

### Jasb and Qumrud

A number of villages around Qumm came to have important Baha'i communities. Jasb (or Jasp) is the name of a region 52 kilometres southwest of Qumm, consisting of seven villages along a river valley which is 12 kilometres long and four kilometres wide at its widest point in the north and completely surrounded on all sides by high mountains. The southern end of the valley is only a few kilometres from Naraq (see vol. 2) but steep cliffs necessitate a long roundabout route. According to tradition, seven of the 313 companions of the Hidden Imam would be from Jasb. The population, which is said to be of Bakhtiyari origin, was estimated as 3,500 in all the villages in 1914.

The Baha'i history of Jasb began in the Babi period when Mulla Husayn Bushru'i and a companion visited the area in 1847. He stayed for some six days at the house of Haji Sayyid Nasru'llah in Kirugan (in the upper part of the valley, 24 km northeast of Dilijan, pop. 125 in 1296/1879;<sup>29</sup> 990 in 1951) and asked that all the elders of the seven villages of the area be called to a special meeting. At this meeting he announced the claim of the Bab. Those attending the meeting were divided, with some accepting and others rejecting the new message. Most of those who became Babis lived in Kirugan, a village that had a large number of Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad).<sup>30</sup>

One of those who attended that meeting and accepted the message was a leading mulla of the area, Mulla Ja'far Jasbi, a maternal cousin of Mulla Muhammad Naraq (the most prominent cleric of Kashan, see vol. 2).<sup>31</sup> He started by converting his wife, Mulla Fatimih, a learned woman who used to teach, translate and comment on the Qur'an for the women of the area. He then stopped attending his mosque and propagated his faith privately. On 26 November 1849 (the day of 'Ashura, when the martyrdom of Imam Husayn occurred), a group of villagers came to his house and insisted that he come and preach to them. Since they would not relent, he reluctantly went to the Husayniyyih (building for the recital of the sufferings of Imam Husayn), which was the largest gathering place in the area,

<sup>29</sup> Mudarrisi-Tabataba'i, *Qumm-namih* 157.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> One source states that he was a son of the maternal aunt of Mulla Muhammad Naraq. See ZH 5:18. Oral tradition among the Baha'is of Jasb also has Mulla Ja'far originally coming to Jasb from Naraq. Telephone interview with Mrs Sharifah Mohajer-Jasbi, 17 October 2004.

and ascended the pulpit. He told them that since the Promised One had now come, these days of mourning should be changed to days of joy. As a result of this pronouncement, he was shunned by his former congregation and even attacked. One night he was warned by Aqa Sayyid Hasan, one of the landowners in the area, that there was a plan to kill him that night and so he left for Kashan. In Kashan, Mulla Muhammad Naraqī ordered him to ascend the pulpit after Friday prayers and repent of his beliefs. Instead, Mulla Ja'far ascended and proclaimed the Babi Faith openly and forthrightly. When he was asked about his beliefs in front of a gathering of clerics at the home of Mulla Muhammad Naraqī, he again proclaimed them fearlessly, even putting his hand into the fire in response to a challenge in order to prove the sincerity of his belief. The clerics appealed to the governor to have him arrested and he was sent to Tehran. There, in about 1866, he was killed by being thrown into a well.<sup>32</sup>

Mulla Ja'far's wife, Mulla Fatimih, continued his work, converting her own family and others, including her brother Mulla Ghulam-Rida (d. 1332/1913), who was also very active in spreading the Baha'i Faith and on one occasion was severely bastinadoed for this. When Mirza Asadu'llah Isfahani visited the village in October 1881, he encouraged the Baha'is to set up an assembly of consultation.<sup>33</sup> On 25 April 1882 the people of Jasb complained of Mulla Ghulam-Rida's activities to Sayyid Javad Mujtahid Kashani in Qumm, who wrote to Muhammad Mahdi Khan I'tidad ud-Dawlih (see above), who was governing Qumm on behalf of Kamran Mirza Na'ib us-Saltanih. The latter sent men to Jasb to arrest Mulla Ghulam-Rida and his brother Aqa Muhammad Javad. Aqa Mir Jasbi, who had been converted after assisting Mulla Ghulam-Rida when he had been bastinadoed and had in turn converted many, went to Tehran and petitioned Kamran Mirza and the shah. Orders were sent to Kamran Mirza who in turn ordered I'tidad ud-Dawlih to free the two brothers. Kamran Mirza's steward, 'Abbas-Quli Khan, however, also wrote to I'tidad ud-Dawlih saying that Aqa Mir had been defaming him (I'tidad ud-Dawlih) and this angered him. The latter wrote back to Kamran Mirza saying he feared that if he freed the brothers there would be disturbances in Qumm and instead suggested Aqa Mir be

<sup>32</sup> Rafraf, 'Mulla Ja'far Jasbi'; ZH 5:18-19, 6:621-2, 623-4; KD 1:440-2; Malik-Khusravi, *Tarikh* 3:435-41. The last named considers that the execution of Mulla Ja'far occurred between 1892 and 1896 because of the existence of a prayer for him by 'Abdu'l-Baha, but this seems unlikely.

<sup>33</sup> A. Isfahani, 'Yad-dasht-ha' 65.

arrested. This resulted in Aqa Mir's detention for a time. Even after his release, however, Aqa Mir persisted in his efforts and eventually, when Kamran Mirza travelled to Qumm in June–July 1883, Aqa Mir went as well and managed to get Kamran Mirza to interview the prisoners. Kamran Mirza was pleased with the answers he received and freed Aqa Muhammad Javad, promising he would send orders for Mulla Ghulam-Rida to be released when he returned to Tehran. When he reached Tehran, however, the arrests of Baha'is there occupied his attention and he did not send the promised orders, despite being reminded by Aqa Mir. Ghulam-Rida spent more than 16 months in prison. Aqa Mir eventually moved to Diya'abad near Tehran.<sup>34</sup> The number of Baha'is in Jasb reached some 30 persons in the time of Baha'u'llah.<sup>35</sup>

The main instigators of these persecutions in Jasb were two brothers-in-law of Mulla Ghulam-Rida, 'Abdu'l-Vahhab the *kadkhuda* and Mulla Muhammad Rida Sayf ush-Shari'ah. In later years these two brothers-in-law of Mulla Ghulam-Rida again conspired to lead a mob in attacking the house of Mulla Ghulam-Rida, beating him to the point where they thought he had died and taking him off to the cemetery. But he survived. On another occasion the local governor of the area imposed a large fine on the Baha'is. Nineteen of the Baha'is left for Tehran where they appealed this action of the local governor. They returned with an order of the government cancelling the fine but they still faced great opposition in Jasb.<sup>36</sup>

In the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha, a local assembly was established in Kirugan. When in 1903 the Baha'is were banned from the public baths on the orders of Mirza Fakhru'd-Din Mujtahid Kashani and Haji Sayyid 'Abdu'llah and Sayyid Sadiq, *mujtahids* of Qumm, the Baha'is built their own baths. At first this was a traditional bath with troughs (*khazīnihs*) but it was later altered to provide showers. As the Baha'is lived in the upper part of the village, the water came to these baths before anyone else had used it and the baths were cleaner than the others in the village, so many of the local Muslims preferred to use them.

There were further attacks on the Baha'is and matters became much worse during the rebellion of Na'ib Husayn Kashani (see vol. 2), which resulted in lawlessness for seven years and many attacks on the Baha'is.<sup>37</sup> A

34 ZH 5:261–3; Baha'i, 'Istintaqiyyih' MS B 122–5; A. Isfahani, 'Yad-dasht-ha' 88, 101, 104.

35 ZH 6:622–3.

36 ZH 8a:655–6.

37 ZH 8a:657–8.

tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha names some 33 heads of family in Jasb from which we may assume that there were probably some 165 Baha'is in the area (about five per cent of the population), the largest number of Baha'is being in the village of Kirugan, where about half the population was Baha'i.<sup>38</sup> As noted above, the Baha'is lived in the upper part of the village and the Muslims in the lower. There were a few Baha'i families in some of the other villages of Jasb, such as Varun (Varan, 3 km northwest of Kirugan, pop. 1,800 in 1951), Harazjan (3 km southwest of Kirugan, pop. 500 in 1951) and Visqunaqan (5 km south of Kirugan).<sup>39</sup>

In 1926 there was a major attack on the Baha'is of Jasb. A shepherd was killed some 30 kilometres away but four Baha'is were accused of this and, at the instigation of Sayyid 'Abbas Fakhr us-Sadat and on the orders of the governor I'timad ud-Dawlih, a troop of mounted security police descended on the area and began to attack the Baha'is. Four of them were arrested and taken off to Qumm. When the authorities in Qumm did not do anything with the Baha'is, a crowd gathered in the precincts of the shrine of Fatimih in Qumm shouting that the governor was a 'Babi', forcing the governor to put the Baha'is in chains. The plan was that on the day of 'Ashura the procession of mourners and self-flagellators would go to the police station, drag out the Baha'is and kill them. However the chief of police, Samsam, moved the prisoners to another location during the commemorations. Three of the prisoners were released after three months but the fourth was taken to Tehran where he was kept for 11 months before he could establish his innocence.<sup>40</sup>

In about 1921 'Abdu'l-Baha sent the Baha'is of Jasb a tablet encouraging them to set up a school. Sayfu'llah Khan, a Baha'i merchant of Jasb who frequently went to Kashan and Qumm in pursuit of his business affairs, after consulting with the local assembly of Kirugan, persuaded Aqa Sayyid Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsi (d. 1959), who was originally from Jasb, and his wife, Tal'at Khanum ('Ubudiyyat, known as Khanum Mudir), to come to Jasb and establish a school there in the village of Kirugan. At first the school was held in their own house but after a time a separate four-room building was built with a courtyard and a large garden. The school taught

38 ZH 8a:660-1.

39 Telephone interview with Mrs Sharifih Mohajer-Jasbi, 17 October 2004. In 1940 or so the village of Kirugan consisted of about 600 people, with more than half the population being Baha'is.

40 ZH 8a:659-60.

boys and girls up to the fourth primary year. This couple also taught the adults such that all of the Baha'is of the area became literate. They also held religious education classes for both children and adults. After the Baha'i schools were closed in 1934, the building became the Baha'i centre (*hazirat ul-quds*).<sup>41</sup>

The people of the village of Qumrud (18 km northeast of Qumm, pop. 90 houses, about 450 people, in 1296/1879;<sup>42</sup> 150 houses, about 750 people, in 1914; and 1,500 in 1951) were all from the Ahl-i Haqq religious community. Some of the villagers were related to the guards who had escorted the Bab from Isfahan to Adharbayjan. Therefore the Bab was brought here on the way and as a consequence a number of people became Babis, including Faraj Khan, who was in charge of security for the roads in the area. Many years later Mirza Ghulam-Husayn Saqat-furush (see fig. 42), an Ahl-i Haqq convert from Tehran, also brought a number of people from this village into the Baha'i community. Ghiyath ud-Dawlih, who was governor of the area, was favourable to the Baha'is and sometime towards the end of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Ustad Ibrahim 'Ubudiyat (see above, under Qumm) established a Baha'i school in the village which both Baha'i and Muslim children attended. There is an important tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha addressed to Ustad Ibrahim giving detailed instructions about the school and the education of children. After the death of Ghiyath ud-Dawlih, however, the enemies of the Baha'is persecuted Ustad Ibrahim and forced the closure of the school. Mazandarani names some 14 heads of families who were Baha'is, which means there were probably at least 60 Baha'is in the village.<sup>43</sup>

41 Personal communication from Mrs Sharifih Mohajer-Jasbi, 25 September 2003; see also ILMA 84:426-7; Muhammad-Husayni, *Tarikh* 263-4 gives a slightly different account of the history of the school. See also Hakim (*Les Baha'is* 39-40), which is based on the author's research in Kirugan in 1972 and 1976 for her doctoral thesis at L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 1979.

42 Mudarrisi-Tabataba'i, *Qumm-namih* 142.

43 Mazandarani, *Asrar* 4:509-10; Davachi, *Daw Baradar* 23; DB 224-5; Muhammad-Husayni, *Tarikh* 258-60; most of the tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha on education is translated in *Selections*, no. 110, pp. 135-6.