faith. In those days, Bahá’ís had the bounty of writing to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to ask for ‘confirmation and strength’. Milly wanted to write to Him, but she didn’t know what she should say. At last, after much thought, she wrote down a few words and finally went to sleep.

When she woke up the next morning, she opened the curtains and saw the sun shining very brightly. Then she thought to herself, “The sun shines on the world with such power and beauty. Does it need a letter?”

At that moment, Milly knew in her heart that there was no need to write to the Master. She was sure that He already knew how much she loved Him. Full of confidence and faith, she tore up her letter. A few weeks later, she received her first Tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá!



Side view portrait of a young Amelia Collins. Date and venue of photo unknown.

After the Master passed away in 1921, Shoghi Effendi became the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. In His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told the friends that they should always try to make Shoghi Effendi happy. Milly took those words to heart and strove to follow them. Pleasing the Guardian became Milly's greatest desire.

She explained, "Whatever step I took in my life... any trip taken, even any thought, I would first ask myself whether my words, trip or thought would make him happy. When I was sure, then I would take action without fear."

The Master's advice to make Shoghi Effendi happy truly became Milly's guide in life!

Amelia Collins traveled far and wide to serve the Bahá'í Faith. Between 1937 and 1953 she visited almost every Bahá'í Centre in the United States and Canada. Everywhere she went, she did her best to help people understand the Faith better.



Hand of the Cause of God Amelia Collins with Masoud Berdjis, her niece, and Doris Lohse in Zürich, Switzerland. On her travels to different parts of the USA and Europe, 1945-1954.

The Guardian wrote many loving, encouraging letters to Milly. He recognized her “steadfastness in service” and her “selflessness and devotion” in the work she did for the Bahá’í Faith. The Guardian even wrote that her services inspired him in *his* work!

Not only was Milly generous with her time, she was also very generous in giving money to the Fund. However, she never wanted anyone to know about her significant contributions and always asked that her donations be kept confidential. When Milly sent money to help build a dome for the Shrine of the Báb in 1944, Shoghi Effendi told her that she was the first person to contribute and that this did not surprise him at all!



Hand of the Cause of God Amelia Collins with Mary Stevison and a Native American believer in Omaha Indian Reservation, Macy, Nebraska, USA, 1949.

Milly's devotion also resulted in a childhood wish coming true. When Milly was a child, she always wanted a gate. As a young girl, she built a tiny house for her dolls and tried to make a gate for it, too. Later when her husband, Tom, built a home in New England, he asked her if she would like to have a gate. But she didn't want to spend the money to buy one at that time.

When Milly became a Bahá'í, she forgot about her wish for a gate. Instead, she became immersed in the work of the Faith and felt detached from worldly things. Many years later, while serving at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel, she offered the Guardian a contribution for his personal needs. Some time passed. Then one day, she received a letter

from Shoghi Effendi. It contained a photograph of a very large, beautiful gate at the beginning of the path leading to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. He'd purchased the gate with the money she had given him. Today, this gate is known as the Collins Gate.





Collins Gate at Bahji.

Even though Amelia Collins was wealthy, she lived simply. In November 1950, Shoghi Effendi asked her to move to Haifa to help him with his work. She lived in a small room in the Master's house. She always felt excited and thankful to be there because she was near her beloved Guardian. During this time, Milly's love for the Guardian grew even deeper. She never had children of her own. In her heart, she adopted Shoghi Effendi as her own son, so great was her love for him.

However, because of her closeness to him, she was very conscious of the great burden that Shoghi Effendi carried. She didn't want to add to these demands or take up his time unnecessarily, even in small ways.

Whenever the Guardian was walking through the house, she would stay in her room so that he wouldn't have to stop and talk with her.

When the Guardian asked Milly how she was, she responded by saying, "My condition is not important. How is the Guardian?"

Whatever the Guardian asked of her, she did with great joy and instant obedience. For her "magnificent international services" and "exemplary devotion", Shoghi Effendi honored Amelia Collins by appointing her a Hand of the Cause of God.

When Shoghi Effendi passed away in England on November 4, 1957, all the Bahá'ís of the world were heart-broken. But Shoghi Effendi had told Milly the last time she saw him alive, "Do not be sad, Milly." As always, Milly was faithful to his wishes. Although she missed Shoghi Effendi very much, she remained calm and steadfast, providing comfort to others, and especially supporting the Guardian's wife, Rúhíyyih Khánum, through those very difficult times.

When Milly left Haifa to attend the Guardian's funeral in England, she carried rose petals from the Threshold of the Shrine of the Báb. Those same rose petals were spread over the Guardian's body before he was buried.





Hand of the Cause of God Amelia Collins in Bahjí with Hand of the Cause Ugo Giachery, 1950s c.

Milly served in the Holy Land until her death. She was dedicated to her lifelong effort to live a true Bahá'í life of obedience and service, despite her poor health.

She was often sick and in great pain from arthritis. The intensity of the pain could have kept her in bed, but she was determined to serve. She suffered in silence, even though the pain in her feet, joints and fingers grew increasingly worse. Every summer, she traveled to Arizona for a few months. The dry, warm climate helped to ease the arthritis. But once she returned to Haifa, her condition worsened.

One evening, Shoghi Effendi was explaining to the gathered friends about a spiritual crusade that would soon be launched around the world. Milly watched with growing fascination and joy as the Guardian rolled out his map and explained his vision for the Ten Year Crusade.

Finally, she could hold herself back no longer. Despite her age and poor health, she exclaimed, "Where can I go?" The Guardian lovingly replied to her, "Your place is here."

After the passing of the Guardian, the Hands of the Cause of God managed the affairs of the Faith until the election of the Universal House of Justice. When the Hands of the Cause met each year in Haifa, Milly always attended. At times, she was in too much pain to sit and would ask for an injection so that she could participate in the meetings.

In 1961, Milly was so frail that the other Hands thought she would not be able to attend, especially as she was traveling from Arizona. But Milly's

spirit was far stronger than her body. She was determined to carry out her duty to the Guardian. She arrived in Haifa in time for the meeting, but she was so weak that she had to be carried upstairs to the meeting in a chair. Nothing would prevent her from serving the Faith she loved so much.





Amelia Collins

Her weak health frustrated her. She didn't want to remain behind while others had the bounty of fulfilling the plans of the Ten Year Crusade. She wanted to travel and teach.

At times, she wondered if her life had any use. In response to this, Hand of the Cause Abu'l-Qásim Faizi compared her to the stove that was in the office of the Hands of the Cause of God. It was a cold winter day and the stove was burning, warming up the room.

“Does the stove make speeches?” Mr. Faizi asked. “Does it travel? Never!... It gives its heat to us very generously and in that warmth we work... we need spiritual heat to give us energy and power to go on... Now dearest, you are our spiritual stove. You burn and we speak, write, travel.”

These words brought great comfort to Milly's yearning heart. She was indeed like a spiritual stove for all those who met her, providing comfort, support, and a guiding light.

During the last days of her life, Milly was bedridden. Even still, she was always eager for news about the progress of the plans. Although she couldn't attend the meetings of the Hands, she read all the letters and signed the documents. The last letter she signed only shows “Am...” as her trembling and aching fingers were not able to continue.

On January 1, 1962, Amelia Collins passed away in the arms of Rúhiyyih Khánúm. Her body was laid to rest in the Bahá'í cemetery in Haifa next

to several of her fellow Hands of the Cause. Milly was eighty-eight years old when she passed on to the Abha Kingdom.

Shoghi Effendi had previously written words that remained true of Milly for her entire Bahá'í life: "Your steadfastness in service, your selflessness and devotion to the work you are engaged in greatly encourage me and inspire me in my work. Your many services, past and present, will ever be remembered with praise, gladness and gratitude."



Hand of the Cause of God Amelia Collins on a visit to Israel, 1950s c.

Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker

by **Vered Ehsani**



Young Dorothy

“Your grandchild is My own daughter,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Mother Beecher. “You must train her for Me.”

A devoted Bahá’í, Mother Beecher was determined to obey the Master. Even so, she could not have known the incredible impact these words would have on the life of her grandchild, Dorothy.

As a child, Dorothy Beecher Baker seemed like other girls her age. She played with the same toys and enjoyed the same games. But her path ended up being very different from her childhood friends. It was a path that touched the whole Bahá’í world.

When Dorothy was thirteen years old, Mother Beecher took her to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in New York City. She was going to see and hear the beloved Master! Dorothy should have been excited, but she was not. Actually, she was very scared. As she and Mother Beecher approached the house where the meeting was, Dorothy fearfully thought, “What if He looks at me? If He speaks to me, I will die!”

Dorothy dared not look up at the Master. Even when He motioned for her to sit on a stool near Him, she kept her eyes focused on her shoes. As she sat there trying to avoid eye contact, she had a strange feeling. She could feel the love coming from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Now she wanted to be very close to that love. She didn’t want to be separated from it. She looked up from the ground, and stared at the Master as He spoke to the guests. For days after, she could not stop thinking about His face and His voice.

A few days later, she wrote to the Master. In her letter, she asked to be allowed to serve Him and the Bahá’í Faith. She signed the letter, ‘Your little follower, Dorothy Beecher.’

In His reply, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote:

Dearest child, your goal is great and God is All-Bountiful. My hope is this: that you succeed in your desire.

Dorothy’s spiritual journey had begun. Like any journey, it had its difficult times. But each difficulty brought a spiritual victory and new understanding.

Dorothy is now very well known for being an active Bahá'í and an excellent teacher of the Faith. Initially though, Dorothy was not so active. After marrying a widower, Frank Baker, in 1920, she spent much of her time on household tasks and child rearing. She knew these services for her family were very praiseworthy and important. Yet she felt there was something missing.

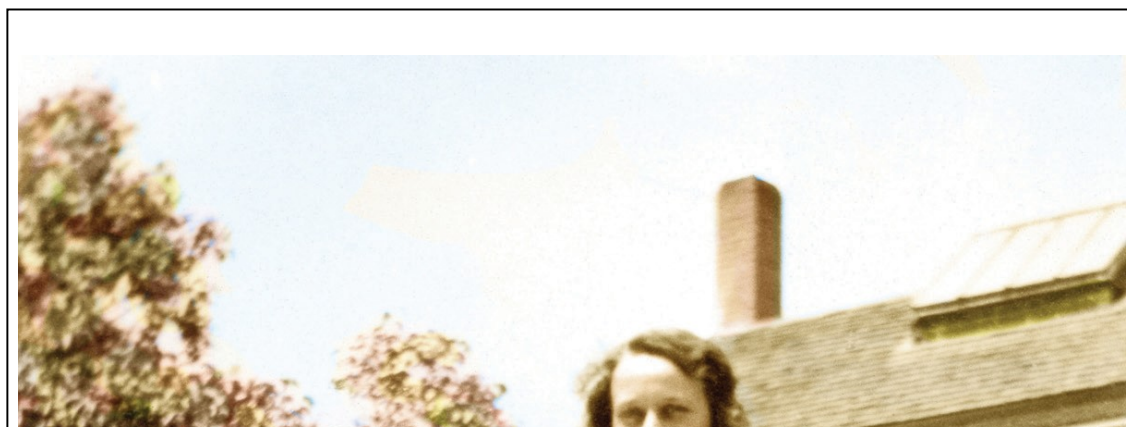
Then disaster struck. Very suddenly, Sara, one of Frank's two children from his first marriage, became ill with leukemia. Within a very short time, she died. It was a terrible, difficult period for the family. In this sad time, Dorothy had a wonderful vision. Several days after Sara's soul had left this world, Dorothy awoke during the night. She saw a bright light filling the room. In that light was Sara, happy and healthy. She had a message for her father:

“Tell him how happy I am.”

Sara's death reminded the Baker family that this material world is fragile. The priorities of life should be the spiritual things. The Bakers began to actively serve the Cause of God. But still, the sadness remained.

So the family moved to Lima, Ohio, for a fresh start. The house they bought had a large “B” etched into the glass of the front door. Dorothy believed that the letter stood for ‘Baker’ and ‘Bahá'u'lláh’! Shortly after, Mother Beecher came to visit, and Dorothy asked her to live with them.

Mother Beecher was happy as she now had a home. More importantly, she had the opportunity to continue Dorothy's spiritual training. She prayed for her granddaughter to become an active Bahá'í.





Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker, probably in her garden.

A new difficulty came into her life, followed by an even greater spiritual victory. In 1929, Dorothy received a shock. Her doctor found a spot on her lungs that could be tuberculosis, a dangerous disease. A few days

later, she discovered a lump in her breast that could be cancer. She didn't tell anyone.

She believed that she didn't have much time left to live and decided to attend the National Convention in Wilmette. She hoped to find some peace of mind there. Instead, her emotional distress increased. She wondered if her life had been worthwhile. On the third day, unable to sit any longer, she walked out of the meeting and wandered around the grounds. A friend followed her. As they walked together, she told him about her illness.

He then asked her, "Dorothy, are you willing to leave this world without rendering some great service to the Cause?"

That powerful question unleashed deep, and sometimes dismal, thoughts. She realized that she had not committed herself fully, completely, and constantly to the Cause of God. Her friend's question burned in her mind and heart. She went to the spot where the cornerstone of the future Bahá'í House of Worship had been placed by Abdu'l-Bahá.

"The few minutes at the shrine will never be forgotten," she wrote. "How my throat ached. What those moments taught me cannot be put into words. I think my heart was laid at the Master's feet there."

That same day, she told a friend, "I'm a spiritual criminal. I have lived uncommitted." Much later, at a Bahá'í Summer School, she shared her understanding of the commitment required. "We cannot be casual Bahá'ís," she explained. "Even if we have only a crumb to give, we must not withhold it. We can keep only what we give."





Portrait of the Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker.

Any lack of commitment she had before this Convention was very quickly replaced by dedication. She climbed to a new level of spiritual strength. With Mother Beecher's assistance, she re-dedicated herself to studying the Bahá'í Writings daily. She spent a lot of time studying and

preparing for the two weekly classes held in Lima for new believers. As she slowly regained her health, her determination increased. She devoted herself to serving the Cause of God and became an active teacher in her community.

She pushed herself to serve constantly and selflessly. She was determined to teach others about the Bahá'í Faith. Even when she went into hospital for a surgery, she taught the nurses, all of whom were nuns!

As her involvement increased, so did her responsibilities. She served on the Local and National Bahá'í Assemblies, as well as on various committees. She gave hundreds of talks. Before each talk, she always prayed, especially the Tablet of Ahmad. She relied on the power of divine assistance.

But she still had doubts about her ability to do everything, and to do everything well. Then she had a very strange experience. She had gone to the dentist's office, as she had some problems with her upper teeth. While under the anesthetic, she saw a spinning round chart with different colored spaces on the wall.

While she watched, a message appeared: "Mrs. Bernstein cannot keep her appointment." When the anesthetic wore off, she heard a nurse say, "Mrs. Bernstein just called. She can't come in today." Then Dorothy heard another voice that did not come from the office: "You see there is a time for everything."

This strange experience removed her worry. Now, she knew she was able to manage all her responsibilities. She went forward, trusting that there was time for everything and that she didn't need to be afraid of failing. Instead of concentrating on her weaknesses, she concentrated on God.

She ignored what she called "useless thoughts" of fear, doubt, and discouragement. Strongly believing that the Faith needed everyone's contributions, she pushed herself over her doubts and onwards.



Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker giving a talk during her visit to Karachi (now in Pakistan), 9 January, 1954.

She completely relied on prayer, for she felt she was too weak otherwise. In the morning before a meeting of the National Spiritual Assembly, she would say the Long Obligatory Prayer and the Tablet of Ahmad nine times for unity and guidance for the meeting. Even when she was about to have a casual conversation, she said the Greatest Name.

There are numerous stories about the impact of Dorothy's prayers. One such story involved the son of a Bahá'í couple. The young man had a nervous breakdown and required special treatment at the state mental hospital.

Dorothy offered to travel with the upset parents as they drove their son to the institution. She sat in the back seat with the anxious young man. He seemed out of his mind with fear and kept talking aloud about all the terrible ideas that rushed through his thoughts. When Dorothy reached out a hand to him, he tried to escape by throwing himself against the door and clawing at the window.

Silently, she began to repeat the short healing prayer by Bahá'u'lláh and the 'Remove of difficulties' prayer by the Báb. Gradually, the young man quieted down and eventually laid his head on her lap. When they arrived at the hospital, the young man calmly told Dorothy, "I can never thank you for what you have done for me." A month later, he was released from hospital. The doctors didn't find any sign of mental illness.

Dorothy had made great progress on her spiritual path by overcoming fear and doubt and relying on prayer. However, she still had to face one of the greatest dangers that any soul can face—the insistent self.

By the mid 1930s, Dorothy was well known in the American Bahá'í community. She was a great speaker and gave excellent classes at summer schools. At the end of her talks or classes, audience members always approached her to praise her and ask further questions. Without really realizing it herself, she began to enjoy the praise.

In 1936, she taught summer classes at Green Acre Bahá'í School. As the audience began to leave the room, Dorothy saw Louis Gregory approaching her. Louis Gregory was an outstanding Bahá'í teacher and a future Hand of the Cause of God.

"That was a very good course, Dorothy," he told her. She was thrilled at his praise. Before she could respond, he continued, "You thought so, too, didn't you? Remember, the moment you begin to think it is Dorothy Baker who is accomplishing this work, that moment your service to Bahá'u'lláh ends."





Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker.

Dorothy was deeply stunned at the words. Worse still, she was horrified to realize the words were true. The subtle dangers of vanity and ego had been quietly creeping into her service.

And yet, the light that others saw was *not* her light, but God's light. All she could do was reflect it. She vowed that before giving any speeches, she would first turn to God and never speak from the self.



Dorothy Baker in a happy mood

By trying to develop sincere humility and purity of motive, she took another leap along her spiritual path of selfless, God-centered service to humanity.

In 1951, Dorothy was once again pushed into another realm of service, but this time by the Guardian himself. At the Bahá'í National Centre of the USA, Edna True, daughter of Hand of the Cause of God Corinne True, received a cable from Shoghi Effendi. She called Dorothy to read out the list of people who had been appointed Hands of the Cause of God. The moment Edna read out Dorothy's name, the following conversation occurred:

"Wait, Eddie. You're kidding," Dorothy said.

"I'm not kidding," Edna replied.

"Yes, you are. You're kidding. You must be!"

"Please be serious, Dorothy. I'm not kidding."

"You've got to be. There's no reason why he would appoint me. Eddie, I think he means you."

"Well, you just wait and see. There isn't anything more I can tell you except that it's sitting right here in front of me, dear, and your name is on it."

"You'll find it's a mistake. It can't be true."

When Dorothy finally accepted the truth, she lost her voice for three days. Leroy Ioas, also appointed a Hand of the Cause at the same time, commented, "When Dorothy heard, she lost her voice. And when Dorothy loses her voice, the birds stop singing. The world is silent."

Dorothy travelled all over the world, teaching the Bahá'í Faith and encouraging the Bahá'í communities. A number of people, including her children, decided to pioneer because of her encouragement.

In August 1953, she and Frank decided to follow that path and pioneer. They chose to go to Grenada in the Caribbean in order to help establish the Faith on that island. But first, the Guardian requested that Dorothy go

to India to attend a conference. She then travelled around the country, giving talks wherever she went.



Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker with friends during the Inter-Continental Teaching Conference held in Kampala, Uganda. 11-18 February, 1953.

Those audiences who saw her on that trip were the last to hear Dorothy's inspirational words. Like her life, her death seemed to be guided by higher forces. Louise, her daughter, recalled a day about twenty years before when Dorothy had declared her wish:

“I hope people don’t make a shrine of my grave after I’m buried!” Dorothy said. “If I could really have my choice, I would be buried at sea... And if I could choose the sea, then it would be the Mediterranean, whose waves will lap eternally on the shores of Akka.”

Not long before her death, she told a friend, “There is only one thing in this life that I dread, and that is growing old. I hope when I go, I shall go with my boots on.”

Her last public appearance was in Karachi, Pakistan, where she spoke to the Bahá’ís. When she asked for volunteers to leave their home and share the Faith in other places, nineteen people volunteered. Touched by this, Dorothy sincerely told them, “Oh, dear! I have nothing to give you! I give you my life. I give you my love.”

That evening, she began her voyage to join her husband in their pioneering post. On the way to London, twenty minutes out of Rome, the plane exploded in mid-air over the Mediterranean Sea and crashed into the water. Dorothy’s above-mentioned wishes were all granted.



Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker with friends during her visit to Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. 1953 Circa.

In a letter written in 1951, Dorothy expressed the following sentiments:

“The Bounty of Bahá’u’lláh was first conferred through the faith and generosity of a paternal grandmother, Mother Beecher, with whom I visited His Holiness ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the city of New York. ... In that hour all fear was replaced by a passion for all people. Beside this, only one thing remained; that Bahá’u’lláh is the All-Glorious redeemer and His power is equal to all things. This fixed principle became, and still is, the fulcrum and pillar of an otherwise impotent life. Faithfully, in the service of the Guardian, Dorothy Baker.”



*Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker in a group picture, holding
the Greatest Name in the Bahá'í Centre of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.
5 December, 1953.*

Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandarí

by **Tarrant Mahony**

“Tell us the story of the orange!”

Every time, everywhere it was the same. Always the story of the orange. How the friends longed to hear it! And so he told it hundreds, probably thousands of times, with love, and with patience. He never tired of telling the story, and we never tired of hearing it.

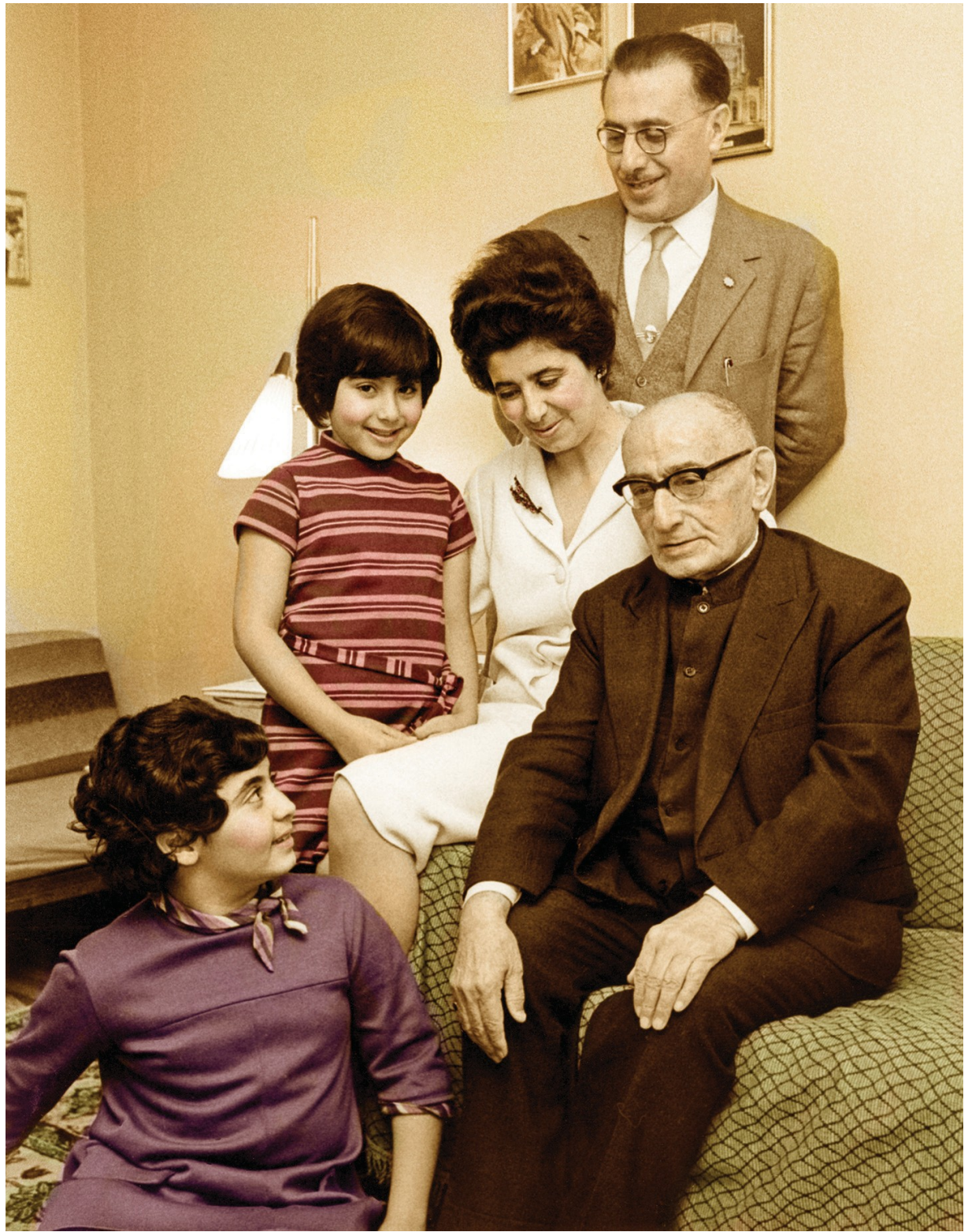
Tarázu'lláh Samandarí was born into a distinguished Bahá'í family. Throughout his life, he never wavered in his service to the Cause. Unique he was in many ways. His family name, Samandar, means *the phoenix*—he who lives in the fire and yet is not consumed by it. This name was given to his father by Bahá'u'lláh. The Blessed Beauty also bestowed his given name, Tarázu'lláh, *the ornament of God*, upon him.

Throughout his long life, Tarázu'lláh Samandarí served the Centre of the Faith with exemplary devotion. While a youth, he went on pilgrimage and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Following the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, he served 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Master, and then Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian. After the passing of the beloved Guardian, Tarázu'lláh served faithfully as one of the Hands of the Cause of God, helping to prepare the Bahá'ís of the world to establish the Universal House of Justice in 1963. Thereafter and until his passing in 1968, he served the Universal House of Justice with love and distinction.

And always he shared with the friends, young and old alike, his priceless memories of the days that he spent in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.

The story of the orange

Tarázu'lláh went on pilgrimage in 1891 and spent six months in Akka “during the Days of God” (meaning when Bahá'u'lláh was alive). He remained there for one month following the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.



Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandarí with his son, Dr. Mihdí Samandarí, granddaughter and great-granddaughters. Nashville, Tennessee, USA, 1967.

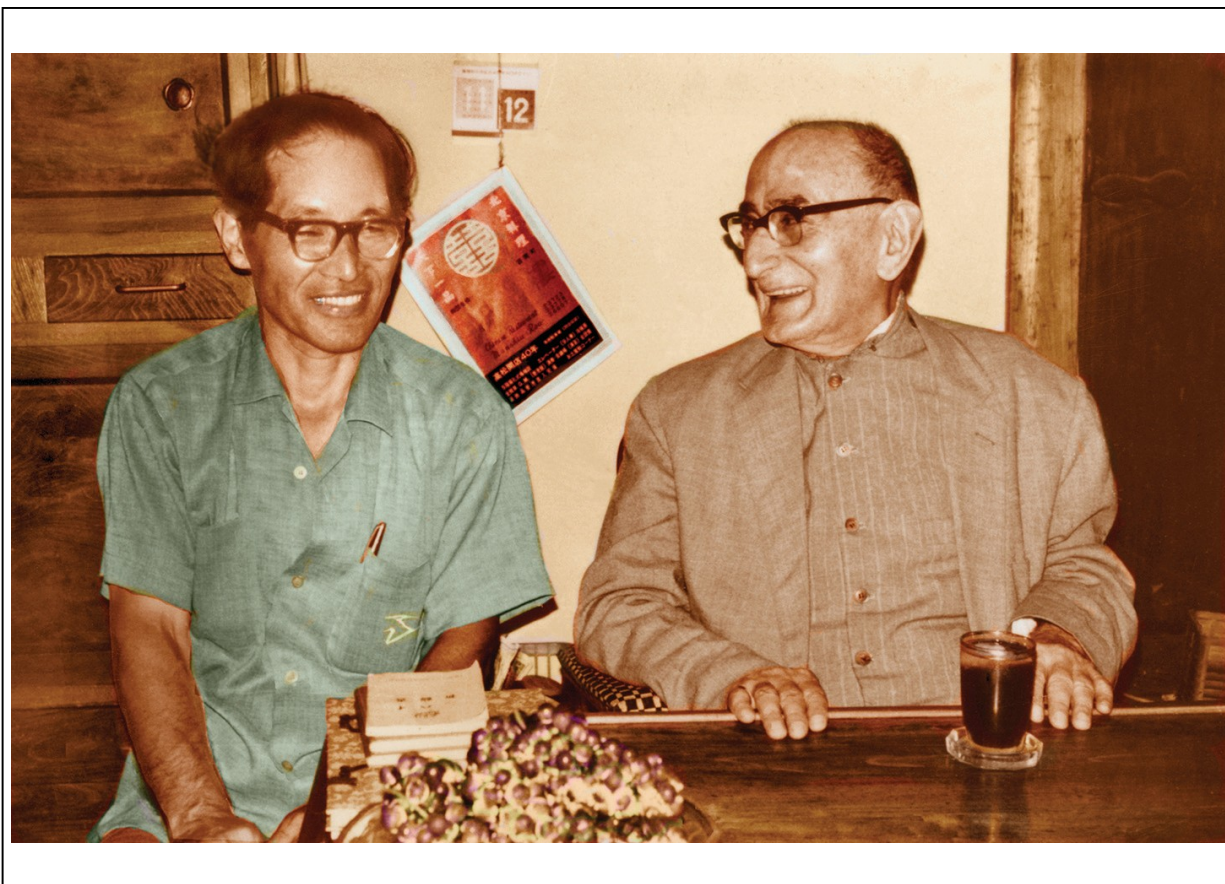
He had the inestimable bounty of witnessing the revelation of Tablets by Bahá'u'lláh as well as being present when Bahá'u'lláh addressed the Bahá'ís during feasts and celebrations.

In his memoirs, Mr. Samandarí recounted attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. “On one of those days, I was standing in the tent, facing the Blessed Beauty, but I could not hear Him well. Some of the other friends were also standing, and He asked them to be seated. I decided that the small storeroom of the tent was the best and nearest place to the seat of the Blessed Beauty. So I managed to move quickly from the back of the tent into that small room. I was there alone, and from that place—while standing there—I could see His blessed face and hear His words clearly.

“The meeting ended with oranges served to those present. Bahá'u'lláh rose from His seat. I came out quickly from my place in the storeroom and reached the door of the tent as He was going out. My arms were folded across my chest in reverence, like a statue. As His Most Pure Being passed out of the tent, His blessed eyes fell upon this worthless gnat, standing by the door. He addressed me in His sweet voice, ‘Marhaba!’ Showing His utmost kindness, He presented me with the orange that was in His hand. He then proceeded to the Mansion.

“Some of the youth who were present saw that the orange in the hand of the Blessed Beauty had been given to me. So they ran after me in an effort to take it away from me. I ran round and round the Mansion; and as they ran after me I ate the orange and finished it before they caught me. I gobbled it all down and was not generous to any of them!”

In his older years, even into his nineties, Tarázu'lláh Samandarí travelled extensively to serve the Faith. Friends much younger had a hard time keeping up with his pace, and they marveled at his strength and endurance. “Where do you get your energy?” they would ask the Hand of the Cause. “From the orange of Bahá'u'lláh!” was his delightful reply.



Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandarí with a Japanese believer. Japan, 1966.

“Do you not meet the Master?”

During his stay in the Holy Land, Tarázu'lláh resided in Akka and had the bounty of regularly being in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. However, Bahá'u'lláh resided in the Mansion of Bahji. For a period of time, Tarázu'lláh did not have the blessing of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. After some two weeks, Tarázu'lláh went to the Mansion where he requested permission to visit Bahá'u'lláh, saying that he had not had the honor of an audience for the previous two weeks.

Trembling with excitement as he entered the room of Bahá'u'lláh, Tarázu'lláh heard the Blessed Beauty address him, “Welcome, Taraz Effendi!” Bahá'u'lláh expressed His kindness and stroked the hair and face of Tarázu'lláh, and enquired about his health.

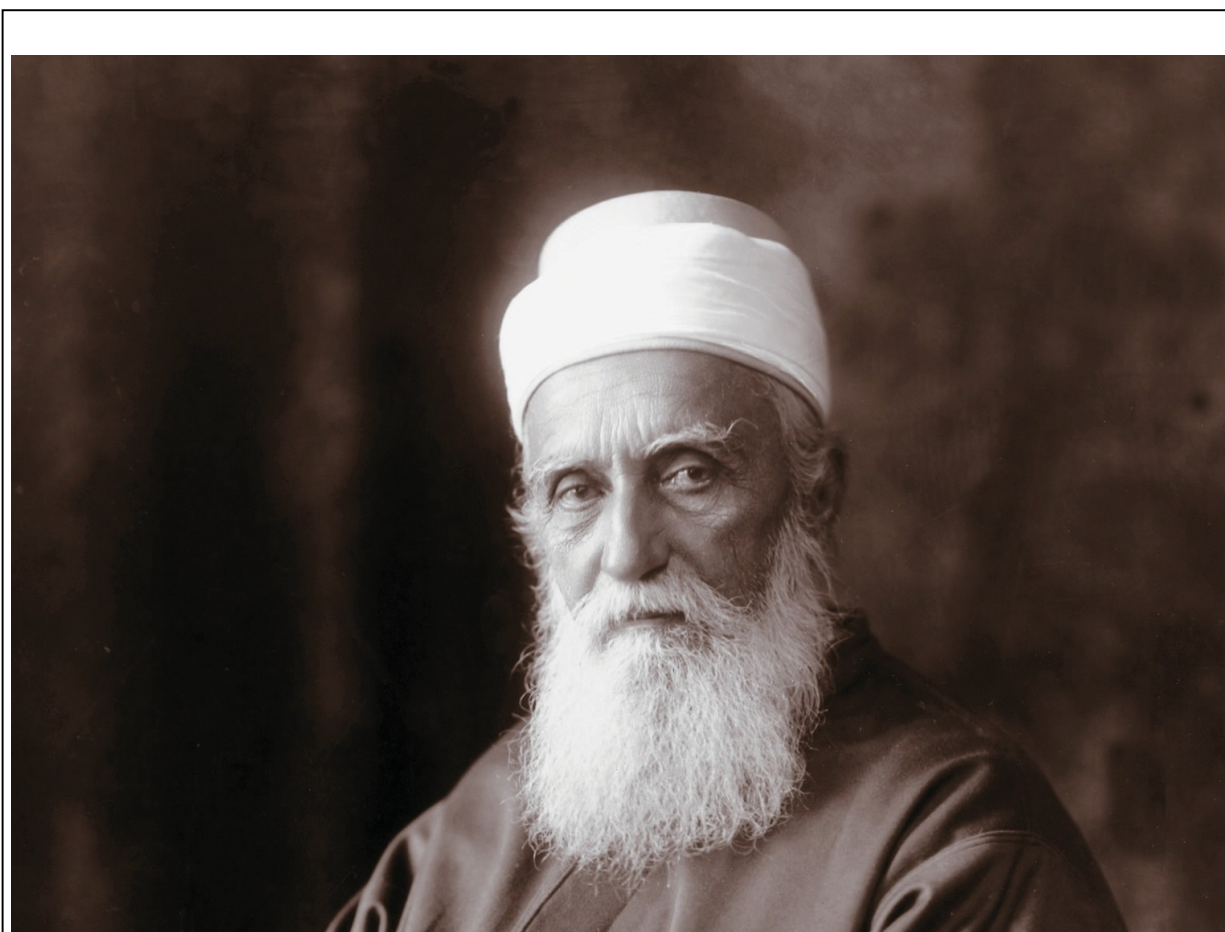
He then said: “You have complained that you have had no audience with Me. Have you not been in the presence of Sarkar Aqa, the Master (‘Abdu’l-Bahá), in Akka?”

“Every day and every evening, I have this honor,” he replied.

“Then why have you complained?” asked Bahá’u’lláh.

Tarázu’lláh knew in his heart that Bahá’u’lláh was telling him that to be in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the same as attaining His own presence. He carried that lesson in his heart throughout his many years of service to the Master.

Later, Mr. Samandarí wrote of that experience, “I was blessed by Him repeatedly that day, and truly it was He who sowed the love of the Covenant in my inmost heart, and wrote it there with the words of His holy mouth.”





‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh

Tarázu’lláh Samandarí was present in Akka at the time of the Ascension of the Blessed Beauty, when the Manifestation of God left this earthly plane for His heavenly abode. A few days before Bahá’u’lláh ascended, all the resident believers and pilgrims were given the honor of attaining His presence. Tarázu’lláh recounted in his memoirs:

“The following verses from the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, were read to us:

‘Say: Let not your hearts be perturbed, O people, when the glory of My Presence is withdrawn, and the ocean of My utterance is stilled. In My presence amongst you there is a wisdom, and in My absence there is yet another; inscrutable to all but God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing.

Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of our favored angels. ’

“Bahá’u’lláh spoke further of the importance of unity, love, and friendship, and urged us to avoid disunity, discord, and schism.

“As we heard these words and clear verses from the mouth of the Beloved of the world, the effect on us can be imagined... we left the room in deepest sorrow, burning from separation from the Beloved. No pen can describe the sadness and grief that encompassed my soul on that day. After this, I contracted a fever and became ill.

“That was the last visit of this feeble one to the holy presence of the Blessed Beauty—glorified be His majesty and glory!”



Room of Bahá'u'lláh in the Mansion of Bahji.

Defender of the Covenant: Service during the Days of the Master

Tarázu'lláh made two pilgrimages during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, once in 1898 and again in 1906. The latter pilgrimage was at a time of great danger for 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land due to the opposition to the Faith created by the Covenant-breakers. The Covenant-breakers sought to undermine the authority that Bahá'u'lláh had bestowed upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

To protect the Faith and the spiritual health of the believers, 'Abdu'l-Bahá instructed Tarázu'lláh to travel throughout Iran for the purpose of meeting with the friends and assisting them to become firmly devoted to the Covenant. For five years, Tarázu'lláh carried out this service, traveling by horse, mule, donkey, and by foot, visiting the friends in remote villages and cities. The resulting unity and resolve of the Bahá'ís in Iran during this period was in no small part due to his tireless, sacrificial services.

When his task was complete, and he returned again to the Holy Land, 'Abdu'l-Bahá showered him with love and appreciation, saying that his services would never be forgotten.



Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandari with 'Alí Nakhavání. Bahjí, 1961.

His love of the Holy Writings

Another valuable service that Mr. Samandari rendered during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to collect and authenticate the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In those days, access to the Writings of the Faith was primarily through hand-written copies of Tablets written to individual believers, as photocopying and mass publication did not yet exist. Thus, in a time when the mere possession of Bahá'í books could endanger an individual's life, Tarázu'lláh was able to compile and leave to history eighteen volumes of priceless Bahá'í Writings, all written in his outstanding and beautiful handwriting.

No doubt this was the outcome of the simple yet powerful education he received as a boy from the great scholar and calligrapher, Jinab-i-

Mu'allim. As Mr. Samandarí later recalled regarding his early training, "...gradually I developed a strong love for inscribing the scriptures. At the age of twelve I invariably got up four hours before dawn and occupied myself with copying the holy scriptures. I felt extremely joyful and not at all tired. Later on, even while traveling on the road, in a train, in a ship, or during stoppages, I was busy copying the holy writings..."



Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandarí penning a calligraphy to be presented to the Conference on the Aged in Japan, 1966.

O ye Homeless Wanderers in the Path of God!

In 1927, at the request of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tehran, and with the approval of Shoghi Effendi, Tarázu'lláh resumed his

travels for the Faith. This period of service was to last for the remaining forty-one years of his life. During this time, he had no permanent home. No doubt it was referring to souls such as Mr. Samandarí that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote:

“O ye homeless wanderers in the Path of God! Prosperity, contentment, and freedom, however much desired and conducive to the gladness of the human heart, can in no wise compare with the trials of homelessness and adversity in the pathway of God; for such exile and banishment are blessed by the divine favour, and are surely followed by the mercy of Providence. The joy of tranquility in one’s home, and the sweetness of freedom from all cares shall pass away, whilst the blessing of homelessness shall endure forever, and its far-reaching results shall be made manifest.”

In 1951, Tarázu’lláh Samandarí was among the first group of twelve believers to be appointed as Hands of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi, who wrote regarding Tarázu’lláh Samandarí this incomparable tribute:

“The brilliant, the continuous and sincere services of that chosen one of the Lord of all beings are engraved on my heart and inscribed in permanent characters in the records of the Abha Kingdom; the passage of ages and centuries cannot efface them...”



Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandarí digging the ground with a pick axe to place the foundation stone for the New Era High School. Panchgani, India, 12 March, 1967.

His unfailing courtesy and delightful sense of humor

Tarázu'lláh Samandarí personified courtesy, dignity, and kindness. He rested only to gain strength to work and was always ready to serve others. He also possessed a strong will and delightful sense of humor. In his older years, he was known to say, with a smile on his face, “Different organs of my body are trying to resign, one by one. I tell them: ‘I won’t accept this! As you came together, you must leave together!’” Indeed, his organs obeyed — his mind was lucid, his sight clear, his voice ringing, his hearing sharp, his step firm and swift, his hand steady, and his spirit radiant until the end.

In the last year of his life, at age ninety-three, he traveled extensively throughout the United States, teaching the Faith and encouraging the believers. During a visit to Los Angeles, he was interviewed by the Los Angeles Times, which reported, “Aged Persian likens self to Apostle Peter: There is only one difference, he asserts; Apostle ‘heard the Son, I saw the Father.’” But Mr. Samandarí was reportedly unhappy that the newspaper had not included his full statement: “Yet I [Tarázu'lláh Samandarí] am not worthy to tie the sandals of him [the Apostle Peter].”

During that same trip, Mr. Samandarí spoke at a campus event organized by the Bahá'í College Club at UCLA. His visit left an unforgettable impression upon one of the Bahá'í students who helped organize the talk and who was concerned that the turnout — based on his experience of Bahá'í events during those days — might be embarrassingly small:

“When the time of the meeting arrived... the three or four seekers and less than a dozen campus Bahá'ís offered a poor showing. Here was the Hand of the Cause of God come to give the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to virtually an empty room... Unfazed by the circumstances, he strode to the front of the hall with his usual quick and commanding motions. Standing in front, ignoring the microphone, as was his custom, he delivered his talk in Persian at the top of his voice. He shouted each sentence aloud, followed by the softer translation of his son. The effect was astounding!

Everyone in the room bolted erect in their seats. Students from outside, hearing all the noise, came into the room to find out what all the commotion was. They stayed, hypnotized by the performance. By the end of the hour, the hall was full...”



Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandari with his wife, Tarazieh and grandson, Sohail (centre) and son, Mihdí (right); date and venue unknown.

With Sorrowful Hearts...

On September 3, 1968, having lived to participate in the conference held to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land, the brilliant soul of Tarázu'lláh Samandari departed this world. His mortal remains were buried in the Bahá'í cemetery in Haifa. The Universal House of Justice cabled the Bahá'í world:

“WITH SORROWFUL HEARTS ANNOUNCE PASSING HAND
CAUSE GOD SHIELD HIS FAITH DEARLY LOVED
TARÁZU'LLÁH SAMANDARÍ... FAITHFUL TO LAST BREATH
INSTRUCTIONS HIS LORD HIS MASTER HIS GUARDIAN HE
CONTINUED SELFLESS DEVOTED SERVICE UNABATED UNTIL
FALLING ILL DURING RECENT TEACHING MISSION...EVER
REMEMBERED HEARTS BELIEVERS EAST WEST...REQUEST
ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES HOLD MEMORIAL SERVICES...
BEFITTING LONG LIFE DEDICATED EXEMPLARY SERVICE
LORD HOSTS BY ONE ASSURED CENTRE COVENANT LOVING
WELCOME PRESENCE BAHAUULLAH ABHA KINGDOM.”

Source Material

The following are the primary source materials used in researching these stories and are included for those interested in further reading.

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Harper, Barron. “Lights of Fortitude”.

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Tarázu’lláh Samandarí

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Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Lee, Anthony. “Forward to Moments with Bahá’u’lláh”.

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