

### 3. Early life

Now an account of my own life is as follows. I was born<sup>1</sup> towards the last days of Sikh rule in 1839 or 1840 C.E. In 1857 I was sixteen or seventeen years old; my beard and moustaches had not yet started growing. Before my birth my father had suffered terrible hardships. Once he travelled through India on foot. But at the time of my birth his straitened circumstances had changed to affluence. It is the mercy of God, the Most High, that I did not see anything of his time of hardship. Nor did I receive anything of the rulership and government which my forefathers possessed. On the contrary, like Jesus, who was a prince in name only because of descent from David, and had lost all means of kingdom, so also for me it can only be said in words that I am a descendant of such chiefs and rulers. Perhaps this happened so that in this respect too there should be a similarity with Jesus. Although I cannot say like Jesus that I do not even have a place where to lay my head, nonetheless I know that all the rulership and authority of our ancestors was taken away, and by my time that state of affairs came entirely to an end.

This happened so that God the Most High might establish a new order, as there has been a revelation from that Glorified One mentioned in *Barāhīn Aḥmadiyya*: *Subḥān Allāhu tabāraka wa ta‘ālā zāda majda-ka yanqaṭi‘u ābā’a-ka wa yabda’u min-ka*, i.e., “God of great blessings, High and Pure, has exalted your dignity more than that of your family; from now on, the

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1. *Author’s note*: I was born as a twin. A girl born with me died after a few days. I think that in this way God the Most High entirely removed from me the essence of femininity.

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mention of your ancestors will be cut off and God will begin with you.” Similarly He gave me the following good news: “I shall bless you, and bless you greatly, so much so that kings shall seek blessings from your garments”.

### **Education.**

Reverting to the previous sequence of events, I record that my education in childhood took place as follows. When I was six or seven years old, a teacher of Persian was employed for me who taught me the Holy Quran and a few Persian books. The name of this venerable man was Fazl-i-Ilahi. When I was about ten years old, an Arabic-knowing *Maulavi sahib* (Muslim religious teacher) was appointed for my instruction whose name was Fazl-i-Ahmad. I feel that since my education was the very beginning of the bounty (*fazl*) of God the Most High, hence the first word in the names of these teachers was also *fazl*. The said *Maulavi sahib*, a devoutly religious and esteemed man, taught me with great care and diligence. Under him I studied some books of Arabic grammar and rules of syntax of the language. Subsequently when I was seventeen or eighteen years old, I had occasion to study for a few years under another *Maulavi sahib* by the name of Gul Ali Shah. My father had employed him also, and appointed him to teach in Qadian. From this latter *Maulavi sahib* I received education in the established branches of knowledge such as grammar, logic and philosophy, to the extent that God the Most High had willed.

I read certain books on medicine from my father who was a very competent physician in the practice of [traditional] medicine. In those days I was so much absorbed in the study of books that it was as if I was not living in this world. My father frequently instructed me to reduce my reading of books because he was afraid, out of great concern, in case my health should suffer. Besides, it was also his intention that I should give up this diversion and join him in his cares and anxieties. This was what happened at last.

**Pursuit of father's legal cases and farming work.**

My father had filed suits in the British administered courts to recover the villages of some of his ancestors. He set me also to pursue these cases and I remained engaged in these affairs for a long time. I regret that much of my precious time was wasted in these meaningless disputes. Along with this, my father placed me in charge of agricultural matters. I was not a man of such temperament and nature and as a result I was often the object of my father's displeasure. He was extremely sympathetic and kind to me but he wanted to make me deal with people like a man of worldly business, but I was by nature thoroughly averse to such a type of dealing. Once a commissioner wanted to come to Qadian and my father insisted that I should go a distance of two or three *kos* to welcome him. But my temperament greatly abhorred it and I was also unwell, so I could not go. This also became a cause of his displeasure. He wanted me to be absorbed in worldly affairs every moment, which I could not do.

Still I think that I had devoted myself to the service of my father sincerely, not for worldly gain but merely to obtain Divine reward for obedience. At the same time I was engaged in praying for him. He believed from the bottom of his heart that I was acting out of the teaching to do good to parents. Many a time he used to say: "It is only out of mercy that I am drawing the attention of this son of mine towards worldly affairs, but I know that what he is inclined towards, that is, towards the religion, that is the right and true way; while we are only wasting our lives."

**Short period in official service.**

Similarly, during the time I was under his care, a few years of my life were spent in government employment, which I detested. At last, as my separation weighed heavily on my father, so on his order, which was exactly what I wanted, I resigned and relieved myself of that service which I did not like, and came back again to my father.

This experience taught me that the majority of those in official service lead a most unclean life. Among them there must be very few who fully adhere to fasting and prayers, and are able to save themselves from those unlawful pleasures which confront them by way of trial. I was always astonished to look at them, finding most of them to be people whose innermost desires were entirely limited to the gain of money and possessions, whether acquired lawfully or by illicit means. Many of them exerted themselves, day and night, only for the goal of worldly progress in this short life. I found very few people among those in official service who, by merely remembering the greatness of God the Most High, possess the high moral virtues of meekness, generosity, chastity, lowliness, modesty, humility, service of mankind, inner purity, lawful earning, truthful speech and abstinence from wrong-doing. On the contrary, I found many of them to be the devil's brethren in arrogance, waywardness, neglect of the religion and all kinds of other low morals. Since it was according to Divine wisdom that I should have experience of all kinds and manner of human beings, hence I had to live in all sorts of company. In the words of the author of the *Masnavi of Rumi* I spent all those days in intense revulsion and pain:

*“I was distressed by all the companies I associated myself with, good ones and bad ones,*

*“Every one thought that he was my friend, but did not seek the secrets of my heart.”*

### **Return home.**

When I returned to the service of my late father, I became engaged as before in the same agricultural work. But most of my time was spent in pondering over the Holy Quran and the perusal of commentaries [of the Quran] and Hadith. Many a time I used to read out from those books to my revered father. Because of his failures, my father was frequently despondent and sad. In pursuing court cases he had spent some seventy

thousand rupees, the result of which was ultimately failure. For, the villages belonging to our ancestors had gone out of our possession a long time ago, and their recovery was a vain thought. It was due to this frustration that my late revered father spent his life in a very deep whirlpool of despondency, sorrow and distress. Observing those circumstances gave me the opportunity to produce a change for the good in myself, because the picture of the miserable life of my revered father taught me the lesson to lead that selfless life which is free from worldly pollution.

Although the revered Mirza *sahib* still had possession of a few villages, and some annual grant had also been allocated by the British Government, and there was also the pension from the period of service, yet it was nothing compared to what he had experienced in the past. That is why he was always sorrowful and grieving. Frequently he would say that if he had exerted himself for religion as much as he had exerted himself for sordid worldly gain then he might have become a saint of the age. He used to recite this poetic verse often:

*“Life has been spent, there remains nothing except a few days; It is better that I should spend whole nights in the remembrance of Some One [i.e. God].”*

I saw many a time that he would tearfully recite a verse composed by himself, and it is this: *O Friend of every friendless one, from your door I do not expect that I would go disappointed.* Sometimes he used to recite this verse of his own with much feeling: *I swear by the tears of the eyes of the lovers and the dust of the foot of the Beloved; My heart burns in blood for Some One.*

Towards the close of his life, he was daily getting more and more overwhelmed by the disappointment of having to appear empty-handed [of good deeds] before the Powerful and Glorious God. Again and again, he used to say regretfully: “I wasted my life in vain for the pointless disputes of the world.” Once my revered father related the following dream. “I saw the messenger

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of Allah, on whom be peace and the blessings of Allah, coming towards my house with great glory, like the coming of a majestic king. Then I ran towards him for his reception. When I drew near, it occurred to me that I should make an offering. So I put my hand in my pocket, but it contained only one coin. When I looked carefully, I found even that to be a fake. On this my eyes were filled with tears. Then I woke up.” Then he himself gave the interpretation that where there is worldliness, the love of God and the Messenger has the value of counterfeit money. He used to say that, as with him, the last part of his father’s life was also spent in nothing but distress, sorrow and grief, and whatever he tried to do resulted in failure. He also used to recite a verse of his father, i.e. my great-grandfather, one line of which I have forgotten but the other is this: “When I make a plan, destiny laughs over it.”

### **Father’s death.**

This sorrow and pain, which he felt, intensified in old age. It was with this in mind that, about six months earlier, my revered father built a mosque in the centre of this village, which is the central mosque of this area, and expressed the following as his will: “I should be buried in a corner of the mosque so that the name of God, the Honourable and Glorious, would always reach my ears, and perhaps it might turn out to be the source of my pardon.” It so happened that the day the construction of the mosque was completed in all respects, and perhaps only a few bricks of the floor remained to be fixed, my revered father, after being ill for only a few days, died of dysentery. He was buried in the very corner of this mosque where he had stood and indicated the spot. O Allah, have mercy on him and make him enter the garden, Amen! He was about eighty or eighty-five years old.

His words of remorse as to why he wasted precious time for the sake of the world are still heart-rending for me. I know that every person who seeks the world will at the end of his life carry this regret with him. Anyone who cares to understand, let him understand.