

SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

Dr. Zia Mabsoot Bagdadi (1882–1937) "The Happy One"



Can you imagine getting named by a Messenger of God? Zia Bagdadi was born in Beirut (now in Lebanon) in 1882. Bahá'u'lláh gave him his first name, meaning "light," and added "Effendi," a title of respect. Later, He gave Zia another joyful name.

As a child, Zia visited Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, His home near 'Akká, Israel. When Bahá'u'lláh asked about his health, Zia replied in Arabic, "Mabsoot," or "I am happy."

Bahá'u'lláh asked about his father. "Mabsoot," Zia said. "How is your mother?" Bahá'u'lláh asked.

"Mabsoot," Zia said again. Bahá'u'lláh laughed heartily, and from then on He called Zia "Mabsoot Effendi," or "The Happy One."

Zia said it was "the greatest honor and privilege to see Bahá'u'lláh and sit at his feet many days and nights . . ." He held Zia's hand as He chanted prayers "with the most charming and melodious voice . . ."

"My eyes would remain fixed on his majestic face," he wrote. "But whenever he glanced at me with his brown, piercing, yet most affectionate eyes, then I had to turn mine away and look down on the floor."

Always Helpful

In 1909, Zia moved to the U.S. to study medicine and soon began his work as a doctor. He also translated into English letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, who led the Bahá'í Faith after His passing.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá traveled to the U.S. in 1912, Zia spent a lot of time with him, writing articles about the journey. Zia eagerly served 'Abdu'l-Bahá in any way.



In 1921, Zia Bagdadi dug the first shovel of earth to celebrate the start of construction for the Bahá'í House of Worship in North America.

At a peace conference in New York, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted to give a Persian rug to Mr. Smiley, his host. Zia volunteered to go to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's apartment in New York City to get it. It was at night, and no passenger train was available, so Zia hopped aboard a freight train. He arrived in the city at about 2:00 a.m., disheveled and dusty. He got the rug, then rode a train back in the early morning. He arrived just as 'Abdu'l-Bahá was saying goodbye

to Mr. Smiley, who was overjoyed by the gift.

"Unforgettable"

Zia was a strong supporter of race unity at a time before the U.S. had outlawed racial discrimination. When he invited an African American friend to his apartment in Chicago, his prejudiced landlord was so offended that he told Zia to move out!

Racial injustice led to violent riots in Chicago in 1919, causing 38 deaths and leaving 1,000 African American families homeless. Zia delivered food to people in these struggling neighborhoods. He also spoke about the need for race unity at Bahá'í conventions around the U.S.

In the 1930s, Zia moved with his wife, Zeenat, and their daughter, Parvene, to Augusta, Georgia. He continued to practice medicine and serve the Bahá'í Faith.

In April 1937, Zia passed away. Shoghi Effendi, who led the Faith after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, praised Zia's "EXEMPLARY FAITH," his "AUDACITY," and his "INDEFATIGABLE EXERTION," calling these qualities "UNFORGETTABLE."