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'Adasiyyah: A Study in Agriculture and Rural Development

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Abstract

This paper comprises of a systematic study of the work of Baha'i farmers, food growers and sharecroppers who, for over half a century (1906–60), toiled on the lands in 'Adasiyyah, a village in the north-west of Jordan. The history of this community has been reconstructed from written and oral sources. The author presents the early history of this community from the time that 'Abdu'l-Baha purchased the land for it. The earliest settlers were Baha'is of Zoroastrian background who moved there from Yazd in Iran. The author describes the gradual growth of this community, some of the problems that they encountered and the guidance that 'Abdu'l-Baha gave them. In particular, the author concentrates on the agricultural development of the community's lands and the innovations that they introduced, some of which were subsequently taken up by other farmers in the area. Some conclusions are drawn about the features of Baha'i development in rural areas as advocated by 'Abdu'l-Baha: the importance of agriculture to rural development; fairness and moderation in the landlord–tenant relationship; the importance of prayer and consultation in community decision-making and resolution of conflict; and the importance of developing self-sufficiency and self-reliance in rural populations.

Keywords

development
agriculture
rural communities
self-sufficiency
landlord–tenant relationships
'Abdu'l-Baha
Jordan
'Adasiyyah

The author of this paper, Dr Iraj Poostchi, passed away on 30 May 2008 while he was preparing a book based on his researches into the Baha'i community at 'Adasiyyah and its agricultural practices as an example of Baha'i social and economic development. Unfortunately, the manuscript he left was not in a state that could be published as a book, but this paper represents the core of the research that he had done. What has been summarized in order to bring this work to a size that can be published here is a great deal of material regarding the general geography and agriculture of Jordan. Nothing of importance relating to 'Adasiyyah itself has been omitted.

This account comprises of a systematic study of the work of Baha'i farmers, food growers and sharecroppers who, for over half a century (1906–60), toiled on the lands in 'Adasiyyah ('Adasiyyih, al-'Adasiya), a village in the north-west

of Jordan (latitude: 32° 39' 54 N, longitude: 35° 36' 47 E). Although it follows a chronological order, it is by no means intended to be a historical account of the daily life of any of these farmers or that of the nascent Baha'i community of 'Adasiyyah prior to the First World War, nor of the more socio-economically developed, greatly refined and actively engaged community in the decades after the First World War and up to the mid-1960s. This study focuses on the techniques, policies and measures used by 'Abdu'l-Baha to guide the Baha'i farmers in such a way as to turn the desolate wild vegetation and scrubland of the area into fertile farmlands, well-managed plots of vegetables and fruit orchards. This paper is a research study into the processes of rural development in the context of building a prosperous self-reliant rural community. In the implementation of this process of development detailed agricultural research plays a crucial role.

This work arose out of a suggestion made at the 1993 International Society for Agriculture and Rural Development's (ISARD) conference held at the Landegg Academy, Wienacht, Switzerland, that the society's members should attempt to compile information about the agricultural and rural development projects, plans and work carried out during the lifetimes of the central figures of the Baha'i Faith. After two members had discussed two projects for a period of time, it became clear that we were rapidly losing time because, before long, some of the aging Baha'is, whose families were directly or indirectly involved in the development of 'Adasiyyah, would no longer be with us. I therefore decided to embark upon one of these projects single-handedly. So in 1999, after a lengthy period of correspondence with the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan and the approval of the Universal House of Justice, I visited Jordan and started the task of interviewing as many members of the original Baha'i farmers of 'Adasiyyah as possible. Although many had passed away, a few family members from the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha were still living and fortunately their sons and daughters who had lived and worked on those farms up until the late 1950s were still in different parts of Jordan. A number of them were interviewed for this paper.[1]

What appears in the following pages is as accurate an account as possible of the life and work of these farmers and their families narrated by the farmers and/or the first generation of their sons and daughters who lived and worked on these farms. These were the farmers who brought 'Abdu'l-Baha's great vision to reality and implemented one of the finest agricultural and rural development projects planned and directed by 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Lack of access to any personal diaries of these farmers or other Baha'i rural inhabitants of 'Adasiyyah at the time or reports of agricultural activities and rural development work carried out during the period between 1910 and 1960 made the task of preparing a cohesive, authentic and meaningful presentation much more difficult. There were also very few relevant documented materials on the agricultural and rural development work of 'Adasiyyah available in the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan or at the Baha'i World Centre. It is quite probable that somewhere there may be accounts or personal diaries related to the cultivation of the land and the social changes that took place in the Baha'i community between 1906 and 1960 that I was unable to locate.

By using the interviews and recollections of as many Baha'is of the time as possible and cross-checking individual statements, it was possible to

1. I must express my deep gratitude for the considerable assistance I have received from various sources: the Universal House of Justice for the provision of valuable documents, photographs and information; Mr Ali Nakhjavani, who on two visits to Haifa provided me with some of the background information about 'Adasiyyah and the Baha'i endowments there; the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan for the provision of some of the information, arrangements for my visits and some transport; Mr Amjad Mihragani who assisted in the day-to-day work of visiting the Baha'is, libraries, government and non-government institutions, ministries and universities in Jordan; Mrs Shahla Shirazi Afnan, who translated when I visited Irbid and Shouneh-Shamaliah and Mrs Zaynab Jamshidi who provided much information.

gain a fairly good idea of the processes involved in the development of agriculture, the social and economic changes of the immediate rural area and those of the Baha'i community at large. This information had to be further examined and compared in the context of the agriculture, rural life and agrarian systems of the Arab states of the Ottoman Empire.

Jordan: geography and history

In presenting the events and decades of work which transformed the wilderness of 'Adasiyyah into productive farmlands as well as building a thriving, cohesive Baha'i community, it is helpful to have some background information on the country during the period of 1900 to 1970.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was one of the new states carved out of the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and was awarded to Prince 'Abdu'llah, son of King Husayn of Hijaz. For some 25 years after World War I, Transjordan was administered under a British mandate and its economy was closely connected with that of the neighbouring British mandated territory of Palestine. Much of its surplus agricultural production, particularly cereals, was marketed in the populous districts of coastal Palestine, and most of the rest of its foreign trade passed through the port of Haifa.

In 1946 Transjordan gained its independence from the United Kingdom and became a hereditary constitutional monarchy, renamed the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. A year later Britain withdrew from Palestine, and in the subsequent division of that country along a truce line, Jordan acquired an area of the plateau country of Samaria and Judaea to the west, extending from Jenin in the north to Hebron in the south, whose indigenous population was itself greater than that of the former kingdom. But in addition, Jordan had to absorb from her new western neighbour, Israel, a vast influx of refugees who have since accounted for approximately one-third of the country's total population. The country has a total area of 89,278 square kilometres (37,000 square miles).

One of the dominant topographical features of Jordan is the depression of the River Jordan valley, some 110 kilometres (65 miles) long and 5–24 kilometres (3–14 miles) wide. This valley, called the Ghor (al-Ghawr), is part of the African Great Rift Valley, a deep narrow valley that extends, within

Figure 1: The Yarmuk Gorge with the Golan Heights in the background, 1940s; in the foreground is Shukrullah Ashchi (photograph from Hossein Ashchi).

Jordan, from just south of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The River Jordan runs through the centre of the valley to the Dead Sea. In the north of the country marshes extend north-westward along the south-west Jebel Druse (Druse Mountains) towards the low watershed of the River Yarmuk. With the highlands of Ajlun and the northern Belka behind it, the village and land of 'Adasiyyah is located on the south and east bank of the River Yarmuk as it flows to meet the northern end of the River Jordan.[2]

Climate: The climate varies from the Mediterranean type in the west to the desert type in the east and the south, but the land is generally arid. The proximity of the Mediterranean Sea is the major climatic influence but this influence is modified by continental air masses and altitude. The prevailing winds throughout the country are westerly to south-westerly, but spells of hot, dry, dusty winds blowing from the south-east of the Arabian peninsula frequently occur. Known locally as Khamsin, these winds bring the country its most uncomfortable weather. They blow most often in the early and late summer and can last for several days at a time before terminating abruptly as the wind direction changes and much cooler air follows. In the Jordan valley the heat is stifling, and from June to September the average daily temperature is around 38° Celsius (100° F).

Because of the variable topographical features of the country, rainfall distribution varies considerably with elevation, latitude and location. The rainfall is relatively high in the area around Irbid, 480 mm (19.2 in.) per annum, Kefr Yuba 643 mm (25.7 in.) and Tayibeh 550 mm (22 in.). These locations are between 23 and 25 kilometres south-east of 'Adasiyyah. It was the frequency and distribution of these rains that profoundly influenced the crop production of the farmers in 'Adasiyyah. It made the cultivation of certain rain-fed crops possible. In all, a minimum average annual rainfall of 200 mm (8 in.) permits marginal farming while an average rainfall of 350 mm (15 in.) produces an adequate yield of most autumn-sown crops. Both the River Yarmuk and River Jordan flow too low below the neighbouring surrounding land to permit gravity irrigation without the use of a pumping system or dykes to raise the level of water.

The greatest level of humidity is found in January, which also is the month of the heaviest rain with about 70 per cent of the annual precipitation falling on the plateau. It decreases fairly rapidly to a minimum in May or June when the humidity is as low as 30 per cent in Amman. There are three phases in the rainy season: the 'Former' rains, the 'Main' rains and the 'Latter' rains. The Former and the Latter rains are the most important for the farmers and crop growers. The first or the Former loosens the soil and allows for ease of ploughing and sowing, and the Latter for the ripening crops. If the Latter rains fail, the spring harvest and cultivation of the summer crops are endangered. Rain generally begins to fall at the end of October, but its quantity is usually insignificant until early November. The heaviest rains occur in January and February after which they decrease rapidly until April, when the Latter rains occur. From June to September there is very little rain.[3]

Natural vegetation, plant and animal life: The 'Adasiyyah area has Mediterranean vegetation and is rich in wood and scrub (maquis). In the 1940s there were still a few good forests left in the country, in spite

2. Information for this section from: Naval Intelligence Division, *Palestine and Transjordan* (B.R. 514, Geographical Handbook Series, Oxford, 1943); G. L. Harris, *Jordan* (New Haven, CT: Harper Press, 1958); W. C. Brice, *South-West Asia* (vol. 3, Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1966); *The World Book Encyclopaedia* (Chicago: World Book Inc., 1997).

3. Information for this section from Naval Intelligence Division, *Palestine and Transjordan*.

of a long history of uncontrolled felling. Most of these forests were to be found in the Ajlun district, including 'Adasiyyah, on the slopes of the higher hills.[4]

Population and settlement patterns: Before World War II, the population of Jordan was 300,000 to 350,000. It had grown to an estimated 586,200 by 1952 and to 900,800 by 1961 (the date of the first population census). With the exception of the Caucasian settlements, small Turkoman community, Baha'i and Druse (an Islamic sect), the majority of the population of TransJordan was Arab. The Arabs of Transjordan, whether Moslem, Christian or followers of any other religion may be classified as follows: settled (i.e. cultivators living in houses); semi-nomadic (cultivators living in tents and still preserving most of the tribal characteristics); or Bedouin (nomads, who do not cultivate the land but depend for their existence on their herds of sheep, goats, camels and other livestock). The vast majority of the population are Sunni Moslems, with a small percentage being Christian. Most non-Arab Christians are Armenians. According to a handbook from 1943, the Baha'is were thought to number around a thousand and live in area of 'Adasiyyah in the Jordan valley (while the Baha'is settled around Haifa and Acre numbered 265 in 1922 and 350 in 1931).[5]

The River Yarmuk and the agriculture of the area

Historically, Palestine and Transjordan are small countries that have been described as being rich agricultural lands and as having supplied in classical times a population many times the present, enjoying a high degree of prosperity from an intensively developed agriculture. Jordan was, indeed, much more highly developed and more intensively cultivated than it is today, as the evidence of old irrigation and terraces show. The only source of water on a scale large enough for such agriculture is from the Yarmuk and Jordan rivers. The Yarmuk rises in the hills of Syria and in its lower reaches forms the frontier between Syria and Jordan. The River Jordan flows from north to south, and throughout its lower reaches, from Lake Tiberias to the Dead Sea, it formed the frontier between Palestine and Jordan. Data from 1932 indicates that the major crops grown in Jordan in order of importance were wheat, barley, lentils, vetch (*kirsinnah*), pulses, millet, maize, raisins and sesame.

In the region south of the River Yarmuk, crop production is not intensive and yields are low. Large variations in yield occur from year to year, in part due to widely fluctuating rainfall. But the situation for the Jordan valley differs. A highly important characteristic of the Jordan valley is its year-round growing season. Double cropping of a large portion of land is both feasible and practical.

Hydrographical studies as well as measurements and estimates of the volumes of water of these two rivers in 1939 showed that at the outlet from Lake Tiberias to the River Jordan 540 million cubic metres pour out per annum as groundwater run-off. This is the water that percolates through the soil after the rain and appears as springs. At the junction of the River Jordan and River Yarmuk there is a flow of 226 million cubic metres. During the rainy season there are liable to be sudden freshets (rushes of rain or fresh water) and floods. During the dry summer months, the flow declines steadily as the tributary streams and springs dry up.

4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*

In 1932 at the confluence of Yarmuk and Jordan, a dam was built to improve the joint waters of both rivers. Hydrographical studies carried out over a period of 13 years between 1925 and 1938 indicated that the volume of water flowing through the River Yarmuk increased steadily from a monthly average of 10–20 cubic metres per second in early January to 40 cubic metres per second in early February, then diminished progressively to a minimum of 8 cubic metres per second in September.[6]

At least three basic types of farms are distinguishable in the region: vegetable-producing farms, field-crop farms and mixed crop and livestock farms. Vegetable farms are the most intensively cultivated and consequently, the most profitable. Major crops grown and the yield given in kilogram per donum (1000 square metres) are wheat 90, barley 98, tomatoes 557, cabbage 1363, cauliflower 1556, peppers 442, peas 117, beans 422, okra 254, potatoes 820, cucumbers 353, peanuts 126, watermelon 396, onions 565, eggplant 983, bananas 1316, lemon 435 and grapes 116. Field-crop farms are generally the least intensive, producing mostly the winter cereals. Some of these farms may receive sufficient rainfall for small crops of sesame, sorghum and vegetables. It has been estimated that the average farm produced an annual gross income of US$876.00 in 1953 including the value of the produce consumed by the farmer's family. Farm expenses amounted to about US$460.00, leaving a net annual return of US$318.00 per farm.[7]

The agrarian systems of the Ottoman Empire

The agricultural and rural development of 'Adasiyyah began during the reign of Sultan 'Abdu'l-Hamid II (1876–1909) when 'Abdu'l-Baha was living in the prison city of 'Akka. In studying the development during this period, a knowledge of the agrarian system in operation at the time gives a better understanding of the social, economic, administrative and spiritual changes that shaped these developments and, specifically, demonstrates the vital role spiritual and moral values play in implementing any worldly projects or plans.

The conditions of peasants, sharecroppers and small farmers in 19th-century Jordan and under the rule of the Ottoman Empire were as wretched as those of other Middle Eastern countries.[8] The Ottoman countryside and its Arab states in particular had been gradually depopulated since the 17th century as a result of misrule, the ravages of war, famine and plague'.[9] Agriculture, the occupation of the great majority of the rural inhabitants, was in a state of stagnation. Poor or inadequate drainage and irrigation systems made the rural areas and their inhabitants victims of alternate floods and droughts. Poor roads often made markets inaccessible and peasants could not dispose of surplus farm produce if they had it, therefore food production was limited to the needs of the family, severely restricting the meagre income of the peasants, sharecroppers and small growers.[10] Cereals were the staple diet of the peasants and their families. They also raised animals to produce dairy products and meat. They sold any excess meat. Animals were also used for haulage and cultivating the land.[11]

The backbone of the agricultural production system of the Arab states in the 19th-century Ottoman Empire consisted of large estates, in which the land was cultivated by a sharecropping peasantry. The crops harvested were divided between landlord and tenant in proportion to their input of land,

6. Information for this section from Sir M. MacDonald and Partners (Chartered Civil Engineers), *Report on the Proposed Extension of Irrigation in the Jordan Valley* (London, 1951).
7. Harza Engineering Company International, *The Yarmuk Jordan Valley Project, Stage II: Engineering and Agricultural Aspect*, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1962).
8. Iraj Poostchi, *Agriculture Beyond 2000: A Bahá'í Perspective* (Henley-on-Thames: Poostchi Publishing, 1992).
9. S. J. Shaw and E. K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 99.
10. E. M. Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers and the Baghdad Railway: a Study in Imperialism* (New York: Russel, 1966) 12.
11. M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East* (London: Longmoan, 1987).

labour, seeds, water and implements as well as draught animals employed for ploughing the land. In many parts of the Arab states of the Ottoman Empire the village community was the basic economic unit with village lands held in common usage. However, the land was periodically redistributed among peasants.[12]

The right to collect the state's share of the farm produce was sold to the highest bidder. Indeed, this right of collecting taxes from the cultivators, peasants and sharecroppers was considered by the Ottomans to be one of the most basic rights of sovereignty. One could say that the ruling class was created and maintained by the Sultan for the very purpose of exercising this right.[13] Throughout the 19th century tax farming remained the mainstay of the Ottoman tax system. The peasants, cultivators and the sharecroppers had to pay taxes or else serve in the imperial army for at least five years.[14]

The peasants, sharecroppers and small farmers had to pay an array of taxes imposed upon them, ranging from those imposed under Islamic Holy Law (*Shari'ah*), to those imposed by the Sultan, 'customary' taxes on all animals, household taxes and the basic tax (*çift resmi*) paid to the landlord in return for the right to cultivate the land. The peasantry was liable to rapacious profiteering by landlords. In the early part of the 19th century dissatisfied and badly treated peasants and sharecroppers would leave these estates or go to the mountains to become shepherds, cultivators, small farmers or bandits. This process resulted in the emergence of large landlords and enormous numbers of landless rural inhabitants and agricultural labourers.[15]

'Adasiyyah: historical background

What is known today as the village of 'Adasiyyah has a long history of settlements and farming stretching over some two thousand years and possibly even earlier into biblical times. Its strategic position at the confluence of the two major rivers Jordan and Yarmuk has made it an important site for military conquerors and a crossroads for caravans, armies and traders in the last 2500 years. At the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha and even until the end of the First World War 'Adasiyyah's administrative affairs were handled by the authorities in Palestine. Today it still maintains its strategic position, since across the two rivers of Jordan and Yarmuk the boundaries of Israel, Jordan and Syria meet in a triangle.

'Adasiyyah is situated south-east of Lake Tiberias and south of the River Yarmuk in the north of Wadi Jordan. To the east of the village lies a mountain range and to the south is the village of Shouneh Shamalieh. To the north it is bound by the River Yarmuk and to the west partly by the River Yarmuk and partly by the River Jordan. The main access route to the village is a paved road from Shouneh Shamalieh which branches off to form a feeder road about half a kilometre before the village centre that leads to the orchards, the farming area and the houses where the Baha'i farmers lived, while the main road continues into the village.

Sometime in 1901, 'Abdu'l-Baha purchased the lands of 'Adasiyyah, as a whole village/estate, from Fayyad-un-Shamdien (or Fias Shamdien) also known as Sheikh al-'Arab.[16] The story of how the purchase came about, as given by one of the three previous owners, is that they had heard of a prospective buyer who lived in Haifa, who happened to be 'Abdu'l-Baha. The three owners decided to go to Haifa and visit him.

12. *ibid.*
13. S. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire* 150.
14. Yapp, *Making of the Modern Near East.*
15. *ibid.*
16. National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan, Monograph on 'Adasiyyah.

17. *ibid.*
18. *ibid.*

For three days they enjoyed 'Abdu'l-Baha's hospitality and were his guests. On the fourth day 'Abdu'l-Baha came over to see them. He greeted them with his usual courtesy and told them that they had been his guests for three days and two-thirds of a day! 'Now tell me what you want and what can I do for you,' said 'Abdu'l-Baha. They all said that they wanted to sell the village of 'Adasiyyah. 'Abdu'l-Baha agreed to the purchase and soon paid them in gold coins for the village. He paid 400 Turkish gold lira for the purchase of 'Adasiyyah.

The original area of 'Adasiyyah, purchased by 'Abdu'l-Baha, was 9200 donum which is equivalent to 920 hectares (2272.40 acres). The unit of measurement in common use at the time was known as the donum. Its area varies in different Arab countries; in Jordan it is 1000 square metres. There is a small compilation about this transaction prepared by three Baha'is, Mr 'Azizu'llah Furudi, Mr Bahram Faraydun Na'imi and Mrs Katayun Siyavush Bihmardi. This compilation was used at a later date by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan, which was elected in 1975, as a source of information.[17]

The title or deed of this transaction was in the name of 'Abdu'l-Baha (Abbas Effendi). It was registered under his name in 1901 at the Land Registry Office of the Ottoman Empire in the city of Tiberias. Once the purchase was agreed, it took a year for the legal transfer of the property and documents of ownership to be processed.

According to the system of land ownership at the time prevalent in Jordan and Palestine, each piece of land was considered divided into 24 qirats irrespective of the size or area. Soon after the completion of the transaction 'Abdu'l-Baha gave one qirat (1/24 of the total area of 920 hectares), 38.33 hectares (94.68 acres) back gratis to the family of al-Wakid, the original owners of 'Adasiyyah from whom he purchased the land. He then gave three qirats of the 'Adasiyyah land, 114.99 hectares (284.03 acres), gratis to his brother Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, despite the latter's rebellion against him. He also gave one qirat 38.33 hectare (94.68 acres) gratis to the Mufti (the religious leader) of Akka (Acre). The total area of land given away by 'Abdu'l-Baha was one-quarter of the total of 920 hectares, or 230 hectares (568 acres).[18] Thus out of 9200 donums (920 hectares) 'Abdu'l-Baha was left with a total land area of 6900 donums or 690 hectares (1704.30 acres).

After the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha, his heirs inherited the estate. Since the ownership title of the lands in 'Adasiyyah was in the name of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi told the Baha'i farmers not to apply for the ownership titles of their farms. The act of not applying for the title of the land each farmer cultivated astonished non-Baha'is because each farmer could have taken possession of a share in the land were it not for Shoghi Effendi's instruction not to do so. During one of his visits to 'Adasiyyah, 'Abdu'l-Baha stated that he had dedicated the whole of 'Adasiyyah as endowments to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah.

When the state of Israel was established in 1948, its boundary with Jordan passed very close to the village of 'Adasiyyah, making it very difficult to continue to live there and many Baha'is moved away. Until 1962, however, 'Adasiyyah had a population of about 200. It was composed of mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds, both Baha'i and non-Baha'i. Some Baha'is had farms in 'Adasiyyah until 1962. Others were Syrian Arabs who

were there temporarily as seasonal farm workers. Every year they would come to 'Adasiyyah to work on the farms for a few months. These migrating workers would come to 'Adasiyyah in the early spring and set up tents or small camps in the foothills. Soon after arrival they would contact the Baha'i farmers for work. Also in the foothills were a number of more permanent settlers. Male members of these families usually worked with the Baha'i farmers in the fields and orchards while their womenfolk helped with the domestic chores of the Baha'i families.

19. *ibid.*
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*

Early tenants and the Iranian farmers

The agricultural and rural development of 'Adasiyyah went through a number of phases, each complementing the others and integrating with the whole. These early phases or stages were as follows:

***Phase I*:** The large tract of land purchased in 'Adasiyyah was virgin land covered by natural vegetation. On this scrubland there were plenty of bushes, trees and thorny shrubs especially the lotus tree (Sidrah).[19] Preparing this land for crop and animal production was a formidable task.

The first group of Baha'i farmers to clear the brush and scrub and start cultivating the land were Mirza Vahid, the son of Mirza Muhammad-Quli the half-brother of Baha'u'llah, and Haji Ali Yazdi. 'Abdu'l-Baha recommended cultivating the land and growing wheat and barley as the first crops. These two Baha'i farmers cultivated part of 'Adasiyyah's land for three years, but could not continue their work since the inhabitants of the neighbouring Arab villages often robbed them or plundered whatever they produced.

'Abdu'l-Baha then leased the land for a period of five years to a wealthy Christian merchant of Kurdish or Turkish origin by the name of Sorsogh or Sorsok. He was a man of good reputation and an experienced rich businessman. It was Sorsogh who built the first guest-house in 'Adasiyyah. Moreover, it was a condition of his lease that instead of paying the rental money to 'Abdu'l-Baha he would build a house, stables and animal sheds in lieu of one year's rental money.[20] It was also stipulated in the lease that he was to clear the brush, the scrub and the wild bushes and prepare the land for the production of crops and the building of houses.

Unfortunately, Sorsogh did not last longer than two years. He farmed the land, planted some crops and cotton, but did not reap a good harvest. Also the majority of any crop he produced was stolen. He managed to build only one house and also cleared only a small area of land. He then went to 'Abdu'l-Baha and apologized for not being able to continue with his contract and said that he could no longer continue his work of cultivating the land in 'Adasiyyah. The year was 1906.[21]

***Phase II*:** A new stage in the development of 'Adasiyyah began when in 1907 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote to the Spiritual Assembly of Tehran and asked them to send a number of Baha'i farmers to come to 'Akka (Acre) and eventually settle in 'Adasiyyah. The Spiritual Assembly of Tehran, in its letter to 'Abdu'l-Baha, stated that the Baha'is who lived in the villages on the outskirts of Yazd, a town in the central plateau on the verge of the great desert of Iran, were most suitable for these agricultural works because they were predominantly farmers. 'Abdu'l-Baha then arranged for a number of

these Iranian farmers who were of a Zoroastrian background to come to 'Adasiyyah to farm and cultivate the land.

Not all the farmers from Yazd arrived together. They were mostly the inhabitants of the village of Mahdiyabad, near Yazd. The first to arrive were Mr Bahram Bihmardi and his wife Katayun (Syavoshi), followed by Rustam Bihmardi, Hakim Mihragan and his wife. These newly arrived Baha'is went first to 'Akka (Acre) and worked as gardeners in the garden opposite Bahji, the Baydun's orchard, instead of working in the Mansion of Bahji as was originally intended. Because this garden could not be sold or rented to them, when the transaction with Sorsogh fell through, 'Abdu'l-Baha sent Bahram Bihmardi to 'Adasiyyah to cultivate the land. He was the first to settle there. A carpenter by the name of Husayn Kashi built a wooden house for him. His wife, Katayun, stayed for four months in 'Abdu'l-Baha's house in Haifa, then followed her husband to 'Adasiyyah in 1908.[22]

The families of Furudi, Siyavushi, Bihmardi, Akhtar-Khavari, Ruhani, Surush-i-Nush and Surush-i-Fard were among the first group to arrive. According to the publication of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan, in 1910 Shahryar Jamshid Mihrgani, Shahryar Bihmardi and Isfandyar Bihmardi arrived in 'Adasiyyah. They were followed by Jamshid Mihragani and his wife Khatun and their children Shahryar, Rustam, Nuru'llah, Shirin and Ruhangiz.

With the expansion of agricultural activities, more workers were needed. Thus, soon after in 1911 or 1913, more families from Yazd arrived. They included Shah-Kavus, his wife Surur and their seven children; Faraydun Khudadad, his wife Firuzih and their five children; Mihraban Kayghubadi, his wife and four children. They first arrived in Akka before going to 'Adasiyyah. Others who moved there were Hakim Mihragan and his wife Shirin and their sons and daughter Habib and Munavvar. There was also Jamshid Mihraban who was later joined by his brother Hushang. Jamshid first worked in the Ferdaws Garden (near 'Akka). Soon 'Abdu'l-Baha sent Jamshid to 'Adasiyyah and told him that he was sending him to a place quite safe and comfortable with a warm climate and lots of water and good farming land. So he moved with his wife and four children. They were the last family to move to 'Adasiyyah and farm there by the order of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The year was 1916. 'Abdu'l-Baha welcomed all of them. On one occasion he told them: 'As farmers what else do you want? Here is a plentiful supply of water, a fertile soil, fine warm weather and plenty of sunshine.' 'Abdu'l-Baha used to encourage the Baha'is who visited him in Haifa to go and live in 'Adasiyyah. He often used to say that 'Adasiyyah was a blessed and holy place.

These newly arrived farmers faced many difficulties at the beginning. They neither knew the language of the people of the area nor did they know how to deal with the local workers and neighbouring villagers. But 'Abdu'l-Baha encouraged them to persevere and assured them of better days to come. He always encouraged them to do their best.[23]

As soon as they started working on the land 'Abdu'l-Baha told them that the land they were farming was dedicated to the Shrines of Baha'u'llah and the Bab, therefore none of the farmers had any future right of ownership of the land they were farming. He told them that they were contributing to the Shrines of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. These words of 'Abdu'l-Baha

22. *ibid.*

23. *ibid.*

were a great source of inspiration and encouragement to these farmers and caused them to exert ever greater efforts to produce more crops. These events took place before World War I when the Ottoman Empire was still in power. The ruling system was such that the life of the people under its harsh administration was often hard and unbearable. After World War I the British arrived and life became more tolerable.

At the time that 'Abdu'l-Baha purchased 'Adasiyyah, the inhabitants were all Arabs and Moslems. The Arabs remained in 'Adasiyyah after the purchase of the land. They had a subsistence system of crop and animal production and would grow only enough wheat and barley for their own consumption and those of their livestock. There were a number of non-Baha'i farmers, such as 'Uthman Nasief, Abdu'r-Rahman al-Wakid, Hasan 'Īsa, Ahmad Fandi and Muhammad al-Wakid, who had land close to 'Adasiyyah on which they cultivated food crops. The Baha'i farmers worked solely on the land which belonged to 'Abdu'l-Baha.

'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Adasiyyah

What is presented under this heading is a blend of memoirs of the Baha'is interviewed, narratives from their parents and extracts from the formal short monograph about 'Adasiyyah published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan in 1969.

Figure 2: Some of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah standing in front of one of the orchards, 1940s (L. To R.): Shafiq Ehsan, Haydar Asad Touza, unknown westerner, Husayn Tabrizi, Isfandiyar Siyavushi, Bahram Na'imi, Davud Forudi, Azizu'llah Forudi (photograph from Hossein Ashchi).

In view of the great interest 'Abdu'l-Baha had in the rural and agricultural development of the community and the lands in 'Adasiyyah, he would visit the village and the Baha'is as often as he was able. When in 'Adasiyyah, 'Abdu'l-Baha would usually stay at the house of Bahram Bihmardi, whose wife, Mrs Katayun Siyavush Bihmardi, acted as his hostess. A room in the house was kept vacant for his visit. Sometimes, he would stay at the home of Mr Mihraban Jamshidi where he also had a room especially designated for him. In both houses there were other rooms where Baha'is and visitors were received. The Baha'i farmers, their families and the community also held nineteen-day feasts and Baha'i meetings in his presence. While staying in 'Adasiyyah, he always gave money to the poor and needy. It is reported that, on one occasion, seeing the conditions of the poor, he said that in years to come an orphanage should be built in 'Adasiyyah for the needy, orphaned and poor.

He would also make recommendations to farmers on what to grow if he felt it necessary. He advised them on the social development of the community, especially on how to treat their non-Baha'i neighbours and establish bonds of friendship with them. In his last visit to 'Adasiyyah Shoghi Effendi accompanied him. They both rode on horseback through the area.

When 'Abdu'l-Baha was resting in any of these houses and the weather was too hot, the Baha'is would improvise and create a system of air conditioning by using a method, which after a century, is still the basis of present-day air conditioning systems. On one occasion when 'Abdu'l-Baha visited 'Adasiyyah it was a very hot day and he became very uncomfortable. To cool the room down and make him more comfortable the Baha'is placed a small dried plant bundle made up of sharp pointed branches of the brush, wild bushes and wild plants on the window-sill of his room. They then took turns to pour water slowly and patiently with a perforated watering can on this dry plant mass. As the cross current passed through the moist plant mass it lost a great deal of heat and greatly reduced the temperature of the air entering the room. It also allowed 'Abdu'l-Baha to rest for a time.

***First visit*:** 'Abdu'l-Baha's first visit to 'Adasiyyah was around Riḍván or April 1914, after returning from his tour of Europe and America. On this trip, the Holy Family accompanied him and arrived two days earlier. Soon after arrival 'Abdu'l-Baha went to al-Hammah, a hot spring spa about three kilometres north of 'Adasiyyah and refreshed himself. Later, they all used the spa. There were three types of hot spring at Hammah. Some had almost boiling water, in some the water was tepid or lukewarm while in the third type the water was cold but refreshing. 'Abdu'l-Baha preferred the lukewarm springs.

For their short visit a tent was raised and they all lived in the tent. This first visit lasted for almost a month. During this time 'Abdu'l-Baha rented a room near the railway station where he and his family resided for a short while. The Baha'is then brought whatever he and his family needed to make them comfortable. Mr Bahram Bihmardi was very active in ensuring that all that was needed was taken care of. 'Abdu'l-Baha's family departed for Haifa before he did.

During this visit pilgrims from India and other places came to 'Adasiyyah and Mr Bihmardi would accompany them to see 'Abdu'l-Baha. Indeed,

'Abdu'l-Baha on several occasions told the pilgrims to go to 'Adasiyyah and receive divine blessings there.[24] He met with the Turkish governor of Hammah by the name of Habbakom Komandaz (?) and they all then travelled to 'Adasiyyah. Other guests included his secretary, Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, Mirza Abdu'r-Ra'uf who was the son of Muhammad-Quli, the half-brother of Baha'u'llah, and Khosrow who was 'Abdu'l-Baha's attendant. They all enjoyed the Baha'is' hospitality, spent the night in 'Adasiyyah and had breakfast the next morning, after which he made a tour of 'Adasiyyah. Soon they all departed for Tiberias and stayed in the Grossman Hotel. 'Abdu'l-Baha rented a room in this hotel, where he stayed whenever he came to Tiberias.

24. *ibid.*
25. *ibid.*
26. *ibid.*
27. *ibid.*

***Second visit*:** On the second visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha no one accompanied him. It occurred in the last two weeks of March 1916, during the month of fasting, when the Turkish government was heavily engaged in the First World War and the war theatre had widened extensively. It was the intention of the Ottoman authorities to mobilize the inhabitants of 'Adasiyyah and other villages in the district, including the Baha'is, and send them to the front to fight in the war. The community decided to send one of the Baha'is to Haifa to inform 'Abdu'l-Baha about this new development. 'Abdu'l-Baha sent the messenger back and rode overnight to get to 'Adasiyyah the next day. It was two days before Naw-Ruz. He received a warm welcome.[25]

Thus on Naw-Ruz (21 March) 1916, 'Abdu'l-Baha was in 'Adasiyyah. Two days later the Turkish government declared exemption from military service for the exiled Baha'is of Iran and other non-Baha'i Persian exiles. For the Baha'is this was the best Naw-Ruz ever and, indeed, they celebrated the occasion. 'Abdu'l-Baha stayed in 'Adasiyyah for seven days. The Baha'is brought a professional photographer from Tiberias to take photos of the celebrations. One day 'Abdu'l-Baha invited all the local notables and government officials. Also visiting 'Abdu'l-Baha and having dinner with him was a high official of the Ottoman government in charge of Tiberias. The Baha'is extended their best hospitality for the occasion.[26]

To ease the work of entertaining these important guests the Baha'is built a wooden cottage close to the west wall of the Guest House. 'Abdu'l-Baha enjoyed sitting in this wooden cottage and its garden and often relaxed by a brook under the shade of a lemon tree close by. He would wash his face and hands in the running waters of the brook and thus refresh himself. 'Abdu'l-Baha stayed in Mr Bahram Bihmardi's wood-built residence during those seven days.

There was also another building called Dar ul-Maṣlaḥah or the Office of Maslahah (administration), close to the site of the future Hazirat ul-Quds, where 'Abdu'l-Baha would spend some time. This was the first building that Sorsogh built in the early years of his tenancy. Mirza Hadi Afnan, Shoghi Effendi's father, also lived there and managed a farm in 'Adasiyyah. Before his departure 'Abdu'l-Baha blessed the house and told Mirza Hadi to look after it because he had lived in it.[27]

When in 'Adasiyyah 'Abdu'l-Baha would ride on a horse and trot the alleys and lanes of the village and then go through to the village of Baqura which is close to the river, and finally to the dam. Baqura is located between 'Adasiyyah and Shuneh Shamaliah.

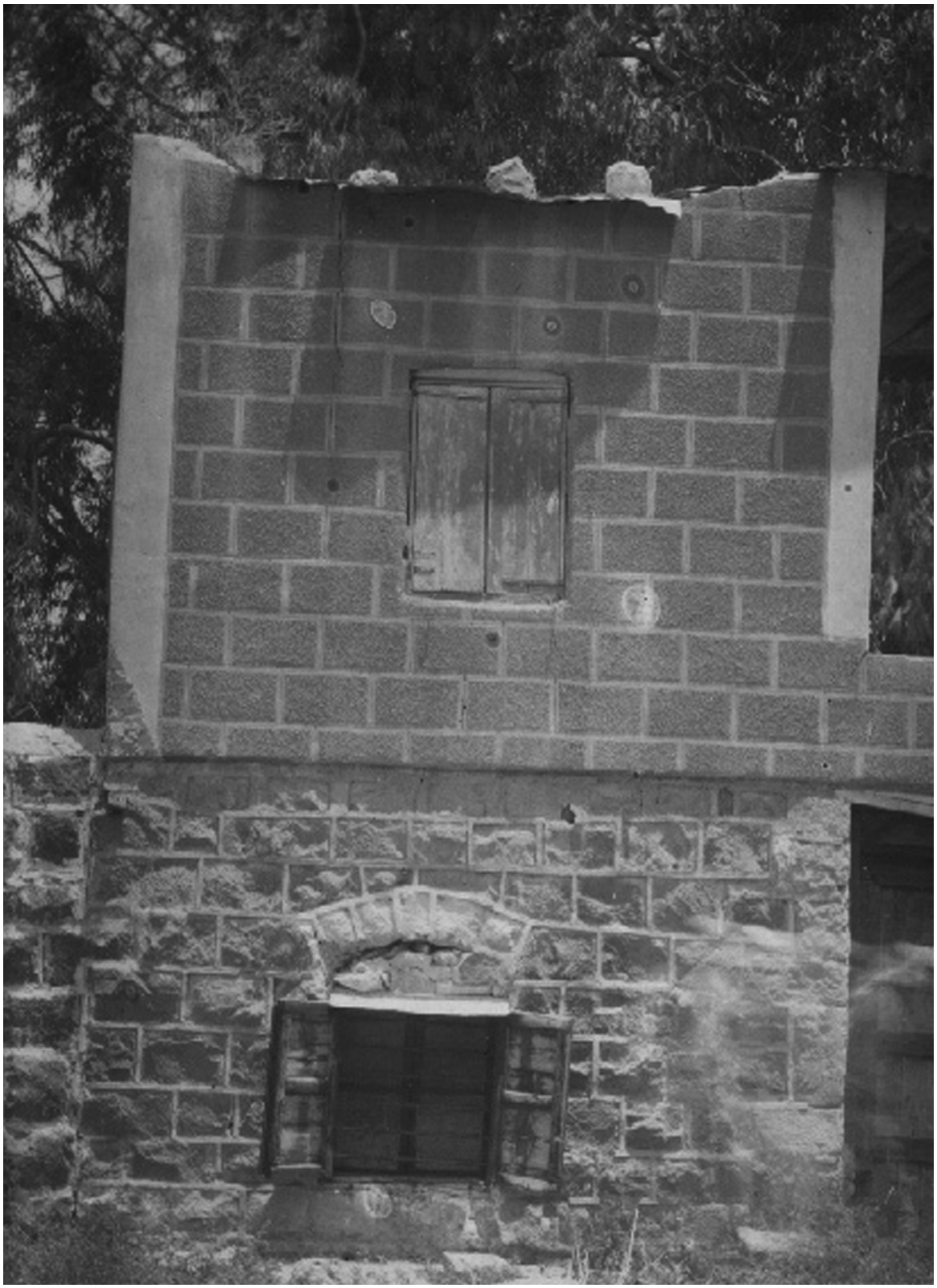

Figure 3: Building of the Dar-al-Maṣlaḥah which 'Abdu'l-Baha used when in 'Adasiyyah, probably taken in 1960s or 1970s (photograph from Hossein Ashchi).

***Third visit*:** This third visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha to 'Adasiyyah took place at a time of the year when it was very hot and uncomfortable. It is narrated that 'Abdu'l-Baha was taken ill due to the excessive heat. There were no doctors or enough medicine at hand to treat him. He was ill for about five days and then began to recover. Still weak and frail he continued to guide the Baha'is in their tasks.

During this bout of illness an interesting event took place. One day, during his recovery, 'Abdu'l-Baha managed to walk from the wooden cottage to the office, or Dar-al-Maslahah. Heaps of bales of freshly harvested barley sheaves were by the office. He sat on a heap and rested for a while. He told one of the Baha'is, Mr Jamshid Mehraban who had come to see him, that he wanted to strike a partnership deal with him according to what was then the local tradition (i.e. half and half or 50/50). The Arabic term for this type of partnership was *Sharaka*.[28] This deal required all expenses to be paid by both partners, and any surplus in cash or goods would be divided equally. Mr Jamshid Mehraban told 'Abdu'l-Baha: "What greater honour could one wish than to have you as a partner. Let us do as you suggest."

This partnership was for a crop of wheat not yet even sown. Mr Jamshid Mehraban was to plant the wheat and care for it. Both before the wheat grains were placed in the soil, and after the seeds had germinated and the wheat plants were a few centimetres tall, no one ever thought the harvest of this crop would amount to much. This was because the area planted was too small to produce a substantial crop. But the wheat germinated and grew to full maturity. When the crop was harvested and grains cleaned everyone was astonished at the volume of wheat harvested from such a small plot! It was indeed a bumper crop! They said that they could not foresee such a high-yielding crop in any place in any year. The land where this crop of wheat was grown was close to 'Abdu'l-Baha's wooden cottage, and to this day is known as 'Shakara Land'. 'Abdu'l-Baha took his share of the wheat and distributed it among the Baha'is as well as the non-Baha'is. In the face of a predicted famine this crop of wheat was a welcome addition.[29] 'Abdu'l-Baha stayed for 15 days during this visit and before departing bade a very sincere farewell to the Baha'is and assured them of the divine blessings yet to come. Later 'Abdu'l-Baha also struck a 50/50 business deal with Mr Farid Jamshidi, who is reported to have been, as a boy of seven, one of the team who used to pour water over the heap of thorny dry vegetation that cooled 'Abdu'l-Baha's room while he was resting.

Shipping wheat to Haifa during the First World War

In July 1917, the First World War was at its peak of combat and destruction. There was below average rainfall and as a result the crop yields were much lower than previous years. People became distressed at the prospect of an imminent famine. Soon 'Abdu'l-Baha arrived in 'Adasiyyah and told the Baha'is that he needed wheat for both Haifa and 'Akka. He told them he had come to 'Adasiyyah to secure wheat for the Baha'is in order that they should not have to face the prospect of hunger, starvation or famine. The Baha'i farmers opened up their barns and storage bins and offered 'Abdu'l-Baha all they had. They also travelled to a number of neighbouring villages, identified suppliers and purchased wheat there. 'Abdu'l-Baha bought all the wheat that could be found.[30]

28. Possibly *Sharaka* is intended [editor].
29. National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan, Monograph on 'Adasiyyah.
30. *ibid*.

Figure 3a: Photograph of 'Abdu'l-Baha with some of the Baha'i farmers of Adasiyyah (taken during or shortly after World War I).
Seated L to R: Subhi, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Jalal Azal, `Azizu'llah Bahadur.
Standing L to R: Rustam Mihragani (picture faint), Khusraw (cook), Rustam Firaydun (standing in front of Khusraw with a small child in front of him, Nuru'llah Mihragani, Bahram Firaydun, Shahriyar Mihragani, Rustam Bihmardi, Tirandaz Shah-Kavus, Bahram Bihmardi, Bahram Shah-Kavus (standing behind Bahram Bihmardi), Shahriyar Bihmardi, Mihraban Jamshid, a non-Baha'i named Shitaywi (behind), Isfandiyar Bihmardi, Jamshid Mihraban, 'Ali Yazdi (behind), 'Azizu'llah Shah-Kavus with child Homa Shahriar Behmardi in front, Isfandiyar Shah-Kavus (child blurred) with Shah-Jihan Hindi in front.

On 'Abdu'l-Baha's instructions, the consignments of wheat were sent over a period of 15 days. A caravan of some 200 camels was mobilized and used to ship the wheat to Haifa and 'Akka. The camel caravans left 'Adasiyyah for delivery to 'Abdu'l-Baha's Firdaws Garden and other places in both Haifa and 'Akka making a total of 400 camel sacks of wheat. The Baha'is continued to buy more wheat for a month even after the 400 camel-loads had been delivered to Haifa and 'Akka. Hundreds of poor, needy and destitute benefited from the wheat shipped there and distributed by 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Mr Bahram Furudi was one of the Baha'is accompanying the caravan of camels carrying sacks of wheat to Haifa. After crossing the frontier from Jordan to Palestine the caravan eventually made its way through Palestine and arrived at the gate of Haifa. By this time, the war had ended and the gate of Haifa was administered and guarded by the British army. The British soldiers at the gate did not allow the caravan to enter the city. Seeing that the guards were not going to let them in, Furudi and one or two of the Baha'is accompanying the caravan decided to leave for the city and asked the other Baha'is to look after the caravan. Also each carried a sack of wheat until they arrived at the House of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Furudi informed 'Abdu'l-Baha that the British soldiers guarding the gate of Haifa were not allowing the caravan of wheat to enter the city. 'Abdu'l-Baha listened very carefully to what he had to say. He then sent Shoghi Effendi with Mr Furudi to resolve the problem.

At the time Shoghi Effendi appeared quite young.[31] When Shoghi Effendi and Furudi arrived at the gate of Haifa they noticed that the major in charge (the commander of the guards) was in an armchair in a reclining position. He was puffing hard at his pipe. Shoghi Effendi approached the major with great courtesy and with amazingly eloquent and fluent English informed the major that the caravan of wheat was for 'Abdu'l-Baha. Struck with amazement and admiration for such eloquent English from such a youth, the major got up and in a state of bewilderment ordered the soldiers to open the gate for the caravan to go through to the city of Haifa.

***Fourth visit*:** Before the fourth visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha, a number of Bedouins had invaded 'Adasiyyah, but no harm was done despite the fact that the Baha'is were outnumbered. This fourth visit of Abdu'l-Baha to 'Adasiyyah took place in 1920. Soon after arriving he told the Baha'is that he had come to 'Adasiyyah to set in place a single permanent rule or order. He told the Baha'i farmers that up until that point they had been paying one-third of their farm produce to the Holy House (meaning himself), and this ratio seemed to him to be rather high. He had accepted the previous arrangements because of the war but now wished the situation to change so that after paying one-tenth of their produce as tax to the government and one-tenth to the partners then only one-fifth of the remainder would be paid to the Holy House. This arrangement would apply even when food or farm produce was obtained from rented land or other sources. Moreover, this ratio should be implemented with honesty and sincerity. He also mentioned that he had intended to stay in 'Adasiyyah for a month but because of some urgent task he had to go back to Haifa immediately. The visit lasted only one day and one night.[32]

31. He would have been about 21 years old [editor].

32. *ibid*.

During this last visit 'Abdu'l-Baha emphasized to the Baha'is the importance of getting together every night, holding prayer sessions and consulting to resolve their personal problems. Four years later when the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah was formed it decided to implement 'Abdu'l-Baha's implicit rule. 'Abdu'l-Baha also told the Baha'is and the farmers to look after the Holy Places.

An interesting recommendation of 'Abdu'l-Baha to the Baha'i farmers of 'Adasiyyah was to pay their farm labourers a portion of the net income they earned. He said that it was his ardent hope that they follow and implement his wish. He also told them that if they did not do so one day these day workers and farm labourers would come and take their share of the income!

During the observance of a holy day a number of Baha'i farmers went to visit 'Abdu'l-Baha. He asked each farmer about his work, how much wheat they had planted and how many sacks of wheat they had harvested. Each farmer gave an estimate. Then it was the turn of a farmer who had planted very little wheat. He felt embarrassed as he told 'Abdu'l-Baha about it. 'Abdu'l-Baha burst into laughter and went on laughing for some time. Then he turned to the farmer and told him: '... my dear fellow; it was not important how much wheat you planted. It is only divine grace and bounty which provides for a plentiful harvest.'

'Abdu'l-Baha's visits to 'Adasiyyah were varied and sometimes accompanied by interesting incidents. On one of his visits when he was returning to Haifa, he decided to ride in a stagecoach pulled by a pair of mules. A couple of Baha'is held the mules' reins and led the coach forward. Soon they reached a river with no bridge that they had to cross. It was shallow water when the crossing began but soon the wheels sank in the soft sand and gravel, and the mules could no longer pull the coach. A number of Baha'is riding alongside 'Abdu'l-Baha dismounted and helped to push the carriage forward but came out of the water completely soaked! 'Abdu'l-Baha told them that being so wet it was best for them to return to 'Adasiyyah. One of the Baha'is who helped to push the coach out of the soft sand was Mr Furudi's father. He accompanied 'Abdu'l-Baha until he got to the village of Samakh and the town of Tiberias. Normally, 'Abdu'l-Baha would get off the coach in Samakh and take the train or go on to Tiberias, where a car could be hired to take him to Haifa.

Shoghi Effendi

After the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha the attention of the Baha'i community in 'Adasiyyah turned towards Shoghi Effendi, who directed the course of events and the overall development of the community for over 36 years until his passing in 1957. Sometime after World War I, when 'Abdu'l-Baha was in 'Adasiyyah, Shoghi Effendi arrived there. He spent some time there but shortly after meeting with 'Abdu'l-Baha he departed for Beirut to follow up his studies.

New challenges and opportunities were faced by the ever-expanding community. As we shall see later, the nature of these challenges and those of both agricultural and rural development as well as the changes in the Baha'i community were of a different type and scale compared with those during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Whereas previously the emphasis was on building sound and far-reaching agricultural and rural

development infrastructures, the task during the time of Shoghi Effendi was the consolidation and strengthening of the Baha'i administration and the advancement of that community. The agricultural and rural development work initiated and partially developed during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Baha continued at a greater pace and scope during the time of Shoghi Effendi. The older Baha'i farmers transferred the management of their farms to the next generation who had hitherto worked side by side with their fathers.

Shoghi Effendi was not only keenly interested in the work of the Baha'i farmers, he also used to recommend to farmers as well as their sons and daughters that they study agriculture and learn about appropriate methods and techniques of farming so that they could enhance the development of agriculture and spearhead rural change. When the construction of the Shrine of Baha'u'llah was in progress Shoghi Effendi instructed the Baha'is in 'Adasiyyah to send a hundred sacks of fine gravel for the landscape around the Shrine. The Baha'is prepared the gravel, packed it in sacks and shipped it to 'Akka. Today, one can still see the gravel shipped from 'Adasiyyah at the Shrine.

'Adasiyyah, the nation's show-place

During the lifetimes of both 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi agricultural development and implementation of rural development programmes including such social structures as schools, weekly character-building classes for children, a fully functioning local spiritual assembly and its various committees such as the farming committee which regulated the seasonal programmes of crops and animal production, attracted the attention of many people near and far. 'Adasiyyah became a show-place for the whole of Jordan. If the government of Jordan wished to show how advanced it was in agricultural production and farming techniques it would bring foreign guests and dignitaries to 'Adasiyyah. Once in 'Adasiyyah the government representatives would show them the fields of crops, vegetable trucks and the orchards of fruit trees as well as the banana plantations. 'Adasiyyah shone like a brilliant star in an otherwise semi-arid scrubland and unyielding desert surroundings.

An important dignitary to visit 'Adasiyyah was Amir Abdu'llah (the grandfather of King Hussein and the great grandfather of the present king). He visited the farms and orchards with his foreign and/or Jordanian guests and other dignitaries. Amir Abdu'llah later became Malik Abdu'llah, the ruler of Jordan. While still an Amir he spent a night in 'Adasiyyah. The late King Hussein of Jordan also visited 'Adasiyyah several times. During one of his visits he stopped in front of a framed portrait of Queen Mary of Romania and her declaration about the Baha'i Faith. He read the declaration right through.

Various ethnic and religious groups would visit 'Adasiyyah during the year to see the fields of crops, vegetable trucks, banana plantations and fruit orchards. For example, early in August 1934, a group of 13 Jewish men and women, who had already secured permission from the authorities, arrived in 'Adasiyyah. They were welcomed by the Baha'is and spent the night sleeping in the Hazirat ul-Quds (Baha'i administrative building). Before leaving they asked for information about the Faith and were given Baha'i literature in both Hebrew and Russian.[33]

33. Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah, *Bahā'ī News*, July/August 1934.

Tenancy

The system of crop and animal production of the Baha'i farmers was based on a special type of sharecropping tenancy that was both innovative and fair. Almost all who farmed were sharecroppers. The land was owned by 'Abdu'l-Baha and the farmers/sharecroppers were simply using the land to produce crops. Here all phases of production as well as input such as seed, water, manure and labour was provided by the farmers. After World War I, 'Abdu'l-Baha arranged that an 80 per cent share of the harvest or the net income would go to the farmers and 20 per cent to him. The 20 per cent of the harvest was usually paid in cash. In some years, when there was a shortage of wheat, the farmers would provide 'Abdu'l-Baha with some wheat as part of his 20 per cent share of the harvest. This was because, in those years of wheat shortage, life for the poor became very hard. 'Abdu'l-Baha would then take the wheat instead of cash and distribute it among the poor. Farmers stored the wheat in 'Adasiyyah and then shipped it to Haifa.

It is not known if 'Abdu'l-Baha ever received anything extra beyond the 20 per cent from the crop and the animal products of the land. However, often farmers would take vegetables, fruits and dairy products as gifts when they went to visit him in Haifa. Even during the time of Shoghi Effendi the farmers were still taking dairy products to him.

When 'Abdu'l-Baha passed away in 1921, the farmers continued to pay the 20 per cent share of the harvest to his heirs who inherited the land after his passing. These heirs were Diya'iyyih Khanum (the mother of Shoghi Effendi), her husband Mirza Hadi Afnan, Tuba Khanum and Ruha Khanum, who were 'Abdu'l-Baha's daughters, and Ruhi Afnan.[34]

34. Ruhi Afnan was the son of Tuba Khanum and Mirza Muhsin Afnan. He presumably inherited a portion when his father died in 1927 [Editor].

Land allotment

When he purchased 'Adasiyyah 'Abdu'l-Baha's intended to cultivate its land and produce crops and other farm products. This would invariably lead to greater expansion in the social and economic activities of what was then a peasant society, the first step towards modernization. Thus, the land as an estate could not remain idle and had to be cultivated. There was a need for smallholders, sharecroppers or tenant farmers who could farm the land and receive a share of the crop and animal products. As described above, farm tenants attempted to cultivate the vast areas of land there but, eventually, it fell to a selected small number of Baha'is from Iran to take on the task and become the cultivators of the land as sharecroppers.

The average allotment for each farming family was based on units of 25–30 donums (2.5–3 hectares; 6–7.5 acres). Each family also received anywhere from three to six hectares to grow food crops and fodder for the livestock. After 1963, when the Land Reform Law was enacted, the Jordanian government maintained the same system of land allocation for new farmers as had been applied by 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Before the farmers started to cultivate the land, 'Abdu'l-Baha instructed these Baha'is to meet, consult and then to divide the land among themselves. Every farmer was to take charge of a certain area of farmland in proportion to the size of his family. For example, Mr Faraydun Khudadad's father had 40–50 donums (4–5 hectares or 10–12 acres) while Mr Rashid Na'imi's father, who farmed the land in 'Adasiyyah during the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, told his son that at the beginning they did

Figure 4: Adasiyyih lands with Enayat Ashchi standing in foreground, 1995 (photograph from Hossein Ashchi).

not have much land. But, when the opportunity arrived they would pay good-will money for the transfer of the rights to farm parcels of land from others to the point that towards the end of his life Mr Na'imi's father was farming an area of about 100 donums (10 hectares, 24.7 acres). Some of the Baha'is took up as much as 150 donums (15 hectares, 37 acres). Mr Na'imi's family also received 150 donums (15 hectares, 37 acres).

Climate

For many of the Baha'i farmers from Iran who were used to the unrelenting, fierce heat of the sun in the central desert of Iran, 'Adasiyyah was one of the hottest spots on earth. 'Abdu'l-Baha had told them that God would gradually make the climate of 'Adasiyyah more comfortable merely for the sake of the Baha'i farmers from Iran! Mr Furudi's father, who came from Mahdiyabad to farm in 'Adasiyyah on the instruction of 'Abdu'l-Baha, worked in the fields all the year round wearing no more than a shirt. He had narrated that the Baha'is had a tough time adapting to the climate when they first arrived. 'Abdu'l-Baha once told them, 'I have brought you to the most inhospitable place on earth.' As the Persian idiom goes: 'Where the Arab threw his spear' (meaning 'a very inhospitable and hard-to-bear place!').

To comfort the Baha'is and their families, regarding the unbearable climate and the attacks of the highwaymen, 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote a special prayer for them, a provisional translation of which is:

> He is God, O Lord. These friends have traversed mountains and deserts, plains and prairies until they have arrived at the destined abode; and now in Ghor are in deep contemplation, and have no refuge and haven but Thee and wish no help-in-peril and respondent but Thee. Have mercy upon us, grant favour to us and shower guidance on all.

In the early years of the Baha'i farmers' work in 'Adasiyyah the weather was very hot and malaria was rampant. Some of the Baha'is would develop the disease and even succumb to it. 'Abdu'l-Baha instructed them to plant a type of eucalyptus that produces the drug quinine in its bark (Cinchona Quinquina). The chemical substances in its leaves and branches acted as a deterrent to both the vectors and the malaria parasite. Once the Baha'i farmers took up 'Abdu'l-Baha's advice and planted quinine trees in the lagoon in the middle of 'Adasiyyah the situation changed. The lagoon was the major breeding ground for the mosquitoes that carried the malaria parasite. Each Baha'i farmer planted 10–30 quinine saplings around the lagoon. These saplings grew fast and through the process of transpiration sucked up large quantities of water. The mosquito-infested water was thus drained. Gradually the incidence of malaria declined and eventually disappeared altogether. The strong wood from the quinine trees was purchased by builders from the surrounding villages and used in the construction of ceiling trusses. Today, when one enters 'Adasiyyah from the south and heads towards the old residential areas where the Baha'is lived, the eucalyptus trees are still standing high in the grove and dominate the landscape. They continue to have a cooling effect on the surrounding area.

Often the weather was so hot that sleeping was impossible. But 'Abdu'l-Baha had once told them that a day would come when the weather in 'Adasiyyah would become as refreshing as that of Iran. Indeed, Mr Furudi's father narrated that this had happened during his lifetime.

Crop and animal production

The Baha'i farmers were given the task of implementing the processes of agricultural and rural development that were at the very heart of 'Abdu'l-Baha's vision of a productive, developed 'Adasiyyah. It was the hard work of those who were directly involved in various aspects of crop and animal production which led to the well-being of the farmers, their families and the Baha'i community.

The first major task of producing crops and animal products was to clear the land of the wild and thorny bushes, scrub, brush and small trees, particularly the lotus tree (Sidrah). The tools at the disposal of the early farmers were primitive and consisted of the hoe, fork and pickaxe, all of which were used to dig out these deep-rooted plants and clear the land. Under the hot and arid conditions of the area, most vegetation bore sharp, needle-like appendages that made them hard to collect. Once the land was cleared of vegetation it was then levelled using spades and shovels.

In the early days of the development it was mostly 'Abdu'l-Baha who advised the farmers, but at a later stage there was a more structured and organized approach by the farmers, although still under the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Much later, all matters relating to farming and animal production were discussed and conducted by a farming committee working under the auspices of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah

which was first formed in 1924. One major task of the farming committee every year was to allocate to each farming household a specific area of land for the production of certain crops.

Water supply

As more land was brought under production accompanied by extensive cultivation of vegetables and fruits, it became necessary to secure a continuous reliable supply of water for all the farmers in and around 'Adasiyyah. The water source for irrigation was the River Yarmuk, which provided a plentiful supply of water throughout the year for all the cultivated land. The estimated water use at the time was approximately 60 litres per second or 3.6 cubic metres per minute. This was to provide for deep irrigation, especially for tree crops such as bananas.

To get water from the River Yarmuk to the fields and orchards of 'Adasiyyah, the Baha'i farmers built a small stone dam. To erect the dam they hauled large loads of stones and small rocks to build a sturdy wall or dyke. They would then walk up this wall, stand on it and fill the gaps in the wall with smaller stones. Much smaller stones and pebbles were used to fill up the crevices, which stopped the water flowing through, raising the water level and boosting the volume that could be diverted to the main ditch leading to their farms.

Years later, the farming committee of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah supervised the maintenance and repair work of the dam. When there were heavy currents or a torrential flow and the need for a larger workforce became apparent, the committee would hire day workers from the village of 'Adasiyyah to assist in rebuilding the dam. Behind the dam a small reservoir of water was created in which people used to swim. The dam was 2 metres (over 6 feet) high and 25–30 metres (77–95 feet) long. This distance was the width of the River Yarmuk at the point of diversion.

From the point of diversion of water from the Yarmuk to the first farm where a large plantation of bananas existed was a distance of 250–300 metres (825–999 feet). The first farm to receive water from the main diversion ditch was that of Mr Husayn Bahram Bihmardi, then Farid Jamshidi followed by Osman Nasief (a non-Baha'i farmer); next was Mr Na'imi and finally Burzu Bihbahani (also a non-Baha'i farmer).

This ditch or small canal was cleared regularly to maintain the flow of water. During the growing season it was cleared of debris and vegetation at least every two weeks. Almost all the farmers participated in the process. Additionally each farmer was responsible for clearing all the smaller ditches inside his farm, orchard or field. The main ditch was so designed as to supply all the farms and orchards and when the last farm/orchard had been irrigated, the excess water would return downstream into the River Yarmuk. At a much later stage in the development of farms in 'Adasiyyah, the job of clearing the ditch was monitored by the farming committee of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah.

Since the River Yarmuk was quite wide at certain points along its course, the farmers could block only a small section of the river. Every year the rain storms produced floods downstream that washed away part of the dam so the Baha'i farmers had to repair the dam every spring to secure an adequate

supply of water for their crops during the growing season. As more land was brought under cultivation the length of the ditch/canal also increased to the point that the distance between the dam and the furthest farmers' fields was about one kilometre (1083 yards/over half a mile).

Soil preparation and planting

There were relatively large areas of farmed and cultivated land in 'Adasiyyah. The soils varied in texture from silt loams to heavy clays. Crops were grown on three major types of soils commonly referred to by their colour as black, yellow and red soils. The black soil was considered to be most suitable for planting fruit crops such as banana, citrus, pomegranate, apples, pears and other fruit trees. The fruits of trees grown on black soils had a better flavour than those grown on either yellow or red soils. However, crops grown on black soils yielded less per hectare than those grown on yellow or red soils. The black soils were much denser in texture and needed considerably more effort to pull the implements through. Weeds were uprooted in these soils using sickles.

Seedbed preparation

In the beginning the farmers prepared the land for cultivation using hand tools such as spades, shovels, forks and pickaxes. It involved heavy toil for the farmers to clear a patch of scrubland of the heavy and deep-rooted brush and wild thorny bushes and bring it under cultivation.

Every farming household used mules or oxen to plough the land. Various types of plough were used with wooden, pig iron or steel mouldboards. Some of the mouldboards were forked. Most farmers preferred wooden ploughs. Farmers who ploughed the land would sometimes leave it fallow for months or a year to allow the farmland to rest and the soil to build natural fertility. If the land was not lying fallow, they employed a different system of production involving rotation of crops (see below). As a rule the rain-fed crops (mainly wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils and broad beans) received no animal manure before planting. During a season when much irrigation water was available, some of the crops that were usually rain fed were irrigated to increase the yield. In some years irrigated wheat was also grown but on a very small acreage.

Hard and heavy soils were ploughed using an implement called a buldock. This was a heavy plough drawn by a pair of strong mules. Two persons were needed to operate this implement. One person would lead the mules from the front while the other person from the rear would keep the plough steady and in a straight line.

Crop rotation

Almost all the farmers employed the practice of crop rotation to produce higher yields. Generally, a rotation involves growing a number of crops in sequence on the same piece of land over several crop seasons or years. Farmers use rotation mainly to improve soil fertility, eradicate weeds and break the pest and disease cycle. Monoculture is growing the same crop on the same piece of land over several crop seasons or years.

As a matter of interest, there was a farmer who did not believe in the use of crop rotation and over a period of several years the farmer planted

tomatoes continuously in a field measuring 3 or 4 donums (3000 to 4000 square metres), which had previously been under rain-fed or irrigated crops. Despite recommendations from other farmers, he continued growing tomatoes on the same piece of land for several years. One of the farmers told this man's son about the advantages of using a rotation system of cropping. The son related the recommendations to his father who, again, refused to listen. In the fourth consecutive year of tomato-plant cultivation, the plants simply stopped growing and produced no tomatoes. The son later narrated that his father had to plough over the fruitless tomato plants.

The normal rotation practised by the farmers in 'Adasiyyah using the rain-fed system of crop production involved a succession of wheat, lentils, barley, chickpeas, vetch and white maize (corn). An alternative to this rotation in fields where rain-fed crops were previously grown was to grow wheat–lentils–barley–lentils–wheat–vetch. Barley was grown extensively to improve the soil structure. Vetch was also an important crop in the rotation system. Since the farmers used an intensive system of crop production not many fields were left fallow.

Planting crops: fertilizers and manure

To increase the yields of crops grown there was a need for a good supply of nutrients from fertilizers. For irrigated crops, pigeon and chicken droppings were used. Farmyard manure (FYM, solid wastes from cattle, sheep and goats) was also used. Every farm household reared cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, and pigeons to produce the required amounts of manure for the season's crops. For example, Mr Khudadad had 10 cattle and 8 goats, while others like Mr Bihmardi had up to 40 cattle. Normally a shepherd took the animals to graze for several weeks or months on the natural vegetation of the area, wild plants and range grasses (short grasses), or the stubble of the crops after harvests. Each farmer had his own shepherd.

Most pastoralists, migrating tribes and Bedouins who lived in the vicinity of, or passed by, 'Adasiyyah had large herds of sheep, goats, cattle and mules. These animals grazed on the extensive vegetation of the area and produced considerable amounts of manure, which was sold to the neighbouring farmers, including the Baha'i farmers of 'Adasiyyah.

Rain-fed crops

The normal practice of growing crops was carried out by farmers individually or groups of farmers working together as a unit. In the production of rain-fed crops, the usual practice was for three farmers to work together as a team. Usually a member of the team of three would cultivate an area of 150 donums (15 hectares, 37.05 acres). Half the land area was used for rain-fed crops and the other half for irrigated crops. The proportion of land allocated to farm, vegetable and fruit crops varied from farm to farm and also from year to year in response to the market demand. Wheat and barley were by far the largest rain-fed crops.

In fields allocated for rain-fed crops, vetch was grown on a regular basis. Vetch grains were used as food for pigeons and the straw was a nutritious feed for dairy cows, while decaying roots added nitrogen for the next crop and improved soil fertility. White maize was grown both for human consumption and poultry feed. One part of the white maize flour was mixed with two parts of wheat flour to prepare the dough for bread.

In late October and November the farmers would plant rain-fed wheat, barley, lentils, chickpeas and burseem (clover). Some of these crops were planted before and some after the main rainfall. In years of very low rainfall the farmers would irrigate the crops. If the land was not too infested with weeds the farmers would start with a light and shallow ploughing, broadcast seeds of grains and pulses then do a second shallow ploughing to cover the seeds.

If after the first soaking rain, weeds that had been dormant all summer germinated and began to grow, a week later, while the soil was still moist, the land was ploughed lightly to bury the weeds. Five to seven days later, with some moisture still in the soil, seeds were broadcast over the soil surface followed by a second shallow plough to cover the seeds. Other rain-fed (non-irrigated) crops were also grown in the same manner. If there was not enough rain by the end of November and up to mid-December, the lands intended for rain-fed crops were turned to fallow because by then the cereal seeds had either failed to germinate, or, if germinated, had not grown well enough to produce a substantial yield/harvest. The usual practice was to leave a poorly germinated crop in a field as fallow to rest the land so that natural fertility could be improved.

This system of sowing crops changed when corn (maize) was planted. The land was ploughed as usual and the seedbed prepared. A person carrying a bag full of maize grains would follow the plough furrow and drop a seed or two at specific intervals. When the plough returned on the same furrow the maize seed was then buried. In this way the row planting of maize was accomplished. If there was adequate rainfall in the growing season the crop would be treated as rain-fed, otherwise it would be irrigated.

Forage crops

Forage crops are species or varieties of domesticated grasses or legumes such as clover or alfalfa/lucerne (members of the *Leguminosae* family) grown as fodder for animal feed. The farmers of 'Adasiyyah grew seasonal, annual and permanent pasture and forage crops. A popular forage irrigated crop was berseem clover, which has a white flower. It was sown in October or November as a rain-fed crop. If there was adequate rainfall soon after the crop was ready for the first cut or harvest in January then they would not irrigate it. It was normal to have the first cut about two months after planting. In total the farmers would have two or three more cuts of burseem clover in the season.

In May, burseem clover produced an abundance of white flowers. At this stage it was left to produce seed. The seeds harvested sometime later would be used to grow more burseem clover next year. Alternatively, burseem clover would be ploughed back into the soil after the seed harvest to improve the soil structure and fertility and/or sesame grown in its place. Burseem clover was cut and mixed with wheat straw and fed to animals. Wheat straw was used instead of barley since the barley straw grown in the area had sharp edges and would get stuck in animals' throats causing considerable injury.

A variety of fassah or lucerne (alfalfa, *Medicago sativa*) with pink flowers was also planted. The crop was irrigated and often lasted for seven years. Both before and after planting lucerne the crop would receive manure. It was usually planted in spring. Land preparation involved ploughing the

fields and ridging them into basins. Seeds were then sown inside each basin, raked into the soil and levelled. Soon after planting, each basin was irrigated. Well-grown lucerne was cut three or four times a year. It was not an aggressive fast-growing fodder crop. Lucerne was not allowed to run into seed and farmers always bought new seed lots from the seed merchants to grow new crops. It was customary for each farmer to grow at least one or two plots of lucerne in each season. It was used as the main source of animal fodder.

Farm crops

In addition to the staple farm crops mentioned above, other irrigated farm crops, such as cotton and beans, were grown mainly for personal consumption. Grain crops were harvested using sickles. The harvested plants were put into bundles or sheaves and kept upright in the form of a pyramid in the field to dry. Once the sheaves were completely dry, they were loaded on to donkeys and taken usually some two kilometres (over a mile) away for threshing. Before loading on to donkeys, the sheaves were placed in a large net made of strong ropes held on two sides by a pair of logs. The sheaves were placed in the net and the logs on each side were pulled together to prevent the load from falling during the haulage.

The actual work of threshing was done by using a perforated wooden box filled with small stones or gravel. The sheaves were untied and spread over a cleared piece of land. The box containing the gravel was pulled by a donkey over the sheaves. As the stones were pressed against wheat heads (spikes) by the weight of the box, the wheat grains separated from the head leaving a mixture of grain and chaff, and as the donkey moved over the sheaves more wheat-heads came into contact with stones. The farmer added more stones or gravel to the box to maintain the weight and friction for the separation of the grain from the wheat head.

Once all the sheaves had been threshed, a wooden or metal fork was used to separate the grain from the chaff. The mixture of grain, chaff and straw was thrown up into the air to a height of about 1.5 metres (5 feet), whereby the lighter pieces of straw and chaff landed a metre or more away from the grain. The grain was partly mixed with small pieces of stone or gravel. The grain was then winnowed until all the plant parts and gravel separated and a pure heap of grain collected. The wheat was then stored and the straw used to feed animals or for their bedding. With some variation, a similar technique was used to thresh other farm crops such as barley, lentils, chickpeas and corn (maize).

Vegetable crops

For the most part the Baha'i framers grew a wide variety of vegetables such as eggplant (aubergine), cucumber, courgette, squash, marrow, pumpkin, tomato, broad bean, carrot, onion, okra, kohl rabi, cauliflower, cabbage (the large-head variety mostly grown in Iran), peppers, potato, chilli, cantaloupe melon, winter melon, watermelon, spinach, turnip, lettuce, beetroot and a popular local green vegetable called *mulūkhiyyah* (Jew's mallow, *Corchorus olitorius*). Usually farmers would grow those vegetable crops they found to be profitable and useful. However, in the beginning most farmers were growing eggplant (aubergine), which is easy to grow, requires little

cultivation, has few pests and produces an abundant crop. Eggplant was the first crop to be harvested. It is said that the Iranian Baha'i farmers were the first to introduce eggplant to the north-west of Jordan, Palestine and Syria (the Golan Heights area). Most indigenous Arab inhabitants of the region did not know how to use it. They called it *badimjān 'ajamī*, which means 'Persian eggplant'.

Whereas most farm crops were rain-fed, almost all the vegetables were irrigated. Crops such as eggplant, tomato, cabbage, green pepper and lettuce were not grown from seed but from transplants produced in a nursery. Animal manure was applied to a small parcel of land and ploughed under. The soil was dug up and large clods were broken to produce a friable and mellow seed-bed and smooth soil surface. It was then ridged up into a basin and divided further into smaller basins to hold water. These basins were then given a light irrigation to encourage the germination of weeds, which were removed using hoes. Manure had already been incorporated into the soil. The soil surface was levelled and the seeds were then broadcast and covered. In each parcel seeds of a specific crop were grown. Later, the nursery was again irrigated. The vegetables received all nutrients in the form of manure applied to the soil before ploughing. No more manure was added to the soil during the growth of the vegetable plants in the nursery. When the plants were about 20 centi-metres (8 inches) tall they were then transplanted into the fields.

For the production of vegetables such as eggplant and tomatoes, trans-plants were brought from their small nurseries and planted in furrows. The plants were then lightly irrigated. Also, all summer crops including vegetables were irrigated. It was customary to plant broad beans between and around pomegranate trees. Some were used fresh or dried for human consumption but a large part of the broad bean crop was ploughed into the soil while still green to improve soil texture and fertility. Tomatoes were picked, cleaned and packed in wooden boxes for the markets in Samakh or Tiberias. From either Samakh or Tiberias the tomato boxes were then shipped to Damascus or Haifa. Vegetable production of high quality and quantity involved an ade-quate serving of animal manure to the land before planting (see above).

One of the farmers who produced vegetable crops was Mr Isfandiyar Siyavushi who left Iran at the age of twelve and worked for sometime at the shrines of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. Shoghi Effendi instructed him to go to 'Adasiyyah and farm there. He grew eggplants (aubergines) and other veg-etables. He also grew rain-fed crops such as lentils, wheat and chickpeas.

Fruit trees

For many years between 1901 and 1921 'Abdu'l-Baha encouraged the Baha'i farmers to shift their system of agricultural production from that based purely on farm and vegetable crops to that of fruit-tree production. He spe-cifically instructed them to grow table grapes, oranges, lemons, tangerines, grapefruits, limes and sweet limes (a much bigger and sweeter version of lime with soft, thin and bright yellow skin used extensively in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries), bananas and a number of other fruits. Sour oranges were also grown.

Despite the relatively mild winters in the area, 'Abdu'l-Baha also instructed farmers to grow apples, pears, sour cherries, pomegranates and quinces. Normally, such fruit, which require cold spells of weather, did not do well in

'Adasiyyah because the average temperature of the area during autumn and winter was high. Grapes were grown in 'Adasiyyah on a limited scale only. Also grown but on a much smaller scale and primarily for home consumption were other fruits such as peaches and plums. Despite great interest in growing mulberry, not much was grown in the area. A Baha'i who lived in 'Adasiyyah for several decades remembers seeing only two or three mulberry trees.

At this stage of active fruit, farm and vegetable crop production, 'Abdu'l-Baha suggested that the farmers grow more large yellow lemons and sesame seeds. For reasons still unknown to us, it was discovered that these crops fetched much higher prices than other farm products.

'Abdu'l-Baha introduced bananas to the region by bringing a number of shoots (suckers) from India. During the last years of his life he received seven suckers of bananas. He gave them all to the farmers in 'Adasiyyah and asked them to plant these suckers and take good care of them. Without having ever cultivated or grown bananas, 'Abdu'l-Baha guided the Baha'i farmers in planting and caring for the newly introduced fruit crop. It is believed that the Baha'i farmers were the first to grow bananas in both Jordan and Palestine. Until the introduction of bananas to the region by 'Abdu'l-Baha nobody in the regions of Syria, Palestine and Transjordan knew anything about this crop let alone how to grow it. Some of the villagers in the area were unsure how to eat it, finding it quite unpalatable at first and hard to swallow until they were shown that the outer skin must be removed and that only the inside soft flesh was edible! Within a few years everybody was growing bananas and profited greatly from this relatively lucrative business and the high demand.

To grow bananas the farmers ploughed the land and levelled it. It was then ridged to form basins. Since banana plants require plenty of moisture for the rapid growth of suckers or offshoots, pits or holes were dug in each basin. A pit was about 1 metre in diameter and 0.8 metres to 1 metre deep. A sack of farmyard manure was emptied into each pit and mixed with the soil. Often the fertilizer was a mixture of sheep, goat, chicken and cow manure. Each sack weighed about 35–40 kilograms. With a sharp knife a sucker or a basal branch was cut and placed in the middle of the pit. The pit was then filled with the soil/manure mixture. The mixture inside the pit was either moistened or left dry. A few days later the newly planted suckers were irrigated. Weeds were uprooted using a hoe. Each recently planted banana sucker would normally produce one bunch of fruit within a period of a few months depending on weather conditions and the amount of water it received. Each plant also produced seven or eight suckers. Only one strong and vigorous sucker was allowed to remain and the others were removed to encourage the plants to produce more fruit.

'Adasiyyah often experienced strong winds from the eastern borders of Syria. For this reason the growers would use a shorter spacing between trees. Spacing of 2 metres between banana plants was used for those plants facing the east. This practice mitigated the shearing effect of strong winds that tore apart the large banana leaves. But a wider spacing of 3 metres was used for the banana trees planted facing north or south.

'Abdu'l-Baha instructed the farmers to use the basin system of planting for bananas instead of the row system commonly used in other countries. Here the soil around a number of trees close together was ridged up to form

a small rectangular or square basin. The main advantage of the basin was that it held the irrigation water for a longer time and allowed a gradual and slow infiltration of water into the soil, also reducing the frequency of irrigation.

Often the growers from other lands would ask them how to grow bananas. Members of the Jewish community visited on several occasions, but mostly on Saturdays, to learn how to make cuttings, plant, cultivate, irrigate, manage and harvest bananas. Often they would buy banana suckers and take them across the River Jordan to Palestine for planting.

The system used for planting bananas was more or less the same as for planting other fruit trees. For example, for oranges, stocks of sour oranges were used to which a sweet orange, tangerine, or lemon was grafted. Once the grafts were set and growing vigorously they were then transplanted to the orchard. These new saplings were planted in holes or pits filled with a mixture of manure and topsoil. All fruit trees received a generous application of animal manure once every other year.

The fruits produced from the orchards of 'Adasiyyah were of high quality, especially the bananas. Other fruits were not grown on such a large scale or they simply did not exist. For instance, in the early days of 'Adasiyyah's agricultural development, citrus fruits could not be found in that region. Citrus trees were produced by grafting buds on sour orange or tangerine stocks while grapefruit was grafted on sour orange stock only. 'Abdu'l-Baha recommended to growers that they should allow a spacing of 8 paces (almost 6 metres) between trees.

Often the Baha'i farmers who visited Haifa or Acre met with 'Abdu'l-Baha and sought his advice. Frequently the Baha'i farmers asked him what crops to grow in the next season. 'Abdu'l-Baha would then make a specific recommendation for that season. He would tell them: 'Grow these crops and you will have a bumper harvest and great bounty.'

Animal products

A wide range of animals was raised and several animal products produced on the farms. Besides raising chickens, the farmers also raised turkeys, pigeons, goats, sheep and dairy cows. Most of the milk consumed fresh was cows' milk. The milk from goats and sheep was used for processed dairy products such as cheese, yogurt and butter. Major dairy products processed on the farms were yogurt, cheese, butter, churned sour milk (*dūq*) and fat for cooking. Farmers would produce sufficient dairy products to supply their household needs. If there were any surplus it was then sold to the Arabs in the neighbouring villages.

Rural development: infrastructures

As agricultural development gathered momentum and began to expand and diversify, many rural infrastructures deemed necessary were set up to support the work of the farmers and the overall well-being of the community. What follows is the establishment of a number of these major economic, social, administrative and spiritual institutions.

***Markets*:** Depending on consumer demand, Baha'i farmers used various market outlets to sell their farm produce. The harvested crops were cleaned,

bagged, sometimes packaged and then shipped by train to Damascus in Syria or Haifa in Palestine. Initially the farmers earned very little from the land and the crops they produced because they were selling in the small markets of the nearby villages. Also there was very little diversification of crops and animal produce since they were producing mostly eggplants and tomatoes.

***Credit*:** By and large when the farmers needed money, it was the commodity merchants who provided the finance. The merchants would buy a part or the whole of a crop in advance of the harvest. Irrespective of the size of the farm, the net return from the crops and animals sold to merchants and traders in different markets supported the farmer and his family. Usually, although farmers' total incomes were not very high, they did not have any other source of income beside that of the farm.

In times of need, some Baha'i farmers would borrow from merchants, traders or money-lenders and paid different interest rates. Others would sell in advance part or the whole of their harvest of crops and/or pay the money borrowed in grain and not cash. Borrowing money to get over short periods of cash shortage was not confined to farmers only. When in need of cash the Baha'is borrowed it. When one of the Baha'i farmers needed money to buy a mule, he paid 10 Ottoman korosh per month in interest on money he had borrowed from one of the main money-lenders such as the aforementioned Sorsok or Umm Zahibah, a female money-lender. When calculated, the total payment for the loan amounted to an interest rate of 120 per cent per annum! It took a long time for the Baha'i farmer to pay back the sum he had originally borrowed. Another Baha'i farmer bought some cloth for 5 korosh on instalments. He was short of cash and it took the merchant who sold him the cloth ten visits to collect the final instalment!

Most food items for the farmer's family were produced on the farm. Only meat, olive oil, sugar and tea had to be purchased. It was common practice among the farming community at the time to set aside whatever crops and grains were needed for the farmer's family and the seeds for next season's planting. The surplus was then either sold to a grain merchant or taken in a number of sacks to the market towns in various parts of the district. When a farmer needed a small amount of cash he would usually borrow from another farmer. Not many farmers would sell their crops in advance of the harvest to get cash.

The Baha'i farmers were, more or less, self-reliant and almost self-sufficient. However, they would visit large market towns every six months or so to get farming necessities such as seeds, tools and implements. Depending on the size of the family they would produce enough crops and animal products to see the family through the year. Wheat, lentils, broad beans and chickpeas were staple food items and always stored on the farm. Barley, which was used as animal feed, was also stored on the farm.

Some farmers worked independently of the others. There were also some who formed a group and worked together as partners. There was not a cooperative system in operation. Sometimes one or two farmers would purchase items on behalf of others as well and gain some reduction in the cost as a result of group bargaining.

***Potable water and waste disposal*:** The sources of clean drinking water in 'Adasiyyah were two springs. One was located near the Hazirat ul-Quds, close to the eucalyptus grove, and the other near Mr Bahram Bihmardi's house. The water from these springs was clean and fresh. It has been narrated that 'Abdu'l-Baha used the water from these springs while in 'Adasiyyah. At a later stage most families had dug surface wells in their homes. They used a hand pump to extract water. This saved them the routine journey to the springs to fetch water for domestic use, a chore often carried out by the women and children of the family.[35]

The waste disposal system used was the prevalent system at the time. A circular pit of 3 metres (10 feet) in diameter and 3–6 metres (10–20 feet) deep was dug in the property. It was filled with crushed stones and gravel to allow for the soluble waste to filter through and the solid waste to decompose. The pit was covered completely for both hygienic and safety reasons.

***Transport*:** Provision of a smoothly operating transport system was crucial at any time during the growing season but especially at harvest and the post-harvest period. For the most part animals were used to carry the farm produce to market. In the early days of the agricultural development of 'Adasiyyah, the farmers had no transport and were obliged to take their crops to the neighbouring Arab villages and sell at a very low price. Later, to transport a load of eggplants to market they first had to travel on foot to an Arab village where they could hire a donkey for 1 fils (about 1 US cent). Often they were attacked by stray dogs in these villages. The rented donkey was brought back to the farm in 'Adasiyyah, the ready-made sack of eggplants was loaded on its back and fastened. They would then walk behind the donkey for 2–3 hours, crossing rivers, all the way to Samakh or Tiberias where a much larger market could provide them with higher prices.

When the Baha'i farmers had their own animals, fruits, vegetables and grains were placed in sacks and loaded onto donkeys or mules. At a later stage they used primitive carts pulled by donkeys or mules. Sometime later better-designed carts were introduced. The farmers used these carts for a short time and then started using carriages that were pulled by a pair of mules. Fresh vegetables were mostly taken to Samakh or Tiberias, and from there onto the trains for the larger markets of major cities in the region.

***Education*:** Prior to the First World War and even up until the Second World War there was no formal educational establishment in Jordan except in Amman and a number of larger cities where some degree of personal initiative flourished. In the early days of the agricultural and rural development of 'Adasiyyah the education of the Baha'i farmers' children took place at home. Repeated instructions and recommendations from 'Abdu'l-Baha were heeded by the parents and led to changes. It became the task of the parents and older members of the family to impart educational information to the younger ones. In this respect the wife or the mother of the family played a significant role. The Baha'is would normally provide a large room in their houses as a classroom. The children and adults first learnt literacy

35. The information on potable water comes from an interview with Mr Akhtar-Khavari, Vancouver, April 2003.

in classes held in the evenings. The Baha'is attended these classes irrespective of their age.

At a later stage, a school was set up in the Hazirat ul-Quds. Soon another school was established. The children attended classes from grades 1 to 9 according to their age group. The age range covered was 5 to 16 years. There was also a higher grade where those interested were given a chance to advance further. Furthermore, private classes were held in the evenings to help these students. The teachers were selected from the community and outside. Those who were experienced and well read with advanced knowledge of a subject were especially requested to help these students.

It is reported that Shoghi Effendi had repeatedly emphasized that since 'Adasiyyah was in the midst of an Arabic-speaking population it was important that children were taught both Arabic and English so that they could easily mix with the local people and establish friendship with them. As a result the Local Spiritual Assembly of 'Adasiyyah had in 1934 selected and hired a graduate from the Kulliyyih School in Beirut to come to 'Adasiyyah and teach both languages.[36]

Much of the curriculum was based on the Persian and Arabic writings of the central figures of the Baha'i Faith. The Hidden Words, laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, many tablets of Baha'u'llah and obligatory prayers were taught. The students were encouraged and expected to memorize tablets. Most children could easily recite by heart some 30 tablets of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha.

To make the best use of the facilities available there were different sessions of the same subjects during the school hours. Girls attended a different class from the boys. Normally the boys would be in the school in the mornings learning Persian, Arabic, Baha'i laws and Baha'i teachings while the girls were also in the school learning Arabic, English, geography, history, mathematics and sciences. This arrangement was reversed in the afternoons.

With the exception of the Baha'i holy days and public holidays, the school term each year normally lasted 9–10 months. The schools were closed for two months in the summer when the students were helping their families on the farms and orchards or with their businesses.

The source materials for the subjects taught in the schools were imported from Iran and were the same books as were used in Persian elementary and secondary schools of the time. There were two female Baha'i teachers and one non-Baha'i. Non-Baha'i teachers had to be employed to teach courses in Arabic, English and geography. In general, most subjects were taught by Baha'i teachers. The average class size was between 7 and 9 students, but could be as many as 12. In total about 40–50 students attended the schools. At the beginning, the cost of this free education was borne by the community and later by the Local Spiritual Assembly of 'Adasiyyah.

In 1933, the District Department of Education made some enquiries about the Baha'i school in 'Adasiyyah in order to officially register it as a formal educational institution. There were three columns in the registration form, each allocated to one of the religious affiliations in the area, namely: Moslems, Christians and Baha'is. This official recognition of the Faith was a cause for great jubilation.[37]

36. Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah, *Bahā'ī News*, July/August 1934.

37. Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah, *Bahā'ī News*, 1 October 1933. Part of this information was also provided by Mr Akhtar-Khavari.

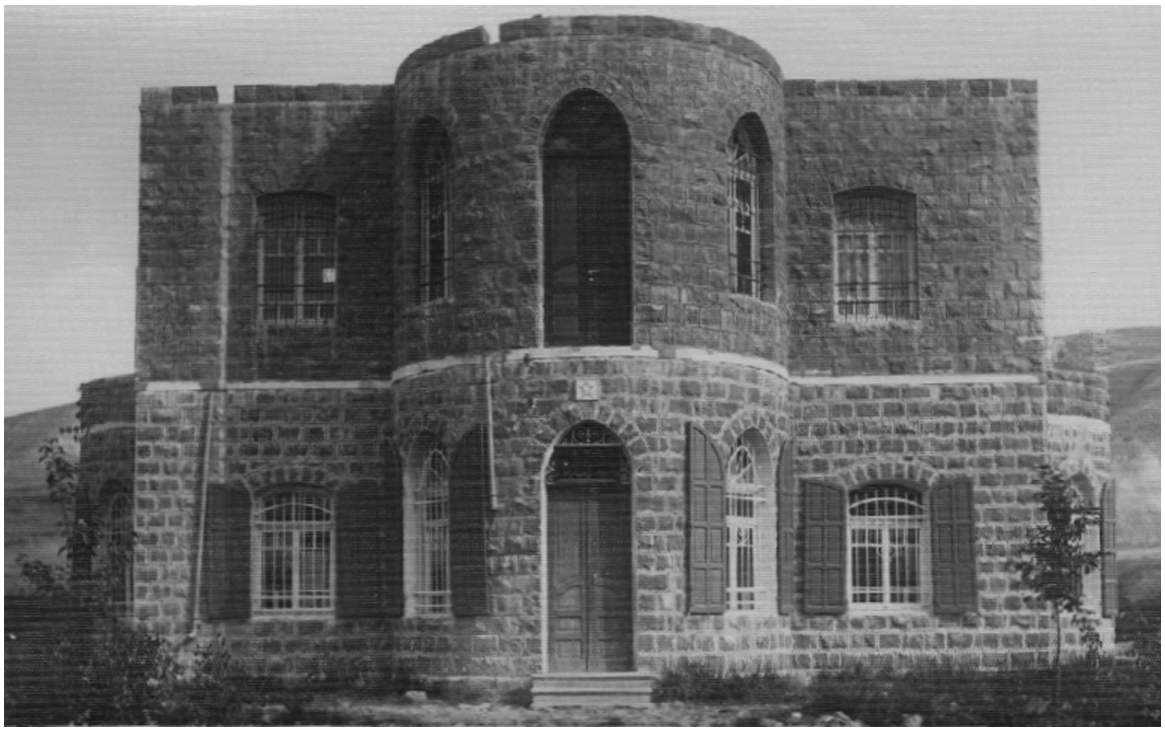

Figure 5: Hazirat ul-Quds of 'Adasiyyah, 1940s (photograph from Hossein Ashchi).

***Health*:** In the early phases of the agricultural and rural development of 'Adasiyyah it was left to each household to look after the health and hygiene of its members. There were neither physicians nor a health centre in the district for even the most basic health care. The first stage of the treatment of any illness began in the home usually under the care of the older members of the family. If the illness could not be cured with known home remedies and treatments of the time, most community members would travel to Samakh for a more detailed examination; complicated cases had to travel to Tiberias where there were physicians and also a hospital. In 'Adasiyyah there resided a lady who was trained and experienced in midwifery. She would help the pregnant women at the time of their delivery, although sometimes the pregnant women preferred to go to Tiberias for their delivery.

***Energy*:** In the early days of the development of the area, the farmers used wood and dried vegetation as the main source of energy. Logs and branches from wild vegetation, trees and scrubland were cut and dried to make fire for both cooking and heating.

Some years later when improved communication and transport systems were at hand, one of the Baha'is took up the task of providing a more convenient form of energy for both the Baha'i farmers and the community, Baha'i and non-Bahai. He would purchase a tanker of kerosene at a wholesale price and have it brought to 'Adasiyyah where he would distribute it in the community. Some families stored the kerosene in large drums and used it in small quantities for both heating and lighting. Most houses used kerosene-operated lamps for lighting. Beside domestic use the kerosene was also used as fuel for tractors. During World War II, the

Local Spiritual Assembly purchased a generator to produce electricity. It first provided electricity for the Hazirat ul-Quds and later for the Baha'i households.

***Building and construction*:** When the Baha'i farmers in 'Adasiyyah first began to cultivate the land and produce crops, almost all construction work was carried out by the farmers themselves. This included the building of houses, feeder roads, ditches, bridges, animal pens, sheds, shelters and waste disposal systems. Only if a more complex structure needed to be built would they employ the services of a professional builder from outside 'Adasiyyah but they would provide the material themselves.

The houses in 'Adasiyyah were made of mud bricks. The mud bricks provided effective insulation against the relentless heat of the summer and the cold easterly winds of the winter. The mud bricks were made by using a mixture of clay and short-cut wheat or barley straw to which enough water was added to make a semi-solid paste. The paste was then poured into a square wooden frame or mould to give its shape and left to dry. The mud-brick facades of the buildings were made more appealing when the walls were painted with whitewash or plastered. At a later stage the facades of the houses were built of cut stones and/or the whole building was completely constructed from stone.

The construction of feeder roads and small bridges required the collective work and cooperation of all farmers. These feeder roads made access to each farm and dwelling place possible and the farm produce could more easily be transported to the markets.

***Rural and home crafts*:** 'Abdu'l-Baha always advised the Baha'is to engage in crafts and small rural industries. Most Baha'i farmers were also artisans. A good number of them worked as part-time carpenters. Farmers would often make simple tools and use them in their routine farm work for weeding, digging, cutting and irrigating fields on the farm. But the task of handiwork fell upon the female members of the family who were primarily engaged in needlework, dressmaking, millinery and the general needs of the family.

***Security*:** The farmers in the area were not immune from the attack of bandits and highwaymen. On one occasion a number of highwaymen attacked 'Adasiyyah. The Baha'i farmers and their families were frightened and as soon as they were able, they ran away. While they were fleeing they could see the water in the stream they had just crossed splashing. This was caused by the bullets aimed at the fleeing farmers by the highwaymen. They headed for Haifa and arrived at the home of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the pilgrim house. They stayed in Haifa as guests of 'Abdu'l-Baha for a time. Often 'Abdu'l-Baha would come at lunch or dinnertime and comfort them. On one occasion 'Abdu'l-Baha told them, 'This is the work of God. If it was not His will how could we all be together and have such a fine feast?' 'Abdu'l-Baha then told them that they must return to 'Adasiyyah. For some, returning to such an unsafe place was very difficult to accept. 'Abdu'l-Baha assured them that such attacks would not occur again. He asked the local governor to protect the Baha'is and their families. As a result no more attacks occurred.

38. *ibid.*

Those who attacked the Baha'i farmers were mostly from the neighbouring villages within Jordan. They took with them all household goods and personal belongings, and in a number of cases they even removed the doors of the houses. One of the Baha'is reported that twice the Arabs attacked the Baha'is in 'Adasiyyah and looted their homes. The Baha'is were often faced with the theft of their mules and the subsequent problems caused by such thefts.

An incident showing how the farmers at times had to face difficult situations was narrated by Mr Na'imi's father. He described how he had managed to grow some eggplants. When they were large enough and ready for market he would pick enough to fill a sack, load it on a donkey and take it to the market. He got a few fils (1 fils is about 1 US cent). He used the money and bought a shirt. An Arab passing by noticed his new shirt. He followed him closely and when quite near him he drew his dagger as if to strike, and, still threatening, demanded he take off his shirt and hand it over. Having no other options the poor man took off his new shirt and handed it over to the demanding Arab. Wearing his old shirt he returned home worse off than before!

The farmers and their families had not only to put up with attacks by human inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, they were also attacked by wild animals roaming the countryside. Some of the Baha'i farmers had to work late into the night to plant banana suckers and offshoots. Wolves would surround them and watch at a short distance. They had to carry kerosene lanterns to deter the wild animals and stop the wolves attacking them. 'Abdu'l-Baha always told the Baha'is that they must be united and work together in order to survive among the neighbouring Arabs.

***Election of the Local Spiritual Assembly of 'Adasiyyah*:** For over a decade the Baha'i community of 'Adasiyyah had the bounty of compassionate advice and guidance from 'Abdu'l-Baha on almost every matter related to their personal lives as well as those related to the monitoring of agricultural and rural development work. With the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the implementation of the Baha'i administrative order by Shoghi Effendi, the time was ripe for the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah which was elected in 1924 and started its task of directing the affairs of that community. The members of the first and second local spiritual assemblies were Mr Jamshid Mihraban, Mr Bahram Bihmardi, Mr Shahriyar Jamshid, Mr Rustam Jamshid, Mr Tirandaz Shah-Kavus, Mr Rustam Bihmardi, Mr Mihraban Kayghubad and Mr Isfandiyar Bihmardi.[38]

***Community buildings*:** The first task undertaken by the newly elected local spiritual assembly was to put into action some of the recommendations of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. It was on the advice of 'Abdu'l-Baha to protect the holy places in 'Adasiyyah that the local assembly, on 21 February 1939, asked Mr Bihmardi to vacate his house. This was a holy place where Abdu'l-Baha had stayed frequently when in 'Adasiyyah. The local assembly built a new house for Mr Bihmardi. During one of his visits to 'Adasiyyah, 'Abdu'l-Baha designated the spot where the future Baha'i cemetery was to be. He also pointed to the sites where the Hazirat ul-Quds (Baha'i administrative building) and the Mashriq ul-Adhkar (Baha'i house of worship) were to be built.

The Baha'is of 'Adasiyyah felt that there was a great need for building a Hazirat ul-Quds for the growing community. During the last visit of

'Abdu'l-Baha to 'Adasiyyah they asked him for advice on where it should be built. 'Abdu'l-Baha, while standing on the site of the Baha'i cemetery, stretched his hand out and pointed his finger to the south side of the area indicating the site where the Hazirat ul-Quds should be built. To this day the spot where he stood is still marked. He then asked the Baha'is to measure 95 metres from where he was standing in the direction he had pointed and allow a perimeter of 150 metres. The building was to be constructed right in the middle of this boundary. The present site is exactly where he had intended it to be.[39]

39. *ibid.*

Unfortunately, the Hazirat ul-Quds was not constructed during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Baha. On one occasion, when in 'Adasiyyah, Shoghi Effendi inquired about the spot where 'Abdu'l-Baha had designated its erection. When Shoghi Effendi visited the Baha'i cemetery the Baha'is pointed out the site of the new Hazirat ul-Quds. Shoghi Effendi then told the Baha'is to take 95 paces from the spot close to the Baha'i cemetery in the direction that 'Abdu'l-Baha had pointed. He said this would be the centre of the Hazirat ul-Quds.

When the Baha'is took 95 paces in the direction which 'Abdu'l-Baha had pointed they reached a spot which happened to be the lowest point of elevation in 'Adasiyyah. So the Baha'is consulted a great deal and eventually decided to build the Hazirat ul-Quds on that particular spot. The first job was to fill this low point or depression, level it, then build on it. With the help of some hired labour and the participation of many of the Baha'is, they hauled tons of stones and rocks from the nearby mountains and quarries until the depression was completely filled and the foundation was firm enough to build on. Each day one of the Baha'is had the responsibility of bringing rocks from the mountain to the depression. Each Baha'i farmer worked a minimum of ten hours a day to help in filling the pit.

When the pit was filled and level with its surroundings, they began the construction. Many of the Baha'is fully participated in providing the funds

Figure 6: Upper room of Hazirat ul-Quds of 'Adasiyyah, 1962. L. to R.: Tawfiq Ashchi and Badi Akhtarkhavari (photograph from Hossein Ashchi).

40. *ibid.*

and in carrying out the work of construction. Finally a spacious two-storey building was erected and completed in 1931. To mark the occasion the Baha'is assembled in the new building and had a devotional service followed by consultations and, finally, celebrations.[40]

Land reform and the end of the Baha'i community of 'Adasiyyah

The Baha'i community of 'Adasiyyah came into existence and went through impressive agricultural and rural development changes under the guidance and directives of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi over half a century. But a series of events that followed soon after World War II brought about the end of that fine community and its unique agricultural and rural development achievements. Regional and international conflicts, the implementation of the Jordanian government's Land Reform Law and some local dissension contributed to this process of disintegration.

In 1948, when the state of Israel was formed, neither the government of Israel nor that of Jordan made any attempt to usurp the Baha'i farmers' lands in 'Adasiyyah. In 1962, however, the Jordanian government initiated a series of land reform measures in the Jordan valley (the Ghor of Jordan). Both the waters of the River Yarmuk and the lands in the valley were included in these land reform measures. The Land Reform Law transferred the entitlement of agricultural production and the ownership of the land to those who worked on the land or those who were willing to continue with the production of crops and animals on these lands.

The representatives of the government approached the Baha'i farmers and informed them that they were taking steps to return the land to the farmers who were working on these lands. They told them that, having worked on and developed their lands to such a great extent for many decades, they had first choice and should pick their share of the land from whichever parts of the farmland they desired. But since Shoghi Effendi had instructed them that they should not take even one inch of this land for themselves, they did not accept the government's offer of entitlement. It was against the implicit and clear-cut agreements they had with both 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. Later, the Universal House of Justice upheld Shoghi Effendi's ruling but allowed the Baha'is to own land or property in other parts of Jordan.

Continuing with food production on the land without entitlement was against the land reform regulations. For a period of two years the land reform officials waited in case there were to be a change of heart on the part of the Baha'i farmers. The national press in Jordan printed commentaries that the government wanted to allow the Baha'i farmers to have the land but the farmers were not willing to accept this offer. Having received no positive response from either the Baha'i farmers or other Baha'is, the government then divided their lands among volunteer farmers who came from all over Jordan. The Baha'i farmers therefore left 'Adasiyyah and either migrated or pioneered to different parts of Jordan or other countries. Thus, the Baha'is did not own any farming land in 'Adasiyyah after the completion of the River Yarmuk Canal Project and the implementation of the Land Reform Law.

Under the new land reform system each parcel of land given to a new farmer was 30–32 donums (3.0–3.2 hectares, 7.41–7.9 acres). However, two large lots that included the Baha'i cemetery and the Hazirat ul-Quds

were exempted from the land reform and maintained by the Baha'is as part of Baha'i international endowments. Unfortunately, some of the land in 'Adasiyyah was inherited by 'Abdu'l-Baha's family after his passing, though they became covenant-breakers (expelled from the Baha'i community for disobedience to Shoghi Effendi). Within a period of two years land speculators and developers arrived and purchased these lands, and now they are no longer the property of the covenant-breakers.

The departure of Baha'is from 'Adasiyyah was based on directives from Shoghi Effendi.[41] For example, in 1946 some of the Baha'is left 'Adasiyyah and settled in other parts of the Holy Land. Others were sent to Maan and some worked with the Bedouins and tribes. In 1947 some Baha'is went to Salt in the south of Jordan. Between 1951 and 1953 the restrictions on the community increased as the political strife in the country intensified. Shoghi Effendi instructed a number of Baha'is to return to Iran. Under the Nine Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice (1964–73), a number of Baha'is pioneered to neighbouring countries and other parts of the world. However, a number of Baha'is stayed in 'Adasiyyah despite the fact that the land they were farming had been sold to others. They leased the farms, the fields and the orchards from their new owners so that they could obey Shoghi Effendi's instructions.[42] The government of Jordan also built a metal sluice and controlled the amount of water which was to flow to 'Adasiyyah's farmlands and the main ditch which brought water to the fields and orchards of the Baha'i farmers.

An unfortunate incident in the 1967 Israel–Jordan War was the death of the Baha'i farmer Mr Surush-i-Noush. He was in his house when an Israeli

41. National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Jordan, Monograph on 'Adasiyyah.

42. *ibid.*

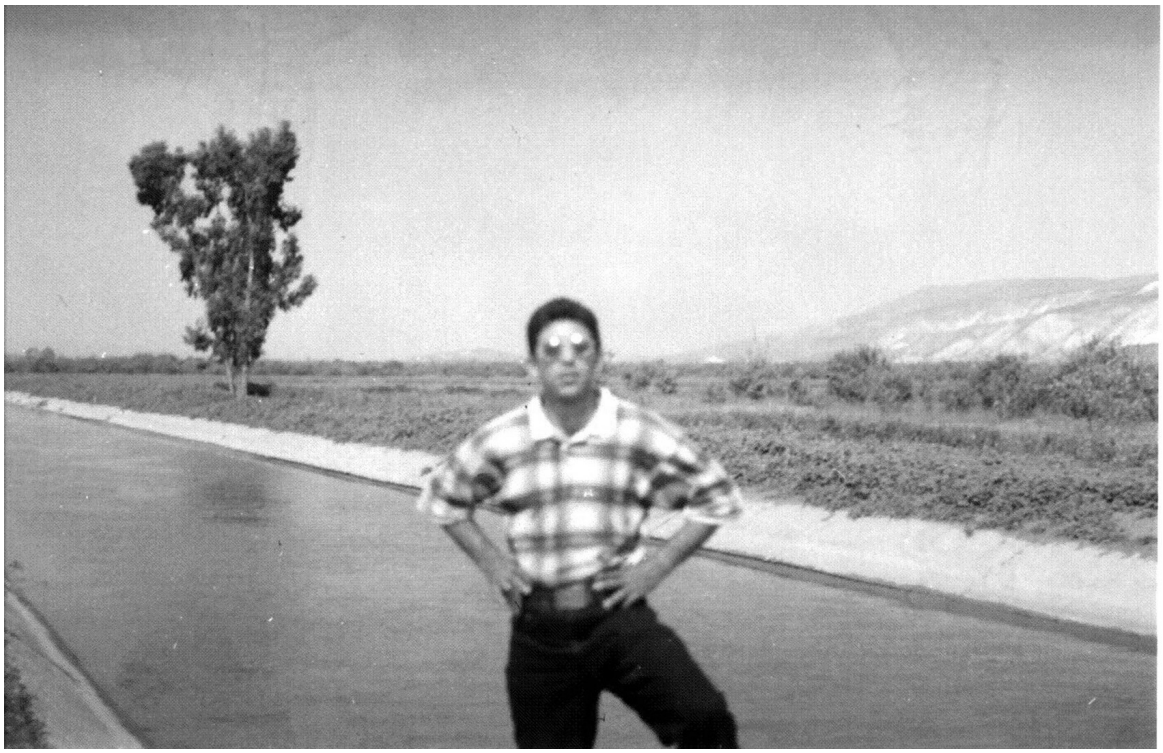

Figure 7: Irrigation canal from the Yarmuk River at the head of the Adasiyyih farmlands, 1995; Enayat Ashchi standing in the foreground (photograph from Hossein Ashchi).

shell hit the house. Mr Noush's father was a renowned poet. Mr Khudadad Na'imi left that same night for Irbid, a town some 40 kilometres south of 'Adasiyyah. A few of the Baha'i farmers stayed in 'Adasiyyah until 1968 after which 'Adasiyyah became no longer safe to live in. The Universal House of Justice then informed the Baha'i farmers and the other Baha'is to go to whatever parts of Jordan they wished to and buy farms, properties but not to remain in 'Adasiyyah. The Hazirat ul-Quds remained in the possession of the Baha'is until 1974.

Today, what remains of that bustling and thriving Baha'i community within the village boundary are the holy places, the Hazirat ul-Quds and the cemetery as well as some of the Baha'is' houses. In 1974 some of the owners sold their houses and the cemetery became part of an Islamic endowment (*waqf*). Besides the endowments in 'Adasiyyah, there were also endowments in the Qor-al-Shemaliyyah area that were donated by the Baha'is who lived there. The area of these endowments is 2000 donums (200 hectares or 610 acres) distributed in al-Baqura village. This land is still rented from the Baha'i International Office in Haifa by Baha'i farmers.

The salient features of 'Adasiyyah's rural and agricultural development processes

In discussing the significant features of the development that took place over half a century in 'Adasiyyah the enormous contributions of agriculture and farming in the overall process of rural development is only too obvious. Once agriculture develops in any rural setting it invariably influences many other processes related to rural development such as health, sanitation, education, business, credit, markets, crafts, roads, energy, transportation and finances and sets in motion a number of other processes. The agricultural developments in 'Adasiyyah were no exception to this general trend.

Of the many processes which for over six decades influenced and shaped many of the diversified socio-economic developments in 'Adasiyyah none has been as far-reaching and effective as that of food production. It is estimated that over 60 per cent of all the development work was both directed by and related to agriculture and farming. These can be examined under the following headings:

***1. Tenancy*:** In the previous pages we have seen that the normal tenancy agreements under the Ottoman Empire's agrarian system were not only unjust but had no guarantee of permanency either. One only had to travel a few kilometres out of 'Adasiyyah to find the traditional landlord–tenant relationship. Too often these tenants/sharecroppers were at the mercy of the landlord and did not know whether they would continue with their cropping pattern and agreement in the next season, or even be given another chance to cultivate the land. Nor did they have any choice in working on the same piece of land year after year. Continuity is a vital part of any process of food production where it allows for improving the fertility status of the land and implementing a viable and sound system of crop rotation.

The best share of the harvest that a peasant/sharecropper could hope for was 50 per cent, and, by the time deductions were made for exorbitant interest on loans and government taxes, the already impoverished peasant was left with a meagre 20–25 per cent share of the harvest. The peasant's

share had to provide the family food for a whole year, seeds for planting the next season's crops and, if by some stroke of good luck any meagre surplus was left, to provide cash for the peasant and his family.

'Abdu'l-Baha established a safe, secure, continuous and fair system of tenancy for both the Baha'i and non-Baha'i farmers so long as they or members of their families were willing to work on the land and had the inclination to cultivate the land to produce crops and raise animals. More significant was his arrangement for the harvest to be shared in such a way that the farmers had 80 per cent of the crops harvested and 'Abdu'l-Baha only 20 per cent, an arrangement unheard of today let alone in the Ottoman Empire's agrarian system. One may say that in this 80/20 agreement 'Abdu'l-Baha was short-changed! But, when one delves deeper into the significance of this approach one realizes his unique foresight. Once provided with such an excellent incentive, the farmers raised their levels of productivity dramatically which resulted in greater crop and animal yields and increased income for both parties. Even today, after over a century of agrarian reforms in many parts of the developed and the developing world, the best a peasant, smallholder or sharecropper hopes for is 50 per cent of the harvest.

By giving such compassionate concessions to the farmers, 'Abdu'l-Baha set an excellent example, and, on several occasions advised them that they should treat their customers and clients with a high degree of integrity and observe honour, courtesy and fairness in their daily lives. We see here that the elements of spiritual and moral values permeated the mundane task of conducting a business. Furthermore, whenever a group of farmers visited him in Haifa or in 'Adasiyyah, 'Abdu'l-Baha always recommended that they should meet and hold frequent prayer sessions, after which they should, with the purest of motives, consult about their affairs.

Another interesting feature of 'Abdu'l-Baha's monitoring of the overall work of the Baha'i farmers in 'Adasiyyah was his concern for the welfare and well-being of the farmers, their families and the day workers or labourers employed either full-time, part-time or hired at the busiest time of the crop production cycle, namely, at planting and harvest times. Day labourers working on the Baha'i-owned farms in 'Adasiyyah would normally come from the neighbouring villages or be seasonal workers recruited from the migrating tribes that set up temporary camps near 'Adasiyyah. 'Abdu-l-Baha recommended to the Baha'i farmers that after they had harvested their crops and gathered their animal products they should ensure that these day labourers received a share of the farm produce or farm income. He told the farmers that the significance of this Divine Bounty would soon become apparent to them.

2. Development of agriculture and the business of farming: As stated earlier, when the processes involved in shaping the development of the Baha'i community in 'Adasiyyah are examined it is obvious that agriculture and farming played a crucial role. In retrospect, it was the wise decision of 'Abdu'l-Baha to prioritize sound food production that formed the foundation of both agricultural development and rural development.

The new farmers who arrived from Iran were faced with a completely different set of circumstances to those they were used to. For example, a new

approach to planting had to be adopted as they had had only 50 millimetres (2 inches) of annual rainfall in Yazd and the surrounding villages, compared with over 350 millimetres (12 inches) in north-west Jordan and around 'Adasiyyah. Equally challenging were the high temperatures combined with humidity of the Ghor, a plentiful supply of water from the River Yarmuk and the hard work of diverting the water from the Yarmuk to their farms, fields and orchards.

From sowing the seed to marketing the harvested crops or animal products, they faced challenges hitherto unknown to them. Whereas in Iran the markets in the city of Yazd provided sound and traditional outlets for their produce, here, throughout this period of reorientation and adaptation to the new environment they faced the challenge of finding new markets. Furthermore, they had to adopt new practices of farming in changing from the arid verges of the central desert of Iran to their new habitat with its tropical to subtropical climate. They steered through these difficult periods by sheer hard work, perseverance, use of accumulated years of farming experience and the constant guidance and encouragement of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Eventually they mastered the art of crop and animal production in their new environment, raised their earnings and started to build a flourishing community through implementation of various rural development activities.

Once food production became stabilized, this gave the farmers a chance to increase their productivity, which set the stage for two very important processes to be implemented. The first was the overall rural development of 'Adasiyyah, and the second was the diversification of agriculture and farming from pure cereal production (wheat, barley, lentils, chickpeas, etc.) to growing vegetable and fruit crops.

Examples of rural development work were the construction of houses, farm roads, feeder roads and bridges, implementation of children's education, establishment of adult literacy classes, while processing of crops and animal products added value to the harvested raw materials produced on the farms. Processing of dairy products such as turning milk into cream, butter, yogurt and cheese on each farm and by each household brought additional income. Here, 'Abdu'l-Baha's recommendation to raise livestock changed the arable face of farming into that of a mixed farming system whereby cereals and protein crops produced feed for the animals and the farmyard manure from the livestock raised the soil fertility status.

Another example of rural development change and innovation was the transition in the source of energy from dried scrubland bushes to logs and dried tree branches then kerosene, and, at a later stage, a generator to produce electricity.

As stated, a very important feature of diversification was 'Abdu'l-Baha's repeated recommendation to farmers to introduce innovations into their production systems. Having the foresight and vision of market changes and shifting consumer preferences, he recommended to the farmers to change their pure crop production approach to that of a varied vegetable and fruit crop production approach. This meant that the value of vegetable and fruit crops produced per hectare far exceeded the income from growing staple farm crops such as wheat, barley or chickpeas. Subsequently part of each farmers' lands were brought under vegetable and fruit production and the remainder kept under cereal crops such as wheat and barley and protein crops such as chickpeas and beans.

As early as 1910, the Baha'i farmers began the shift from pure farm crop production to that of vegetable and fruit crop production. But to cater for the farmer's family's staple diet, 'Abdu'l-Baha advised them to keep part of the land under farm crops. Thus wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils and broad beans were produced side by side with vegetables such as cucumbers and eggplants and fruits such as bananas, tomatoes and oranges.

'Abdu'l-Baha had a keen sense of observation. He observed and evaluated the cultural practices employed by the Baha'i farmers and then recommended that certain changes be introduced. The introduction of bananas to the Baha'i farmers' systems of production is a very interesting case of innovation and diversification. 'Abdu'l-Baha on many occasions encouraged the farmers to introduce banana and orange production into their cultural practices. Although the Baha'i farmers of 'Adasiyyah were the first to introduce bananas to the region and the country, soon they were followed by the non-Baha'i farmers in the area. An interesting feature of banana cultivation recommended by 'Abdu'l-Baha was the use of the basin system rather than conventional row planting. In the microclimate of 'Adasiyyah this proved to be the best cultural practice since it allowed the irrigation water to slowly and thoroughly infiltrate the soil horizons and prevent undue plant stress resulting from fluctuating soil moisture content and also ensured even ripening of the fruit and an overall increased fruit yield.

The Baha'i farmers consulted 'Abdu'l-Baha on the type of staple crops they should produce in different seasons. In the early part of each planting season a number of Baha'i farmers would go to Haifa and take some farm produce for 'Abdu'l-Baha. Then 'Abdu'l-Baha would ask them about their farms, the crops they grew and the harvest they had. Presenting him with the relevant information they would then seek his advice as to the type of crops that should be grown in the coming season. Listening to their request intently, 'Abdu'l-Baha would make a number of suggestions leaving the final decision to each farmer. Sometimes the farmers later realized 'Abdu'l-Baha's foresight and acute awareness of the trends in market demand and supply in the areas of Jordan and Palestine where the Baha'i farmers were to sell their produce in the coming season.

***3. Management*:** One of the interesting features of both agricultural and rural development processes was the management of all the related activities by 'Abdu'l-Baha. It was both morale-boosting and heart-warming for the farmers, their families and other Baha'is that there was someone close by who in their hours of need or distress could provide guidance, solace, encouragement, assistance and hospitality, while the owners of other villages were mostly absentee landlords whom their peasants and sharecroppers rarely saw.

***4. Self-sufficiency or self-reliance*:** A concept which has been the hallmark of agricultural development in both the developing and the developed world in the 20th century and even before is self-sufficiency in agricultural production. Besides providing sustenance for the population of the country, its strategic benefits in times of war and conflict were only too obvious to governments. Even today many developing countries and Third World nations exert great effort to achieve some degree of self-sufficiency in food production.

Unfortunately, this concept with all its apparent benefits did not work for either the developed or the developing nations. This is because the imperatives of the international commodity markets, political manipulations of these markets, tariffs, quotas and the dumping of surplus food products of the developed countries onto the markets of developing countries and Third World nations in the name of international aid have completely distorted the operations of the international markets to this day. It has also driven millions of farmers in developing countries and Third World nations into greater poverty due to the disruption in either their farm production systems or their local markets.

From the very beginning of their work the Baha'i farmers of 'Adasiyyah were advised by 'Abdu'l-Baha to sell their products in markets beyond the immediate boundaries of Jordan. Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Baha strongly recommended that they establish bonds of friendship with the people they met or had business dealings with. This approach paved the way for the implementation of the concept of self-reliance. When the Baha'i farmers sold their products in Samakh, Tiberias, Haifa or Damascus, they purchased some of their tools and family needs from the markets in these towns. Indeed, had this concept been operated on a world scale we would not have over 500 million poverty-stricken subsistence farmers all over the world today.[43]

43. Iraj Poostchi, *Rural Development and the Developing Countries: An Introductory Interdisciplinary Approach*, Oshawa, ON: Oshawa Press, 1986.

Conclusion

This study is by no means exhaustive, and there is scope for future agriculturalists to delve further into the development of 'Abdu'l-Baha's unique project and its significant contribution to the agricultural and rural development of north-west Jordan and the country as a whole, and the universal Baha'i approach to agriculture and rural development in both developed and developing countries. Within the limited time and resources available only a certain amount of research of these farming and rural development activities could be covered.

Perhaps one of the important features of this study is that it provides a glimpse of a development project monitored under the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Baha and his down-to-earth approach to the practical issues of life. Equally important was to gain some insight into the hard work, the frustrations, the feelings of joy and despair, the achievements, setbacks and the devotion of the Baha'i farmers who, having moved from their native land of Iran and its oppressive agrarian system, transformed the scrubland of 'Adasiyyah into flourishing productive fields of farm crops, vegetable patches, orchards, banana plantations and citrus groves.

Another reason for undertaking this study was to study the effect of implementing moral and spiritual values in day-to-day work. These values promoted and strongly recommended by 'Abdu'l-Baha, more often than not, had significant influence on production and marketing systems of the farmers, improving their fortunes as well as the spiritual development of both individuals and society. 'Abdu'l-Baha's constant advice to the farmers to hold prayer sessions, then have consultations, with the purest of motives, in all of their daily affairs clearly demonstrates how he tried to inculcate these values as part and parcel of their toil on the land and administration of their personal affairs and that of the Baha'i community.

In today's world or, for that matter in that of twentieth-century Jordan, dealing with the day-to-day affairs of people invariably would have brought and still brings clashes of personalities and contrasting viewpoints. More specific problems such as those related to tenancy, transfer of the right of production and share of irrigation water are bound to arise in any agricultural setting, then and now. Often, they cause discord among the rural inhabitants. We also see that as soon as these Baha'i farmers sought 'Abdu'l-Baha's advice regarding these matters, he, with a joyful smile, always suggested to them that they should sit down and pray together, consult on the resolution of the problem, and ensure that the unity of the community was maintained no matter what.

The post-World War II years proved to be a very trying time for the farmers and Baha'i community of 'Adasiyyah. A huge influx of displaced Palestinians into all parts of Jordan, implementation of the Land Reform Law by the Jordanian government, and the fiercely-fought 1967 war between Israel and Jordan which directly involved 'Adasiyyah all contributed to the termination of this episode in the life of the Baha'i farmers and the Baha'i community of 'Adasiyyah. By the end of 1967 there were very few or no Baha'is living in 'Adasiyyah but the Baha'i endowment and properties such as the Hazirat ul-Quds and the Baha'i cemetery and over 283 hectares of land are still part of the Baha'i international endowments in that country.

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