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Dedication to the Sacredness of the Bahá'í Fund Compiled by the National Spiritual Assembly of Azerbaijan



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## 10. Traditions and My Envelope

Dedication to the Sacredness of the Bahá'í Fund Compiled by the National Spiritual Assembly of Azerbaijan



*To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

*All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly ...*

—Shoghi Effendi

*If a person is willing to make his offering with utmost contentment, its acceptance is permissible, otherwise our merciful Lord is independent of all mankind.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

In this edition of *The Roaring Fountain*, we will continue to discuss the psychological barriers that hinder us from serving generously and sacrificially in the path of God. Whether cultural or intellectual these psychological barriers dictate how we offer our services to Bahá'u'lláh. When I lived in Agjabadi and Barda in the 1990s, I used to work for a humanitarian NGO that assisted with building homes for the victims of the Nogorno-Karabak war. I had a co-worker by the name of Hilal. We became good friends. He was passionate about the arts: he read poetry, listened to classical Muqamat, chanted in Sigah, and was

a skilled calligrapher. He was also a devoted man and truly worshiped God through his deeds. While driving from one project to another, we often talked about the spiritual aspects of life. There is something spiritual about journey and traveling that makes our spirit reflect.

Once in a while, I noticed Hilal setting aside a Mammad-Amin (a nickname for an old Azerbaijani bank note) in his car as nezir (alms). After praying to it, Hilal placed the Mammad-Amin on the dashboard of his car to keep until he was able to give it to charity. Hilal's nezirs sometimes stayed on the dashboard for weeks. He watched the side of the road for a good nezir box in which he could make his offering in the path of God. He was quite particular about where to drop his nezirs, because he didn't believe that all of the nezir boxes worked. On one occasion, he dropped his nezir in a box near Yevlaq but got into an accident while driving away. As a result, he had concluded that some nezir boxes did not provide protection.



Nezir box says, Give in the path of God for construction of the road

In my estimation, Hilal was a rich man. He saved his money in crisp US \$100 bills, rolled them in Khalq newspaper pages, and stored them in his freezer. During the 18 months that I worked with Hilal, I could never figure out why he donated only one Mammad-Amin (US \$0.25) at a time in the path of God. He had noticed that I never dropped money in the nezir box and tried to mentor me. With a heartfelt expression of brotherly love, he used to persuade me to donate, stating that it was an important step towards loving and thanking God. I never shared with him my struggles to understand the divine wisdom behind generous and sacrificial contributions, but he had learned a lot from his forefathers and was assured in his beliefs.



Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, was an Azerbaijani Statesman, Scholar, Public Figure and the first President of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918–1920)

Whenever I looked at the dashboard of his car, I could only contemplate what made such an educated historian, musician, poet, and devoted man of God contribute to humanity in this way. One day, we

went to have lunch in a restaurant in Qaratepe. When the bill came, Hilal insisted on paying; he paid the bill, but the waiter came back and returned one of the Mammad-Amins, stating that it was too old and torn. Hilal got up from his chair and in utmost humility apologized to the restaurant owner and exchanged the bill.

Later, when we sat in the car, I noticed that he placed the same torn bill on his dashboard, stating that he had been trying to get rid of that bill for a while and no one would accept it. He explained that under the Soviet regime, he could exchange the torn bills, but since the Nagorno-Karabakh War and the fall of the Soviet Union, this was difficult. I asked him, “If no one accepted the bill why are you offering it to God? Do you believe He is going to accept?” Hilal calmed me down and said he had a plan. He said he would drop it in the nezir box near Yevlaq—the one that did not work. That day I recognized how people looked at the nezir boxes in today’s world. They are for the collection of bills people no longer need. But in this new era of maturity, contribution in the path of God must be more than that.

Deep in my heart, I truly believe that learning about true generosity, sacrifice, and service to humankind—as opposed to ritualistic giving—has the power to transform an individual, as sincere and God-loving as Hilal, to a spiritual giant. For me, Hilal’s story is a prime example of our stage in history—the old world order is rolling up and the New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh is being unfolded. There are vestiges of antiquated traditions, but they are gradually being replaced. We must work hard to welcome the new skills, mindsets, and disciplines needed to bestow our time, energy, and wealth for the prosperity of mankind.

Hilal worked hard and had everything, but he was continuously worried about his own life. One day, he fell ill with an ulcer and was rushed to Baku. I never saw him again. Perhaps if he had had a better means of nurturing his generous spirit, he could have been healthier and more joyous. At least that is what Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson’s new research entitled, “The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose,” suggests: “Generosity often triggers chemical systems in the brain and body that increase pleasure and experiences of reward, reduce stress, and suppress pain, which tend to lead to greater happiness and health.”

Understanding the fate of old traditions like the nezir box helps us grasp the importance of divulging our identity on envelopes to the Spiritual Assembly. All of these measures are carefully designed by Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation for this age of human adolescence. Today one may not be able to enjoy a stack of US\$100 bills wrapped in Khalq newspaper and stored in the freezer unless he develops a spirit of generosity with a new set of tools.

The main question is this: If Hilal were to place his contributions in an envelope with his name written on it, would he ever consider contributing one torn Mammad-Amin to God? From what I saw in Hilal, I would say: “Never!” Fear of God was ingrained in him. He just did not have a good channel for it; instead, he had the nezir box on the side of a lonely and windy highway. Indeed, fear of God was given to all of us as a gift by our Lord in order to guard us against our own selves and unworthy and unseemly actions.

*The fear of God hath ever been a sure defence and a safe stronghold for all the peoples of the world. It is the chief cause of the protection of mankind, and the supreme instrument for its preservation. Indeed, there existeth in man a faculty which deterreth him from, and guardeth him against, whatever is unworthy and unseemly, and which is known as his sense of shame.*

—Bahá’u’lláh



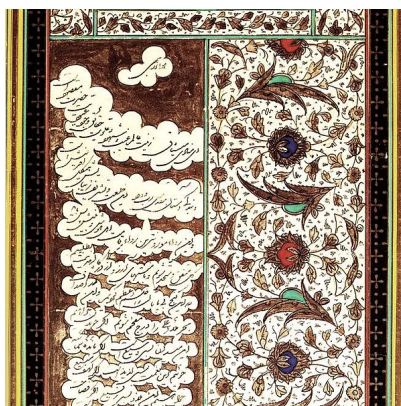
*We exhort you to fear God, to perform praiseworthy deeds and to do that which is meet and seemly and serveth to exalt your station.*

*—Bahá'u'lláh*

*All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country.*

*—Shoghi Effendi*

In the Bahá'í Faith, the friends are advised to hand their offerings directly to the Assembly Treasurer. One will not come across a Bahá'í Fund box in public places. Even at the Bahá'í World Centre, contributions are accepted by a special representative who meets the pilgrims, accepts the donations, issues receipts, and later provides an acknowledgment letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to sign a letter, acknowledging receipt of funds from every individual who offered their contributions in the path of God. Examples of these letters exist in the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of Azerbaijan. Please see below.



Acknowledgment of receipt of funds in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's pen to a friend in Azerbaijan

Another observation I had during my very close working friendship with Hilal was the nature of his sporadic contributions. He did not give much in the summer time, but gave more in winter because difficult road conditions required more blessings. In the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, contributions are encouraged to be regular and universal, and not dependent on our needs. The importance of regular contributions are for our own health, because generosity is like a medicine that affects our spirit and physical health, and just like with prayers, eating, and sleeping, generosity needs to be nurtured and regularly practiced.

*The House of Justice appreciates the difficult task of educating the Local Assemblies and the believers in the importance of contributing regularly and sacrificially to the Fund and it feels sure that you frequently remind them of the principles of universal participation in this, as well as all other aspects of the Faith.*

*—The Universal House of Justice*

*To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.*

*—Bahá'u'lláh*

*The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures.*

*—Bahá'u'lláh*

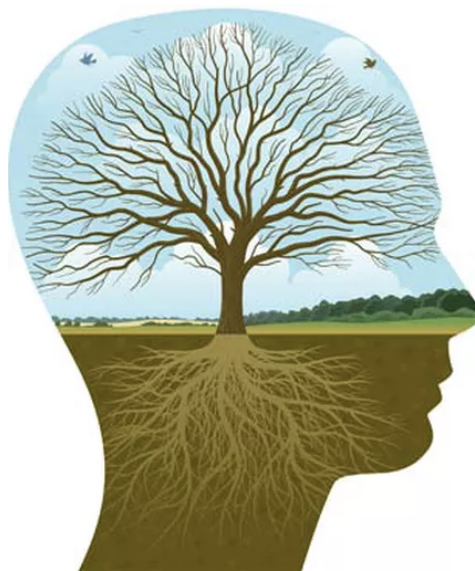
*It is to the believers, and to the believers alone, that Bahá'u'lláh has given the bounty of contributing the material things of this world for the progress of His Faith. It is not the amount of*

*the contribution which is important, but the degree of self-sacrifice that it entails—for it is this that attracts the confirmations of God.*

*—The Universal House of Justice*

*All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate.*

*—Shoghi Effendi*



The Journey Continues...

*Next Chapter: Adorn Yourself with the Ornaments of the Earth...*

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This Site is Managed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Azerbaijan. The Material presented here was initially published between 2001 to 2006. Kindly contact us at [AzerbaijanBahailcmasi@gmail.com](mailto:AzerbaijanBahailcmasi@gmail.com)



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