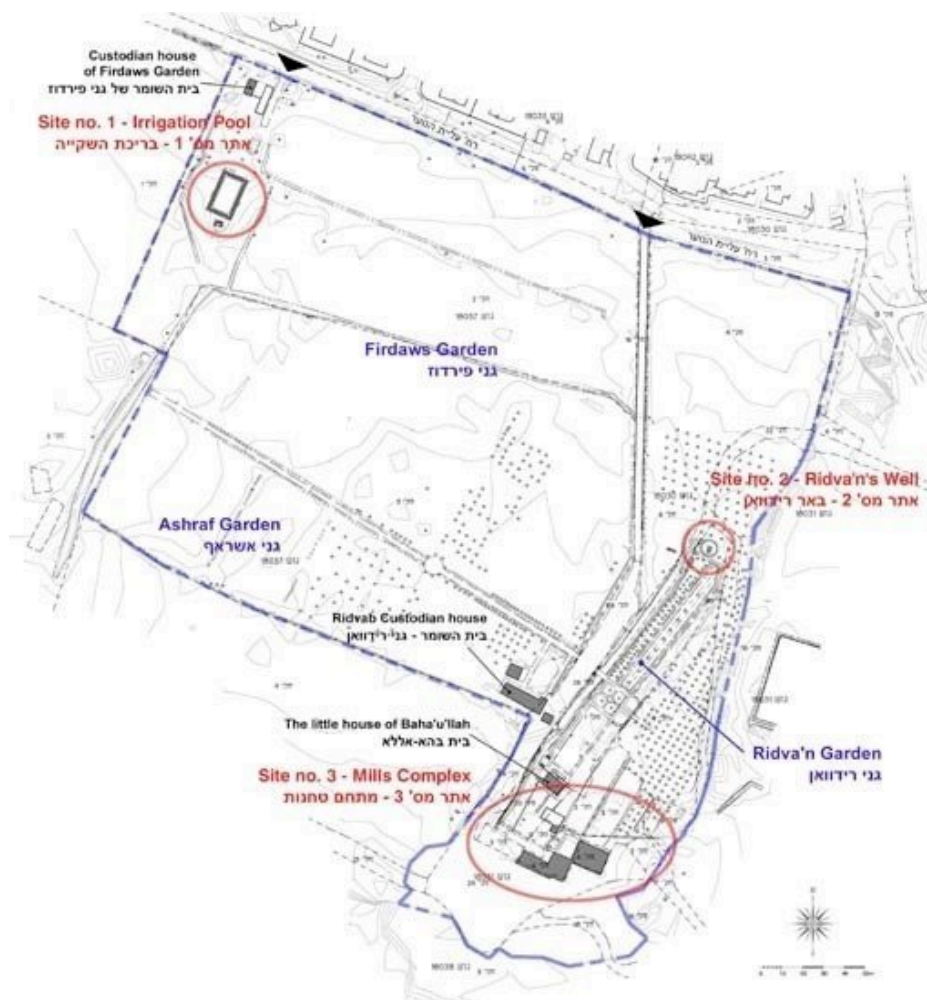


Ridvan Garden in Akka



Our Verdant Isle

'Abdu'l-Baha also acquired a garden called Na'mayn, which was an island in the midst of a stream within a short distance of 'Akka. It was close to the man-made hill named after Napoleon Bonaparte, which had been raised to mount Napoleon's cannons for the bombardment of the city. 'Ridvan', reminiscent of the garden of Najib Pasha outside Baghdad where He had first declared His Mission, was the designation which Baha'u'llah bestowed upon the garden of Na'mayn. Furthermore, He referred to that delightful oasis on the then bare and treeless plain as the 'New Jerusalem' and 'Our Verdant Isle'. To this garden which His followers beautified, Baha'u'llah would at times resort. And there were occasions when He stayed in the very modest summer house which had two plain, habitable upper rooms. He vividly portrays in a Tablet a vision of 'the Maid of Heaven' which came to Him by the cool waters of Na'mayn. [1]



Map of Ridvan Garden and its surrounding gardens (Firdaws and Ashraf Gardens).

The Ridván Garden, ..., was rented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1875 and prepared for Bahá'u'lláh's use. In 1881, the Ridván Garden was purchased for Bahá'u'lláh. [4]

Most of the flowering plants have been brought from Persia by the pilgrims. These wonderful pilgrims! How they came on that long, toilsome journey on foot, braving numberless dangers, malignant human enemies and bad weather, and through all the fatigue, carrying, as the greatest treasure, some plant for their adored one's garden. Often the only water, which the devoted pilgrims so urgently needed for themselves, was given to the plant. Some of the gardeners who had been in the employ of Baha'u'llah in His glorious gardens at the beautiful country house, His former home in Persia, remembered that a particular white rose was a favourite flower of Baha'u'llah's. This rose, single with golden centre, brownish stalks, shiny leaves, and a peculiarly delightful scent, is now flourishing in the Ridvan. Many bushes of these beautiful roses are in full bloom; the waxen cream and gold of their blossoms, and their burnished leaves, make a pure and peaceful note in the love-laden harmony of the glory of that garden. [Recollections of Tuba Khanum, daughter of 'Abdu'l-Baha in 2]

In the time of Bahá'u'lláh the garden was laid out in flower-beds and there were many ornamental shrubs and fruit trees. There was a splashing fountain from which water was fed to all parts of the garden. As it flowed, it came rippling down in a broad stream over a stone platform under two large mulberry trees. The stream which flowed by the island was about fourteen to fifteen feet wide and three feet deep; fish were darting about it in abundance. It was fringed with weeping willows, and the fragrance of jasmine and orange blossoms filled the air. Most of these features are preserved today, except that there is no water circling the garden, for the streams have been diverted in recent times. [3]

On! the joy of the day when Baha'u'llah went to the beautiful Ridvan, which had been prepared for Him with such loving care by the Master, the friends, and the pilgrims! The Master's heart was gladdened indeed to see the enjoyment of His beloved Father, resting under the big mulberry tree, by the side of the little river rippling by, the fountain which they had contrived splashing and gurgling in sounds refreshing indeed after the long years of confinement in the pestilential air of the penal fortress of 'Akka. Only those who were present there could realize in any degree what it meant to be surrounded by such profusion flowers, their colours and their scents, after the dull walls and unfragrant odours of the prison city. ... I remember well the greatest of our joys was to go with Baha'u'llah for the occasional picnics to the Ridvan. "Now children, to-morrow you shall come with Me for a picnic to the Ridvan," He would say, and our night was so full of joy we could scarcely sleep. [Recollections of Tuba Khanum, daughter of 'Abdu'l-Baha in 2]



The water pump which pumped the water to the fountain and other parts of the garden. It was driven by a donkey.

Beauty of the Garden

It seems that Abu'l Qasim told stories the pilgrims about events that had taken place in the Ridvan Garden. Abu'l Qasim said "that he could not possibly relate or convey the wonderfulness of the many events, or the power of the many experiences, which occurred in the Ridvan."

Abu'l Qasim related that the Blessed Beauty had said the following about the Ridvan Garden.

"All the trees in the Garden are mentioning thee, are saying that thou art doing thy best to serve them.", "This Garden is like the Garden of the Martyrs.", 'This is the most beautiful garden in the world.'

During the last visit of the Blessed Beauty to the Ridvan Garden, He said to Abu'l Qasim: "I have never enjoyed being in any Garden as much as in this one, and I have never seen so beautiful a Garden." [6]

Mrs. May Maxwell, one of the first western pilgrims to visit the Holy Land in 1898, ... writes in her notes from her pilgrimage, the following:

After driving for about half an hour we reached the garden where Bahá'u'lláh spent much of His time during His long years of exile in 'Akká. Although this garden is small it

is one of the loveliest spots we had ever seen. Bahá'u'lláh frequently said to His gardener, Abu'l-Qásim, 'This is the most beautiful garden in the world.'

With its tall trees, its wealth of flowers, and its fountains, it lies like a peerless gem surrounded by two limpid streams of water just as it is described in the Qurán; and the atmosphere which pervades it is so fraught with sacred memories, with divine significance, with heavenly peace and calm that one no longer marvels to hear of the traveller who, passing one day before its gates, paused and gazing in saw Bahá'u'lláh seated beneath the shade of the mulberry trees, 'that canopy not made with hands,' and remembering the prophecy in the Qur'án, he recognized his Lord and hastened to prostrate himself at His feet. [7]

Place of Joy

There were many occasions when the believers held feasts in that garden and Bahá'u'lláh honoured them with His presence. Such gatherings engendered indescribable joy and spirituality, beyond our imagination. The garden became truly a place of celebration and rejoicing. Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí, an eminent believer, has related that once Bahá'u'lláh Himself entertained all the believers with refreshments in the Garden of Ridván to celebrate the release of several Bahá'í prisoners in Tíhrán. These included Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, the Hand of the Cause Hájí Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, and Siyyid Asadu'lláh himself. In His all-embracing knowledge Bahá'u'lláh had announced their release and celebrated the occasion, whereas the telegram bearing this news reached 'Akká a day later. [3]



The Ridvan Garden and the mulberry trees.

A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh revealed there and translated into English hangs on the wall of that room today. Its perusal enables the reader to see how much Bahá'u'lláh enjoyed the Garden and how much He loved the beauty of nature. Here is a translation of this Tablet:

He is God, Glorified be He, Grandeur and Might are His!

On the morning of the blessed Friday we proceeded from the Mansion and entered the Garden. Every tree uttered a word, and every leaf sang a melody. The trees proclaimed: 'Behold the evidences of God's Mercy' and the twin streams recited in the eloquent tongue the sacred verse 'From us all things were made alive'. Glorified be God! Mysteries were voiced by them, which provoked wonderment. Methought: in which school were they educated, and from whose presence had they acquired their learning? Yea! This Wronged One knoweth and He saith: 'From God, the All-Encompassing, the Self-Subsistent.'

Upon Our being seated, Rádíyih, upon her be My glory, attained Our presence on thy behalf, laid the table of God's bounty and in thy name extended hospitality to all present. In truth, all that which stimulateth the appetite and pleaseth the eye was offered, and indeed that which delighteth the ear could also be heard as the leaves were stirred by the Will of God, and from this movement a refreshing voice was raised, as if uttering a blissful call inviting the absent to this Feast. God's power and the perfection of His handiwork could enjoyably be seen in the blossoms, the fruits, the trees, the leaves and the streams. Praised be God who hath thus confirmed thee and her.

In brief, all in the Garden were recipients of the choicest bounties and in the end expressed their thanksgiving unto their Lord. O that all God's beloved would have been present on this day!

We beseech God, exalted be He, to cause to descend upon thee at every moment, a blessing and a mercy and a measure of divine grace from His presence. He is the Forgiving, the All-Glorious.

We send greetings to His loved ones, and supplicate for each one of them that which is worthy of mention and is acceptable in His presence. Peace be upon thee, and upon God's sincere servants. Praise be to Him, the Lord of all mankind. [3]

Tablets Revealed in the Ridvan Garden

Other Tablets were revealed in this holy spot. There is a celebrated passage about trustworthiness in which Bahá'u'lláh describes a vision He had in the Garden of Ridván of a Maid of Heaven. This passage appears in the Tablets of Ishráqát, Tarázát and also in a

Tablet revealed in honour of Hájí Mírzá Buzurg-i-Afnán, one of the illustrious custodians of the House of the Báb in Shíráz. [Revealed in 1879]

“We will now mention unto thee Trustworthiness and the station thereof in the estimation of God, thy Lord, the Lord of the Mighty Throne. One day of days We repaired unto Our Green Island. Upon Our arrival, We beheld its streams flowing, and its trees luxuriant, and the sunlight playing in their midst. Turning Our face to the right, We beheld what the pen is powerless to describe; nor can it set forth that which the eye of the Lord of Mankind witnessed in that most sanctified, that most sublime, that blest, and most exalted Spot. Turning, then, to the left We gazed on one of the Beauties of the Most Sublime Paradise, standing on a pillar of light, and calling aloud saying: 'O inmates of earth and heaven! Behold ye My beauty, and My radiance, and My revelation, and My effulgence. By God, the True One! I am Trustworthiness and the revelation thereof, and the beauty thereof. I will recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank and station, and hold fast unto My hem. I am the most great ornament of the people of Bahá, and the vesture of glory unto all who are in the kingdom of creation. I am the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world, and the horizon of assurance unto all beings.’ [3]

The Locust

Abu'l-Qásim told the pilgrims of what he had witnessed with his own eyes. Mrs. May Maxwell writes:

He told us the story of the locusts. How that during one hot summer there had been a pest of locusts and they had consumed most of the foliage in the surrounding country. One day Abu'l-Qásim saw a thick cloud coming swiftly towards the garden, and in a moment thousands of locusts were covering the tall trees beneath which Bahá'u'lláh so often sat. Abu'l-Qásim hastened to the house at the end of the garden and coming before his Lord besought Him, saying: 'My Lord, the locusts have come, and are eating away the shade from above Thy blessed head. I beg of Thee to cause them to depart.' The Manifestation smiled, and said:

'The locusts must be fed; let them be.'

Much chagrined, Abu'l-Qásim returned to the garden and for some time watched the destructive work in silence; but presently, unable to bear it, he ventured to return again to Bahá'u'lláh and humbly entreated Him to send away the locusts. The Blessed Perfection arose and went into the garden and stood beneath the trees covered with the insects. Then He said:

'Abu'l-Qásim does not want you; God protect you.'

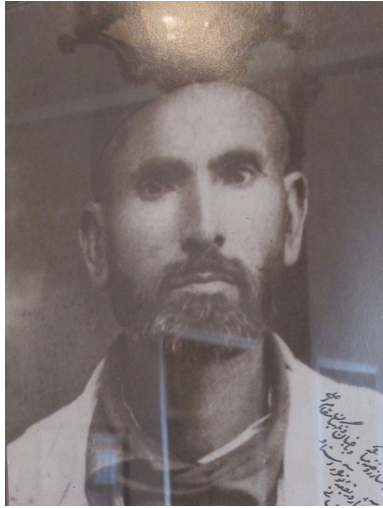
And lifting up the hem of His robe He shook it, and immediately all the locusts arose in a body and flew away. When Abu'l-Qásim concluded this story he exclaimed with strong emotion as he touched his eyes: 'Oh, blessed are these eyes to have seen such things; oh, blessed are these ears to have heard such things.' In parting he gave us flowers, and seemed, like all the oriental believers, unable to do enough to show his love. [7]



The spot of the bench where the Greatest Name is put, is where the Blessed Beauty used to sit. The gardner, Abu'l-Qásim is also shown.

Keeping the Ridvan Garden Holy

In those times, the Ridvan Garden was very different from its surrounding areas; it was full of flowers and trees bearing a lot of fruits. As such, some of the local inhabitants were very eager to come in to the garden area and pick flowers and fruits. Abu'l-Qásim understood that, if they were granted access, it would have been impossible to keep the garden as a Holy Place. At the same time, he did not wish to deny them entering the garden so he devised a plan. Dr. Ḥabíb Mu'ayyad recounts the following in his memoirs:



Ustad Abu'l-Qásim, the gardener

Abu'l-Qásim served in the Garden of Riḍván for many years. He worked as a gardener tending the trees, the fruits and flowers. He welcomed the friends to the garden, whether pilgrims or residents, entertained them lovingly, and ensured that they enjoyed their visit.

He had devised a master plan to prevent the Arab inhabitants of 'Akká from entering the Garden. Whenever he was leaving the Garden to go to 'Akká either to attain the presence of the Master or to purchase food or other necessities, he would lock the gate with the instruction that it should remain locked until his return. He had invented two passwords, one that signaled that the gate was to be opened and the other that it should remain shut.

When he returned, if there was no one outside the garden wanting to get in, he would call out a fictitious name, 'Shukru'lláh' (Thanks to God). This meant, 'Thanks to God there is no one bothering us', and the gate would open! If, however, there were some people outside, he would call out the name 'Ḥassan' which in Persian sounds phonetically like "Hastan" 'They are', meaning, 'They are waiting outside', and the gate would not open!

People thought that Ḥassan was the name of the gardener's servant. And since there was no response from Ḥassan they would eventually leave the garden area and go home. In this way Abu'l-Qásim protected the fruits and flowers of the garden from the inhabitants.



The entrance to the Ridvan Garden.

The Illuminated Fountain

In 1901, an American lady by the name of Isabella Brittingham was on pilgrimage and had a conversation with Abu'l Qasim. She relates in her pilgrim notes the following stories of what Abu'l Qasim related:

At another time Abu'l Qasim was trying to beautify the fountain in the Garden, and he placed a tube in its apex to add to the grace of its flow. He also arranged some candles so that they would illuminate the spray of the fountain at nightfall. Then He sought the Blessed Perfection and supplicated Him to visit the Garden and see the fountain.

The Blessed Perfection replied:

"It is well. Ask the man to make ready the horses and I will go."

When all was ready and they had started for the Ridvan, Abu'l Qasim pleaded to be permitted to go on before Him and put the fountain in running order, the Blessed Perfection replied:

"No, you have already walked here from the Garden."

When about half way there Abu'l Qasim renewed his entreaty, and this time the Blessed Perfection granted it. In the twinkling of an eye the gardener found himself in the Garden, but was unable to explain how he arrived there. He turned on the water and, when the Blessed Perfection appeared in the Garden, He said to the one who attended to the horses:

"Abu'l Qasim does not understand how he reached the Garden so quickly. He does not know whether he flew, or walked, or ran."

After seeing the improved flow of the fountain, the Blessed Perfection was about to depart, but Abu'l Qasim supplicated that He would remain and see the illuminating effect of the candles. The Blessed Perfection said to him:

"O Abu'l Qasim! Know, verily, that it was prophesied and foretold that the fire would be conflagrating amidst the waters; and this is the time and now here is the fulfillment of that prophecy." [6]



The fountain of Ridvan Garden.

Promise Kept

At another time, Abu'l Qasim went to visit Bahau'llah early in the morning, bringing with him a bouquet of roses.

When the Blessed Perfection inquired of him concerning the Garden, the gardener supplicated His Presence there, in the afternoon, saying:

"You will see it when you come and bless it." The Blessed Perfection then said: "We have much work to do."

The gardener replied: "Your work is never finished. But mine, in the Garden - if my work amounts to anything - will be finished by noon." The Blessed Perfection then promised to visit the Garden in the afternoon, and permitted Abu'l Qasim to leave.

In the Afternoon a severe storm arose. Abu'l Qasim prepared the samovar with its little charcoal fire, and placed it in the room of the Blessed Perfection, awaiting His arrival, in order to prepare some tea for Him. Then he climbed on to the roof of the house in order to command a wider outlook, and sat there a long time drenched to the skin from the rain, watching for the approach of the Blessed Perfection. After a time he saw the carriage looming up in the distance, and hastened down to make all things ready. And then he met the Blessed Perfection at the entrance to the Garden, with an umbrella, and walked by His side holding it over Him. The Blessed Perfection turned to Abu'l Qasim and said:

"All the Household begged of Me to remain at home in this storm, but I said: 'No, I must go because I have promised.'"

Then the Blessed Perfection ascended the steps to His room. But before He reached the room the storm suddenly ceased. [6]



The building at the Ridván Garden where the Blessed Beauty used to stay and sleep in when staying over.

Meeting his Lord

One believer had an awe-inspiring experience as he gazed upon the face of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván. He was known by the name of Hájí Yahúdá. He grew up in a Jewish family; his father was the chief Rabbi of the city of Rasht and its neighbouring towns in the north of Persia. In his youth, he used to work as a pedlar travelling to various cities. On one of his trips to Hamadán, he encountered a few Bahá'ís who acquainted him with the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh and consequently he was converted to the Faith. Around the year 1888-9 He travelled to 'Akká in order to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. His first meeting with Him took place in the Garden of Ridván.

As soon as he was ushered into His presence, the scene of water flowing from the fountain near Bahá'u'lláh's feet as He sat on the bench surrounded by the two streams,

vividly brought to his mind the vision of the Prophets of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament:

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.

He was overwhelmed by this vision so suddenly and vividly revealed to him. It came upon him as a thunderbolt and he was carried away into a different world. His whole being was stirred to its depths as he saw himself, standing with awe and wonder in the presence of the Lord of the Old Testament. His instant urge was to prostrate himself at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh, and this he did. The effect of this first meeting, and of hearing the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh on that occasion, was to create a fire of love and adoration which continued to burn within his heart till the end of his life. He was transformed into a new creation and was exultant with joy as he left the Holy Land. [3]



The spot on which the Blessed Beauty would sit, under the mulberry tree.

Shade of the tent of the Cause of God

Haji Mirza Habibu'llah recalls one late afternoon in the Garden of Ridvan, when they were there in the presence of Baha'u'llah. The air was fresh, pure and redolent, he writes, and it was raining slightly. Baha'u'llah spoke to them on that day about Mirza Yahya and

his crew, during the Baghdad period; how Mirza Yahya took as his wife the sister of Mulla Rajab-'Ali, the second wife of the Bab, and then gave her to Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahani, despite the injunction of the Bab. This shameful deed, Baha'u'llah said, had prevented the mother of the Bab from giving her allegiance to the Faith. Haji Mirza Habibu'llah states that traces of sorrow appeared on the face of Baha'u'llah, as He spoke of those days in Baghdad. His father, Aqa Mirza Aqa, was greatly affected, but Baha'u'llah said, 'Do not grieve. Praise be to God, the mother of that Blessed Being came to believe, at the end.' That same afternoon in the Garden of Ridvan, Haji Mirza Habibu'llah records, Baha'u'llah spoke about some of the Shi'ih divines of Nasiri'd-Din Shah and Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Aziz, of their total failure, despite their great exertions, to extinguish the light of the Faith of God. 'Before long,' He said, 'you shall see people of all the nations of the world gathered under the shade of the tent of the Cause of God.' [5]

Future of the Ridvan Garden

Abu'l Qasim said that sometimes Bahá'u'lláh slept in His room at the Ridvan. At such times Abu'l Qasim never slept, but, in his devotion, remained watching.

One night, sitting thus before the door of the room of the Blessed Perfection, being weary, sleep overpowered him. He was awakened by a touch upon his neck, and beheld the Blessed Perfection standing beside him, Who said to him:

"You were sleeping and I awakened you."

He told the gardener to come into the room, and then He said to him:

"Do you see this Garden? ... people ... will say: 'What a great time was that when Abu'l Qasim used to serve in this Garden!' and they will beg to be permitted to visit this Place. [6]"

Shoghi Effendi placed the picture of the gardener at the top of the staircase leading to the upper floor of the Mansion of Bahji. Hand of the Cause Giachery writes;

A few days later, on the evening after my first visit to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah and the Mansion of Bahji, the Guardian asked me what I had first noticed on entering the Mansion. He was looking at me intently, with an expression of expectation on his dear face, and when I replied that on the wall at the top of the staircase I had seen the framed photograph of an interesting man's head, possibly of a Persian, his face became aglow with an inner feeling of pleasure and gratification. 'Oh, I am glad you did see it,' he said smiling; 'how observant you are. I placed that picture there myself for everyone to see. It is our remarkable and celebrated gardener Abu'l-Qasim, whose services to the Master and

myself will never be forgotten.' I had heard before of Abu'l Qasim and of his great competence and dedicated activities, but I had not seen his photograph, now so much honoured as to welcome every visitor who enters the Mansion of Baha'u'llah [8].



The room of the Blessed Beauty in the building of the Ridvan Garden.

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- [6] Pilgrim Notes of Isabella Brittingham 1901
- [7] Pilgrim Notes of May Maxwell
- [8] Shoghi Effendi - Recollections by Ugo Giachery page 109