



Bahā' ad-Dīn al-Āmilī

Biography and Achievements

(1546-1622¹)

He is Muḥammad bin al-Ḥusayn bin 'Abd aṣ-Ṣamad al-Āmilī al-Ḥarithī al-Ḥamadānī². Born in B'albak in 13 of al-Ḥijjah 953/1547, and died in Isfahan in 12 Shawwal 1031/1622. He was transported before his burial to Ṭūs where he was buried in his residence near The Imam Reza shrine, peace be on him. His majestic tomb has been well maintained and renovated, and is visited by tourists who come to Khurasān.

Al-Bahā'ī is the most renowned of scholars and the most mentioned in the eleventh century of the Hijri calendar. He received the basics of the Islamic thought and civilization and was one of the great Imams who distinguished himself by studying various sciences and other fields of academia. Apart from the Fiqh [Islamic jurisprudence], [...], Al-Ūṣūl [Principles of Islamic jurisprudence], Literature, he wonderfully and astutely mastered engineering, astrology, arithmetic, algebra and various branches of mathematics, knowledge, Kalām [Islamic scholastic theology] and other scholarly fields. It was related that he was the only one to seek these sciences.³

Al-Bahā'ī was praised and admired by scholars. One of those was Aḥmad bin 'Alī al-Manīnī who elucidated the poem of “al-Bahā'ī” known as: “Wasīlat al-Fawz wal-'Amān fī Madḥ Ṣāhib az-Zamān” [The Tool of Victory and Trust in Praising the Imam Zaman (Muḥammad al-Mahdī)] and which he completed in 1151 AH. He described him as: “...The author of books and editions

¹ [This text is extracted from Ni'mat, al-'Allāmah Sheikh 'Abdallah “al-Bahā'ī” in *Falāsifat ash Shī'ah, Ḥayātuhum wa Arā'uhum [The Shia Philosophers, their life and opinions]*, Beirut, al-Ḥayāt Press, [n.d.], pp. 398-408. We point out that the notes are stated as in Sheikh Ni'mat, and we added under brackets the name of the author and the title in full].

² Al-Ḥarithī attributed to al-Ḥarith al-Ḥamadānī companion of the Prince of the Faithful 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, peace be on him.

³ See: [Al-Khawansārī, Al-Mirzā Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Asbahānī], *Ar-Rawḍāt [Rawḍāt al-Jannāt fī Aḥwāl al-'Ulamā' was-Sadāt (The Garden of Paradise of Scholars and Notables)]*, p.532.

who deserves more than others that his news be known, his qualities propagated and that the world be astounded with his virtues and achievements. He was an independent entity well versed in all areas of sciences and erudite in the particular arts. I do not think that time would allow a comparable being nor will it provide his peer.”¹

His student as-Sayyid ‘Izz ad-Dīn Ḥusayn bin Ḥaydar al-Karkī al-‘Āmilī described him with the words: “Our Sheikh - blessed be his soul - was the best of his time, unique in his scholarly knowledge, he is of a stature unknown neither by his contemporaries nor before. He was strongly inclined to Sufism, and he was fair in research...”²

The author of *Sulāfat al-‘Aṣr*³ [*Overview of the best excerpts*] praised him in his usual style and in rhymed prose. He described him as encompassing the arts of sciences and distinguished in the various virtues. Others also praised him reflecting his social status and his scholarly personality, which contributed to the scientific movement and the awakening of the century that he was living in.

Al-Bahā’ī’s influence and scholarly importance are best appreciated by contextualizing the epoch he lived in: it was a period when most of the people in the world were in profound lethargy. Stupefaction dominated knowledge and thought and the intellectual life faded away. Weakness and decline dominated all aspects of life as a result of the events and catastrophes that affected the Arab and Islamic world and blocked cultural revival in its regions.

In spite of all this, there were oases in certain Islamic regions fertile in knowledge and culture in which scholarly schools with ripened fruits were found and reached its utmost vitality.

There was in South Lebanon an area called Jabal ‘Āmil [Mount of ‘Āmil] loaded with scholarly energy where knowledge rid itself of its fetters and was awakened from its slumber to enable this spot [Jabal ‘Āmil]. It became a nursery of scholars, thinkers and exalted guides who carried in that dark period the torch of learning and thinking and paved the way for others to be guided by its splendor. It is sufficient to mention: ‘Alī bin ‘Abd al-‘Alī al-Maysī known as the subtle al-

¹ See the explanation [of the poem] “Wasīlat al-Fawz wal-‘Amān” at the end of *Al-Kashkūl* [for al-Bahā’ī], p.317.

² *Ar-Rawḍāt*, op. cit.

³ [He is Ibn Ma’sūm, ‘Alī bin Mirzā Aḥmad bin Ma’sūm al-Ḥusaynī (1052-1120/1642-1708), author of: *Sulāfat al-‘Aṣr fī Maḥāsīn al-shū‘arā’ bikul Miṣr* (*Overview of the best excerpts of the poets in each country*)].

Maysi al-‘Āmilī; ‘Alī bin ‘Abd al-‘Alī al-Karakī, known as the second subtle, author of valuable works; Zayn ad-Dīn bin ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī al-Jabā’ī, known as the second martyr; Muḥammad bin Makkī al-Jazzīnī al-‘Āmilī, known as the first martyr; Sheikh Ḥusayn ‘Abd aṣ-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī, the father of al-Bahā’ī, and others among the pioneers of knowledge and thought who benefited their generations and other long generations after them in the rich and fertile scholarly energy that they bequeathed to them and in the intense intellectual heritage, which remains, till today, a big source of knowledge in many parts of the Islamic world.

It was from this same oasis, Jabal ‘Āmil, and in this same period that al-Bahā’ī lived. He was a scholarly pioneer whose mind encompassed all the cultures known in his age. His works had an electrical impact on the minds of the intellects of his society in the arena of knowledge and learning.

His works in geometry, astrology, mathematics and other fields remained a long time after him and until now, a source for many of the scholars in the Orient. It was at the same time a source for students in schools and in universities to draw from.

Also, his works in Philosophy, Kalām, Fiqh, Ḥadīth [traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad], Literature and poetry are as important as his works in Astrology and Mathematics. His importance, however, in the latter sciences prevailed especially in the later centuries when his works in these subjects attracted scholars and students at the same time inciting them to explain, comment and teach these books in many capitals of the Islamic Orient.

Two clear tendencies appear in al-‘Āmilī’s thinking. First, the Mathematical tendency, which dominates most of his endeavors and handling of scientific questions, especially question of metaphysics. This tendency appears in many pages of his book *Al-Kashkūl [The Satchel]* where he attempts to “negate it proving his ideas by mathematical and geometrical proofs reminding us the tendencies in al-Kindī’s philosophy.”

It also reminds us of Nāṣir ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūṣī’s method given in his Kalām as examples, like abstraction, benefit of belief and others, to negate the infinity and progression also.

In this book, he refers to several quotations related to the words of the worshipers, the knowers, the Sufis and their stories, and the reflection of this trend is evident in his words and poems in general.

Life

Bahā' ad-Dīn is originally from Jabal 'Āmil, southern part of Lebanon, and from Jaba' or Jibā' village, the abode of his fathers and grandfathers. It is the village of his father Sheikh Ḥusayn 'Abd aṣ-Ṣamad aj-Jaba'ī al-'Āmilī and his grandfather was Shams ad-Dīn Muḥammad aj-Jibā'ī the author of the famous collection from which Bahā' ad-Dīn quotes extensively in *Al-Kashkūl*.

Al-Bahā'ī himself affirms that he is originally from Jabal 'Āmil. He was quoted as follows by Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī: "Our fathers and grandfathers are from Jabal 'Āmil and were always preoccupied with learning, worship, ascetics and were always esteemed. We were deprived of all this when we drank the water of al-'Ajam. There are still today in Jabal 'Āmil a few families affiliated to his brother 'Abd aṣ-Ṣamad, and this is the family of Muruwah.¹

Many writers and historians were under the false impression thinking that he comes from "Āmil" in northern Iran and some stated that he was born in "Āmil" in Khorasan which is situated on the left bank of Jihūn river.

The last one who was a victim of this illusion was Professor Qadrī Ḥāfiẓ Ṭūqān who, in his book, *Turāth al-'Arab al-'Ilmī* [*The Arab Scholarly Tradition*], stated the following: "to say that he was born in B'albak is far from reality and is rather an absolute mistake. It is probable that this is a result of confusing Jabal 'Āmil in Syria and 'Āmil which made them think that he was born in B'albak and which could have been also the reason which made the scholars call him Bahā' ad-Dīn al-'Āmilī."²

This error ran when published in the Lebanese encyclopedia *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Lubnāniyyah* under item "Āmil". No doubt that what Ṭūqān mentioned is not right and is among the impressions where he did not rely on a source.

¹ See: [Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn], *A 'yān as-Shī'ah* [*the Shiite Notables*], v.26, p. 259.

² See: [Ḥāfiẓ Qadrī Ṭūqān], *Turāth al-'Arab al-'Ilmī*, p. 427.

We do not need to prove that al-Bahā'ī is “‘Āmilī” and not “‘Āmilī”. It is enough to quote what his student al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī wrote in his book: *‘Amal al-‘Āmil fī ‘Ulamā’ Jabal ‘Āmil* [*The hope of those who hope in Scholars of Mount ‘Āmil*], and what Aḥmad al-Manīnī wrote in his explanation of the Al-Bahā'ī's poem entitled “Wasīlat al-Fawz wal ‘Amān” [The Tool of Victory and Trust], and to his published works as *Miftāḥ al-Falāḥ* [*The Key to Success: Book Forty*], *Kitāb al-‘Arba‘īn* [*The Quarantine Book*], and *Al-Kashkūl* where he declares his affiliation to Jabal ‘Āmil.

This is in addition to what Shī'ī scholars and translators like al-Khawānsārī in *Ar-Rawḍat* and as-Sayyid ‘Alī Khān in *Sulāfat al‘Aṣr*, and what was written about his father, his brothers and his grandfather in the books of biographies and autobiographies. It all affirms that he was “‘Āmiliyan” and not “‘Āmiliyan” especially his declaration to “al-Majlisī” his contemporary as was mentioned.

Al-‘Āmilī's father, Sheikh Ḥusayn Bin ‘Abd aṣ-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī took him to Iran when he was young. It was believed that he was less than seven years old then. This was after the murder of Sheikh Zayn ad-Dīn al-‘Āmilī in 966 AH who became known as “The second Martyr”.

Concerning his tutors, we got introduced to his father Ḥusayn bin ‘Abd aṣ-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī (d. 974 AH) one of the known scholars in science, fiqh and literature in that century, and the Mawla ‘Abdallah ibn Ḥusayn al-Yazdī (d. 981 AH) one of the masters of Logic and Philosophy, author of *Al-Ḥāshiah fil-Manṭiq* [*Notes in Logic*] which is taught in the universities in Najaf and Qom and the rest of the Shī'ī capitals till today.

It is natural for al-Bahā'ī to have usually taken general knowledge from different masters. He was probably able to get acquainted while on his long travels with scientific and literary personalities and others who provided him with science and culture. There are still many sources in his culture unknown to us and I did not find his historians taking notice of this matter. All what they mentioned here is that he studied with the great scholars of his time.

Many students drew from his school and took from him. They were scholars of their time. Among them:

1. Sheikh Jawād bin Sa‘d al-Baghdādī al-Kāzīmī known as al-Fāḍil aj-Jawād al-Kāzīmī, studied under al-Bahā’ī in Isfahan until he became one of the brilliant minds in the rationalistic and the traditional thought, as well as in mathematics and other fields. He also explained a few of his tutor al-Bahā’ī’s works like *Khulāṣat al-Ḥisāb* [*Summary of the Calculation*] and *Zubdat al-‘Uṣūl* [*Summary of the Foundations*].¹
2. Mullah Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kashānī (d. 1091 AH), one of the renowned philosophers.
3. As-Sayyid Rafi‘ ad-Dīn Muḥammad bin Ḥaydar aṭ-Ṭabaṭabā’ī al-Ḥusaynī al-Nā’inī (d. 1092 AH), one of the renowned scholars in Philosophy.
4. Sheikh Muḥammad bin ‘Alī al-Tabnīnī al-‘Āmilī.
5. Zayn ad-Dīn bin Muḥammad bin Ḥasan bin Zayn al-‘Āmilī one of the fiqh scholars.
6. Ṣadr al-Muta’allihīn ash-Shirāzī.
7. As-Sayyid Mājīd al-Baḥrānī, and many others.²

Bahā’ ad-Dīn acquired high ranking and significant standing with the Safavids, kings of Iran, especially with Shah ‘Abbās the Safavid in Isfahan. There he took over the Sheikdom of Islam and composed for the mentioned Shah his book: *Aj-Jāmi‘ al-Abbāsī* [*The Abbasid Mosque*] in Fiqh.

He was in close contact with the philosopher of his time as-Sayyid ad-Dāmād, a brotherly and friendly contact where purity and amicability prevailed. Biographical books in fact have mentioned about this refined connection, but this has not obliterated the spirit of competition between them, as is usually the case between two contemporary scholars found in the same locality. It was related that “A student brought al-Bahā’ī’s book: *Al-‘Arba‘īn* [*The Quarantine Book*] to as-Sayyid ad-Dāmād. When ad-Dāmād looked at it he said: This Arab is a virtuous man, but he was not known nor considered a scholar when he first arrived in our century.”³

¹ See [‘Abbās al-Qummī], *Al-Kinah wal-Alqāb* [Nicknames and Titles], vol. 3, p.6.

² See: *Ar-Rawḍāt*, op.cit., p. 539.

³ *Ibid*, p.536.

Al-Bahā'ī lived in Harāt a long time, admired it and loved its climate. In one of his long poem in rajaz he described Harāt, its air, water, its grapes and the variety of its fruits. At the end regrets having to leave this place. He wrote:

“How beautiful were our days that we passed in Harāt
Stealing pleasure and happiness
Not tired of joking and jesting
Pleasant is our life in its shadow
And times complying with our wishes.”¹

This life did not please al-Bahā'ī so he preferred solitude and tourism. His tourism lasted around thirty years when he wandered in Egypt, Iraq, Hijaz and Syria where he met many scientific and literary personalities and wrote his book *Al-Kashkūl* while in Egypt. He returned to Isfahan where he was visited, greeted, and honored by Shah 'Abbās, the governor of the Safavid State.

Al-Bahā'ī occupied an eminent position with the Shah till al-Bahā'ī died in Isfahan in 1031 AH. He was transported and buried in Ṭūs beside al-Imam 'Alī ar-Riḍā - Peace on his soul.

Al-Bahā'ī, as all great men and thinkers who surpass in their thinking ordinary men, did not escape criticism and slander in his belief and learning in spite of his well-rounded and religious personality. His high and refined position and his status with the kings of Iran brought him invidious people and competitors who aroused around him doubts and misconceptions. Al-Bahā'ī referred, in one of his *Al-Kashkūl*, to this matter. He said: “My name was once brought up in a high-end meeting where one of the men present who pretends to be a man of reconciliation but is habitually a slanderer; he is one such man who shows affection while in reality he is bigoted. He followed the road of injustice and aggression, and gave full rein to his tongue in backbiting and false accusations, and ascribed defects in me that are still in him forgetting the saying of the exalted, “Is there among you who like to eat his brother's flesh?²””. More than one person from the people of learning mocked him as al-Majlisī and Fayḍ 'Allāh at-Tafrīshī did not quote him and criticized his inclination to Sufism.

Sheikh 'Abdallah bin Ṣāliḥ, al-Baḥrānī, attacked him saying: “He has few weak convictions as the belief that the entrusted is not to be blamed when he errs in his belief and will not abide in

¹ See: *Al-Kashkūl*, p. 73.

² Ibid, p. 77.

fire even when differing from people of the Truth as long as he tries his best in finding the proof”. He said: This is absolutely wrong for the scholars who go astray and the leaders of the unbelievers whose thinking lead them not to follow the people of the Truth should abide in fire.¹

The reason of al-Baḥrānī’s campaign is al-Bahā’ī’s opposition to what al-Baḥrānī and those who agree with al-Baḥrānī’s opinion and thinking who do not consider reason as a proof in these subjects.

It would be more proper if al-Bahā’ī’s opinion be considered a praise and a virtue proving his freethinking and good character and to consider his opinion in this matter a tribute and not a blasphemy. The problem resides in old traditions that are not related to religion and which control the thinking of most of the scholars.

Al-Bahā’ī is known for his great scholarly personality and his brilliant standing in all aspects of knowledge. His scholarly reputation with the people reached a point capable of elevating him to the status of legendary personalities. People recounted many strange stories, miracles and legends showing clearly al-Bahā’ī’s scholarly influence and his great leverage on the thoughts of people. It was said that he was able to destroy the atom, control its energy and use it when needed. The proof is that he formed a candle that he lighted in a furnace in Isfahan, which was enough to heat a whole bathing room for a long time without any change in the candle. It was attributed to him also that he formed a continuously moving watch not needing to be budged.²

Other strange anecdotes were attributed to him with no space to mention here. It is probable that al-Bahā’ī’s personality in the sciences and arts and his renowned standing in most of the cultures that was known in his age and which was propagated in all the Islamic countries has woven a great halo around him and constituted a strong factor in what was ascribed to him of strange anecdotes and legends.

Al-Bahā’ī composed and commented on many books that interested and benefited the scholars in their studies. Most of it is published, beside some of his books in Mathematics, Geometry and Astronomy were studied meticulously and commented upon.

¹ Ibid.

² See: *‘Ajwibat Al-Masā’il ad-Dīniyyah [The answers to the religious questions]*, number 6, round 4, Jamadi al-‘ Akhirah, 1379, and this is a publication issued in Karbalā’, Iraq, p. 32.

What distinguishes his writing in general is that it is void of redundancy and that it is beneficial to its reader. These writings of his dealt, assimilated and digested many aspects of culture and thought.

Al-Bahā'ī is considered productive in writing for he left more than fifty books [123 books according to our institute], which remained a reference to consult and to depend upon. His books in Arithmetic and Astronomy are taught in the universities of Najaf, Iran, and other countries till today.