

A MEETING WITH
GOD

the making of a modern day mystic

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The nature of my experience is as follows:

My childhood was quite ordinary, plenty of outdoor activities : Fishing, Bike riding, Playing outside with friends – nothing out of the ordinary. A rather rebellious teenager, often in trouble at school, mixed with the ‘so called’ wrong crowd – considered a ‘no hoper’ up until I was about fifteen years old. Then I developed an aptitude for Art and woodwork and was given encouragement from a few teachers who believed in me and who thought that perhaps I had some potential. I performed quite well in these subjects and went on to further and higher education.

Following a path that lead into the field of Engineering Design instead of Art. This path I chose because I thought that it would at least supply me with a steady pay cheque. I first developed a curiosity for Religion as a student and often wondered at the enthusiasm and sometimes secrecy that my Christian colleagues seemed to display at times. This lead me into contact with the student Priest at my college. Of the few talks that we had I remember feeling confused and unhappy about having to chose a particular Church or branch of Christianity over some other. This I felt would somehow distance me or separate me from all of the followers of the other Churches and I was told that I had to make up my mind which path I wanted to follow before I could progress any further.

I decided not to sign up with any particular Church and instead to defer my decision until a future date. I do remember however that that Priest had suggested that, as I was not really a prayerful sort, to say every night the simple phrase “O LORD JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD HAVE MERCY UPON ME A SINNER” and that I should direct this prayer towards GOD who at that time I knew not. This simple phrase I quickly memorised and have said every night since and always proceeds any prayer that I make, even today.

My family although quite ordinary were not really Religious at all, my parents simply did their best to raise their family of six children on a single low income, no mean task at any time. My Father worked long hours, as a guard on the Railway and we just got by living a fairly modest existence. My Father was quite strict with us and always made an effort to teach us right from wrong and to be honest and truthfull. We learnt however, as we were left to our own devices for most of the day, to be street wise and how to survive off our own wits and efforts. I attended a local Sunday school as a child on occasion, with my elder Brother and Sister, but only because they used to give us free sweets afterwards I am sure.



The public baths in Akka, where Bahauallah used to bathe.

I had never really managed to meet a girlfriend and this was starting to trouble me at nineteen or so. I had managed to avoid having a fling with a so-called 'easy girl' that my elder brother had set up for me, because it just didn't seem right. I wanted more than a 'one night stand' I wanted a proper relationship. I was looking for real love and all that comes with it, I needed a lucky break. I thought I would have to throw in the towel and just go for it as in the college halls of residence a certain girl approached me to go out with her. I was thinking that although I wasn't physically attracted to her, I had to give it a try even if just for the experience, and at least I wouldn't be so lonely. Whilst I was troubled by uncertainty and as the next morning I was due to make the journey home for the Christmas holidays, I decided that perhaps for the first time in my life I would really get down on my knees and Pray to my newly found saviour Jesus, for help. I don't remember much of that prayer but I remember that I was sincere in pleading and I desired only for direction in my life and help in resolving this dilemma. The link between this prayer and what was to occur the following morning only became clear to me some years later.

As I went to board the train the next day I noticed an attractive young lady sitting on her own by a window. I sat down opposite her and soon became enamoured by her beautiful appearance. I made a few comments and to my surprise she seemed to accept my company. We talked some more; I bought her a coffee and the journey passed timelessly. As we left the train I plucked up the courage to ask her out and she accepted. It seemed as though my feet were always a few inches above the floor from then onwards. I was in Love at last and life seemed to be just about as good as it gets. After meeting in the winter we were married in the spring. I was in love with a beautiful woman, married, four children followed and everything that came with it; home, family life, work, more work, nappies, etc.

The other blessing that came from that union was that my wife introduced me to her eastern Religion 'The Bahai Faith'. You see my wife was from IRAN and was here as a student and a refugee because of the fact that her family had been persecuted in their own country because of their religious beliefs. None of this really meant anything to me because I was in love and my wife was here with me and nothing else mattered. This new Religion however I immediately warmed to, its members seemed very nice people, they were very positive and optimistic about life and the future in general. They were all united in their beliefs and all of their teachings seemed most agreeable. This seemed to be the sort of Religious philosophy that I had been hoping to find all along, a Religion that actually accepted all the others to be equally true. I started reading a few books on my wife's Religion and as I seemed to agree with everything that I read it wasn't too long before I became a member myself. Although this Religion is relatively new, it only started in 1844, and its Prophet founder a man titled BAHAUDDIN (the Glory of God) lived during this century up until 1892 when he passed away in Israel, after having suffered many years of persecution himself. I soon discovered that this Prophet as well as founding a new world Religion had also made the ultimate claim that he himself was none other than the return of my Lord Jesus Christ. A claim that filled me with wonder and hope and intrigue, I simply had to investigate this claim further, could such a thing possibly be true. The flame of search for my Beloved had been kindled in my heart, a flame that burned brightly for several years of searching and seeking, asking and pondering. But alas with increasing family commitments as my children were growing up and of the demanding responsibilities that this entailed, my search seemed to be increasingly distracted and gradually waned until only the spark of search remained. Ten years passed by, ten good years, busy years, my time preoccupied with simply trying to keep my head above the water. These years took their toll however on my spiritual well being. I had hardly read a book on bahai subjects or indeed on any other spiritually related subject. It had been several years since I had said any prayers of any sort, I was so wrapped up with everyday life and work and commuting through the traffic that I just couldn't find the time anymore.

I became distant and withdrawn, disillusioned about my personal problems and about worldly concerns. I had lost my enthusiasm and had entered onto the pathway of despondency and despair. Against the principles of my religion I had started drinking alcohol with my friends at work during the lunch breaks and this seemed to be the start of a slippery slope. My marriage life was suffering and my wife and I seemed to argue more while I slipped deeper and deeper down that slope.

All of these things were happening during the year leading up to my long awaited visit to the world's centre of the Bahai Faith on mount Carmel in Israel. The centre in Israel contains the tombs or sacred shrines of the founders of this Faith along with all of the surviving relics and artefacts that used to belong to them. There are also well-maintained and restored buildings where the Prophet and his family used to reside. All of these places are normally visited during ones pilgrimage to the Holy land.

We had reserved our place on this trip some five years earlier, as there was normally a long waiting list. Although this was a very special trip for my wife as she had never been, for me in my present state of mind it seemed like just another two week holiday to somewhere hot and sunny, in fact somewhere that I didn't even want to go, as it was expensive and I couldn't really spare the time from my busy work schedule. The date for our trip was due in January 1993 and was due to last for nine days at the centre with three days left over to explore Israel. As I said, I did not really want to go, it didn't seem important to me, and as it happened I lost my job over it as my boss was not happy about me having two weeks off when I was in the middle of a busy contract. Upon my return I was to discover that I would have no job to come back to, as my boss had brought someone else in to replace me during my absence.

Before our departure we left our children with my wife's sister for the duration of our trip of which I thought of as a well-earned break away from the kids and at least all to ourselves. During our first day in Israel i was quite indifferent to my surroundings, although the environment seemed pleasant enough. The land around the shrines had been transformed over the years into beautiful gardens, painstakingly maintained by a veritable army of volunteer gardeners. Because of my state of mind I could not really appreciate the need for such exquisite beauty and even thought it all perhaps as a bit wasteful. The rest of the Bahai pilgrims on our group, numbering about twenty souls in total, seemed nice enough people, although to me they were just people, just faces in the crowd. I didn't really want to engage in exchanging pleasantries or small talk with any of them. Nine days suddenly seemed like a long time to me. On the third day however, I decided to leave my wife for a while, as she was busy talking to one of her new friends, and pay a visit to the shrine on mount Carmel. As we were currently in the pilgrim's house on Carmel, it was only a five-minute walk up to the shrine. I entered the shrine itself, a square shaped room, directly above the vault where the sacred remains

were entombed. There was room for about twenty people who would have to sit or kneel on the exquisite Persian carpets that covered the floor, the room was scented with the odour of fresh roses and there was a heavy silence. I walked quietly over and kneeled down at the back of the room. There were only a few visitors there, I settled down and closed my eyes. The silence was only broken on occasion by the sound of someone in the room chanting a Persian prayer in a soothing and melodic voice. As I personally had not said a prayer for some years, I was content just to sit there in silence, relaxed and composed. Perhaps half an hour or so had passed when the strangest feeling came over me. It seemed as if all of the stress and the worries that I had stored up over the years, was simply evaporating up through my body and out of my head, leaving me carefree and stress free. Feeling light and elated, I left that Temple and walked out into a different world, a much more pleasant world. The sun was shining brightly and everything looked fresh and new. The transformation that had occurred in that Temple was quite remarkable, even though I hadn't prayed it was as though someone or something had taken pity on my wretched state and had mercifully revived me. I was like a new man that had been given a new lease of life, and I felt like a sheep feels when all of its thick wool is sheared off and it runs off jumping joyfully. I was enthusiastic again and exited to be in such a beautiful place. My spirit that had lay dormant for such a long time had been rejuvenated, like a smouldering candle with just a spark remaining suddenly ignited again to burn a bright. When I returned to the other pilgrims I smiled and greeted them, I was happy to be with them all. I remember thinking at the time that if this was all that I was to get out of this trip then it was well worth it, people in the cities pay large sums of money for this kind of stress relief and not nearly as effective. I feel today that it was meant to be that I entered that shrine in such a dilapidated and dried up condition in order that I absorb a lion's share of that life giving spirit that is manifest there.



Typical wild cats as seen in Akka and Haifa.

I recall soon after this, entering a Bahai library on that site and reading part of a book that spoke of the pure devotion of the early believers who walked on foot many hundreds of miles in order to catch a glimpse of Bahauallah at the window of the prison barracks where he was incarcerated at that time. These early pilgrims underwent extreme hardships during these perilous journeys. Many were beaten and robbed of their possessions on those desolate highways. It seemed clear to me that making a journey on foot was the best way to experience the real sense of actually travelling and would therefore be more satisfying. I decided there and then that this is what I wanted to do; I would make the journey from Haifa to Akka on foot on the last day of my pilgrimage. I planned to visit the Turkish bath where Bahauallah used to bathe, and also the prison barracks where he was incarcerated in that town. I felt sure that Christ himself would guide me on this journey. I had already made the journey from Haifa to Akka the day previously as an official tour with my fellow pilgrims, in an air-conditioned coach. The distance is only some twenty miles or so and takes a little over an hour by coach, it didn't seem that far, I felt that I could easily manage it. Arriving at that destination

by coach however, I felt more like a tourist than a pilgrim, and I remember that the experience was a bit of an anticlimax on the day.

The night before the last day of our official stay, I set out to fulfil such an intention. I surreptitiously departed from my Hotel room a little after one in the morning, whilst my wife was asleep, and left her a note explaining my intentions. Once outside into the cool, still night air, I immediately made my way down towards the seafront; I intended to make the whole journey on foot right along the coastline. To my disappointment however I discovered that for the most part of my journey there was actually no access to the beach allowed. The entire coastline was blocked off by miles of heavy industrial building sites; cement factories, oil refineries, scrap metal sites, and the like. I followed a main road, which ran along side all this industry and headed off in the right direction. I was pestered by Taxicabs in Haifa, who prowled the streets looking for fares, and I was anxious to avoid them still whilst on this road.

I stopped at a large river, about ten metres across, which was a few miles distance from the town, and stood on the steel bridge, there was an oily smell in the air. I looked at the river where the moonlight was reflecting on the surface and noticed the distinctive haze of oil and pollution there. It seemed obvious to me that the river was being used to dispose of industrial waste under the cover of darkness. I felt sorry that this beautiful land was being abused and polluted in that way and that some countries could get away with this sort of behaviour in this day and age. As I resumed my journey I started to notice some large olive trees along the side of the road. I realised that these trees were old enough to have originally been there during the time of Bahauallah and could well have been seen by those early pilgrims making that journey to see their Lord. These beautiful old trees were now in a dilapidated condition being near a busy roadside and surrounding them were piles of refuse and old rubble that had been fly tipped there as was common along these remote stretches of road. As I became more emotional, my eyes became tearful and I started to bemoan the plight of this once beautiful countryside and how sorely it had been treated. As I progressed further along this route I came across an oil refinery and I stopped to look at the pumping stations and filtration vessels. This plant was all too familiar to me as I had designed equipment just like this back home where I worked as a draughtsman for companies that worked in this industry. All of these things played heavy on my mind and I became irrational and started to imagine myself in somehow partly responsible for all of this unsightly industry and for the pollution. My heart sank lower and lower as I progressed and I began to feel worthless and increasingly depressed. I had remembered reading of pilgrims who used to walk that same journey from Haifa to Akka, who walked the entire distance along the beautiful sandy shoreline with its clear blue sea and bordering sand dunes, and I so envied their experience and I wished it could have been so now.



A view out to Sea, Through the City walls in Akka.

A disused railway line ran parallel to the road in the direction of Akka and I chose to walk along this for a few miles. It was now raining quite heavily and I was so despondent that I didn't even open up my umbrella that was hanging from my leather coat, instead I just walked sombrely onwards becoming wet through. As I rejoined the road some time later I lost my way and headed for some miles in the wrong direction, only

having to retrace my steps again, as signposts were few and far between. As dawn approached, I came upon a small coastal village, and with the little money that I had remembered to bring I entered a shop and purchased some bread and some milk for my breakfast. With this I made my way down to the beach and sat by the sand looking out at the calm, peaceful sea whilst eating my food. It was low tide and the wet sand stretched out before me, it was nice to be finally on the shoreline by that beautiful sea with the sun slowly rising on the horizon. After the cold and miserable night I had been through it felt good to be warmed by those first rays of sunshine. After a relaxing rest I got up and walked out onto the sand to resume my journey along by the sea. I noticed as I walked that the shells crunched beneath my feet and fell into pieces, as this had not been the case in towns that I had previously visited further down the coast, I suspected that this might be due to the pollution I had seen being dumped into the sea in that region. The sight of a few dead fish and oil stained seabirds that had been washed up onto the sand reaffirmed my suspicion. I had only walked for half a mile or so, when I came upon a barbed wire fence stretching down into the sea, there was an armed guard in a lookout tower and I realised that I could walk no further. It was a large military base and I would have to walk around its vast perimeter fence. I was too tired to follow the road round, as it now seemed to head back in the wrong direction, so I crossed a field and rejoined that old railway line that I had seen in the distance. To my left as I walked was the end of that barbed wire fence surrounding the military base, with another lookout tower on the corner, and to my right was another fence.



A view looking at the walls of Akka – as I arrived.

I walked past the armed guard; I was aware that he was looking at me but I kept my eyes on the floor in front of me and kept on walking straight ahead. I soon heard a mans voice behind me shouting “Halt”, the guard was now following me along the railway line, I walked a few more steps, then the fearful sound of his automatic rifle clicking as he was preparing to shoot made me come to an abrupt stop. I raised my arms above my head and perhaps for the first time ever, feared for my life. An army jeep drove up to me and I was escorted by a few soldiers to an office. I sat for a while there while checks were made on my passport and with my Hotel. They asked me what I was doing there and I managed to explain that I was making a journey on foot from Haifa to Akka. Before to long they decided to let me go and drove me out of the base to the main gate, they wanted to drive me the last few miles into Akka but I insisted that they let me walk, they obliged although I realised that they thought I was a crazy Englishman. I walked past the army base and to my relief

realised that I could once again gain access to the beach. When I got to the beach I sat down by some sand dunes and pushed my fingers into the warm sand, it was beautiful. I looked up the beach and gazed on the distinct city walls of the old fortress town of Akka, it was a pleasure to behold, the pale yellow brickwork glimmering in the sunlight, I was awestruck. I realised that I had reached the end of my journey, that city looked as magnificent then as it must have looked to those early pilgrims some one hundred or so years ago. It was about ten in the morning and it was a brilliant sunny day and I was exactly where I wanted to be in the world, I felt elated. I noticed down in the grass besides me a young tortoise, so I picked it up and decided to take it with me. Tortoises are expensive to buy as pets in England whilst in Israel they are considered pests and are often killed by Farmers and gardeners for eating their plants. In any case at least now I had some company for the rest of my journey. I would keep him with me for a few days and find him a new home out in the wilderness and out of harms way a bit later. As I walked by the sea towards the city, some few miles ahead of me, I came across a river flowing into the sea. The river was about ten metres across and it was as deep as a mans waist. There were three local men fishing that estuary with small fine nets, and I noticed one of the men empty his net on the river bank, he left a dozen or so small silver fish to die on the ground. I walked over and picked up the wriggling fish and threw them back into the water. The logic of these fishermen amazed me; it was no surprise to me that they were not catching any larger fish if they simply killed off all the small fry. When I crossed the river I made no attempt to roll up my trousers or remove my shoes, I simply waded straight across, after all I had been wet for most of the night so I didn't really care. The three men gave me a strange look as I passed them. One of the men approached me on the other side, he asked me directly if I had any cigarettes, he was trying it on so I thought and I suddenly felt quite vulnerable, however I smiled at him and said that I hadn't and he just left me, so I continued and walked away.



A view closer to Akka City walls.

As I approached the city walls I came to another fence. On this stretch of beach near the fence I noticed an injured sea gull dragging its broken off wing behind it as it walked about. I drove the bird into a corner and as it couldn't fly I easily picked it up. Some tough, stringy ligaments connected its wing, so with the aid of two sharp stones I managed to cut the dead wing off. The bird would never again fly, but it could now walk quicker and when I let it go, it ran straight for the safety of the ocean and swam out. I watched it for a few moments; it felt good to have been able to help in some way. I remembered from a Bahai book an analogy about the two wings of a bird being likened to a husband and his wife, and for the first time that night I remembered my wife who I had left earlier that morning, I hoped that she would forgive me. As the tide was low I managed to wade out into the sea a little and climb over the fence away from the barbed wire. I

walked a little way along the next beach when two soldiers rushed over to me and told me that I shouldn't be there, I was in another, smaller army base. One of the men suggested to the other that perhaps I was a tourist from a nearby hotel, I thought it wiser to lie at this point rather than try a long explanation, so I said "yes, I did". The two men smiled to each other and led me to an iron gate, which they unlocked and allowed me to pass through. I was so relieved to have been allowed to pass through that gate as for a moment back there I thought I could have been in a lot of trouble. I was now free to enter the walled city as the big wooden gate was in view just ahead of me. I admired that old gate for a time, about six inches thick, solid oak, about ten feet tall and ten feet wide, filled with rusted, large iron rivets. It was possibly several hundred years old and looked very foreboding. I remembered those old stories I had read about the early pilgrims and how they had dreaded to pass this very city gate. They had had to disguise themselves and openly lie to the guards who watched over that gate and allowed people to pass through into the city, as they made a point of turning Bahai pilgrims away. It then suddenly occurred to me that perhaps throughout the whole of my journey through the night, that God had been watching over me and had helped my experience to feel more realistic. There had been the sheer length of the journey, about ten hours on foot that had left me exhausted. There was the emotional turmoil that I had been through, that had left me emotionally drained. There had been the fear of the armed guard and my interrogation at the first army base. There had been my elation at arriving at those city walls after such an arduous journey. There had been a very real possibility of being beaten and robbed by the fishermen, and finally there was the experience of being caught at the eleventh hour, and having to lie to the soldiers who let me pass through a very substantial iron gate and into my final goal, the city itself. I realised that all of these events were more than just pure coincidence, so on a spiritually high note, I entered the city gate.



The broken winged bird swimming out to sea, near Akka.

Once inside the city, I walked through the narrow streets and wondered to myself if they had changed at all over the past hundred years or so. The old walled city of Akka was in fact remarkably well preserved and unspoiled; I believe that it is protected by a preservation order that helps to keep it that way. Most of the buildings in the old city were built with the same thick stones that were used to make up the surrounding city walls, and they looked as though they were built to last. I spent several hours wandering about that venerable old city, soaking up the atmosphere and admiring its views. I entered into an old public Turkish bath that had been out of use for many decades, but that had been preserved as a tourist attraction. This place was of special interest to me as I had heard that my Lord Bahauallah Himself had used this bathhouse regularly to cleanse

Himself during the years that he was incarcerated in that city. I walked reverently around those premises and then sat down quietly and recited a prayer, again wishing I could turn the clocks back to those glorious days when my Lord walked this earth. I stopped for some food and ate near the sea, and then I walked up to the old prison barracks and sat down on a wall by the sea overlooking the window of the cell where Bahauallah had been imprisoned. I sat there for well over an hour, looking up at that window, as had many pilgrims a century before, hoping to glance upon the outstretched arm of that noble hostage, waving a handkerchief in acknowledgement of their presence. But for me there was no such prize at my journeys end, only an empty building albeit with a glorious history, but empty and derelict all the same, with only the burning desire to meet the Lord of this world and the world that is to come



A view of the prison barracks in Akka, with tortoise.

I had the long and tiring journey home to make, I had no money left and I was still weary from the night before. It was early evening, if I made good time I'd be there by bedtime, I took a deep breath and set out, although I wasn't sure if I could actually make it. I got about fifty metres down the road when a small white van pulled up next to me and a young man, African, with a smiling face, looked out of the window and said "Mike! I've been looking for you!" and bade me to get into the car. My wife had told the security people at Haifa that I had walked to Akka and that she was worried about me, and this man had been sent out to look for me. My initial reaction was anger and surprise that this man had been put to so much trouble on my account, but I was surely grateful for the ride back home. Travelling at speed along the main roads we were back in Haifa in less than an hour. I was taken to a man who was in charge of security that simply greeted

me and enquired if I were all right. At that point I was so disillusioned and upset that I just broke down and started to cry out aloud and uncontrollably. The man consoled me and led me back towards the pilgrims house where the others in our group were gathered for their last nights celebration meeting. Because I was still upset and in such a state, I did not want to meet anybody so I asked if I could be left in the grounds to regain my composure. I was left in a remote spot and sat down on the ground leaning against a wall, the man had told me that he was going to fetch my wife and had walked off. I sat there for about twenty minutes and held my little tortoise for company. When my wife arrived she wanted me to go back with her to the party but I told her that I was too tired, so we both made our way back to the Hotel. Thus ended my first experience of pilgrimage in the Holy land, Israel.

The next morning I awoke feeling much better after having had good nights sleep. We had to pack our bags and leave the Hotel in Haifa as our nine days permitted stay in that town had elapsed. We made our way after breakfast down to the town centre. I decided to cheer my wife up by hiring a car and spent our last four days in Israel driving around the country seeing the sights. One day we drove out to the dead sea, another day we drove around the sea of Galilee, and so on. Whilst travelling we came upon a beautiful spot in the wilderness by a small stream where I let my little friend run free.

The next day we flew home back to England and to our little house in Berkshire where we were reunited with our children. The next day I turned up for work to find someone else sitting at my desk, then my boss told me that he didn't need me any more and that there was no longer a job for me there, this was good news to come back to I thought, but I calmly took the bad news and returned home again. This was just the excuse I was hoping for however, and as I scanned the bookshelf in my living room, I surveyed all of the Bahai books that had literally been collecting dust over the years and I picked one to read. I decided to read a book written by Bahauallah Himself, I held the book in my hand, blew off the dust, and kissed the book reverently, as I now appreciated how precious these writings were. I made myself comfortable on the couch, and started to read then and there, with great eagerness and enthusiasm, those sacred passages. I remembered that one of the things that I had prayed for, whilst in the Holy land, was that upon my return to England, that I would somehow be able to find more time to read the Bahai scriptures, because the pressures of work normally made this difficult. Little was I to know that my prayers would be answered quite so soon and so dramatically, it just goes to show that one certainly has to choose ones prayers carefully when at the sacred shrines, because they might well be answered, and not necessarily in the way that one might at first expect. I read for most of that day and well into the night as well and this process went on for the following four or five weeks. I read through all of the books that I owned and then borrowed books of other people to read such was my thirst for

spiritual knowledge. I made some attempt to find another contract job but there was not much work around at that time so I continued with my studies. In the early hours of one morning whilst deep in study I began to meditate on a particular passage from the writings of Bahauallah, the passage referred to a chalice of immortality and that one had to drink deeply from it to attain salvation, or something like that. I thought to myself that the meaning of this was quite clear enough; I would simply try it and ask for it. I remember starting a deep long prayer towards the end of which I offered to God my entire life and soul for Him to do with whatsoever He pleased and that I desired to drink deeply from this chalice of immortality that I had read about. I slept well that night. The next morning I awoke with an overpowering desire to visit a certain sacred place, it was the shrine of the guardian of the Bahai faith in north London, a place that I had visited many times before. I knew that I had to go there, to go straight there and as a matter of urgency, I did not know why but as I had nothing else to do I would just go and follow the prompting of the spirit. As I drove along the motorway it felt as though my car were on autopilot, my driving was meticulously careful, which was unusual for me, it was as though someone or something were watching over me making sure my journey went smoothly. I arrived at the cemetery quite normally, I had been there many times before, but this time as I walked past the graves of the Bahais who were buried there, I felt a strange and powerful presence, vibrating in excitement, from every grave that I passed by. I had felt no such thing from the older Christian graves that I had just passed leading up to where the Bahai graves were. This experience of communication with those departed souls intrigued me but I continued onto the main tomb itself, that of the beloved Guardian of the faith. The shrine of the Guardian is a large white marble structure with a large central pillar upon which stands a beautiful statue of a golden eagle, the tomb is surrounded by fresh flowers and is enclosed by a surrounding wall with a large iron entrance gate at the far end. I entered the gate and walked respectfully up the stone path that leads up to the tomb, I fell to my knees placed my forehead on the white marble step and started to commune with the omnipotent God with all my heart and soul. I can't remember all that I said, I prayed for about a half an hour, my eyes were closed and I was in a trance like state, but I was uttering verses in a similar style to those prayers of Bahauallah Himself. All of a sudden a flash appeared before my eyes, a brilliant dazzling vision of a dozen or so figures in white flowing robes, this lasted only a few seconds and then it was gone, leaving me bewildered. But in the same way that when you stare at a light bulb and then close your eyes you can still see the outline of that bright object on the inside of your eyelid for several minutes afterwards, well I could still see the outline of those figures in the darkness of my closed eyes for quite some time after that moment. I was still wondering what that vision could mean when I found myself immersed in the warmth of a strong sunlight shining upon me and I basked in that beautiful warm light for ten minutes or so, not really praying

anymore but just bathing in that warmth until as I thought the break in the clouds would pass and I would be back in the overcast dreary weather again. Whilst still in that light I decided to end my prayer as my legs had long since gone to sleep and were aching so. But as I opened my eyes expecting to see the sun above me, I found myself beneath a cloudy overcast sky with not a break in the clouds to be seen anywhere. But what about that light and that heat I thought, where could it have come from? I couldn't understand it, my head was still burning and when I looked in a mirror later my forehead was visibly reddened just as if I had been in strong sunlight. After twenty minutes or so I was just about able to stand up again as the blood flowed back into my legs. But my spirit had become excited and disillusioned within me and I was deeply touched and moved by what I had experienced.



The fishermen in the river estuary, near Akka.

I entered the office at that site and found some elderly men debating religion rather pessimistically and I remember speaking with an optimism for the growth of this cause and the spread of the spirit of God on earth rather like a forest fire consuming a dried-up woodland with a force that would be all consuming and unstoppable. My enthusiastic speech raised the spirits of those men and gave them new hope, this I recall but those moments were somewhat hazy for me as my mind was preoccupied by that light. When I set off for home I found myself driving via the head office of the Bahais in London. I related the details of my experience to the two lady secretaries that were there, they were very sympathetic but were really unable to console me and they asked if I would be all right to drive myself home. But I simply had to tell somebody although now I realised that there are some things that you have to keep to yourselves because people cannot really understand them.

Even my wife when I told her later that evening didn't understand, she said that I must have been imagining it and there was always a logical explanation. I soon realised that I was on my own and that perhaps there was no one who could understand me. For several days I was somewhat dazed and I remember that sleep was impossible for me during those days as my mind was in a continual state of meditation, constantly turning over all that I had read and had now experienced. As the days passed my inner turmoil worsened and I grew restless, it seemed that no one could be found to advise me or help me or console me. After about ten days of this I realised that I could only find rest or answers if I went back to the holy land, Israel. I drove to the airport one night, alone, but although I changed some money and had my passport with me, as the time of departure drew near I questioned my actions and drove back home. The next morning I joined my wife and told her where I needed to go and she came with me this time, along with my nine-year-old daughter. My daughter had an eye disfiguration from birth and my wife had always wanted to take her to the shrines to pray that one day she could be healed. We drove to the airport and bought our tickets to Israel. I remember in the departure lounge my realisation that I would soon be in the presence of the Lord Christ Himself, to the extent that I started emptying my pockets of all unnecessary possessions, leaving me free and uncluttered for the impending meeting. I became certain that I had been selected for this divine meeting and my compounding sense of desperation to become free from this perplexity only confirmed my belief that I was ultimately being summoned into that Holy presence, as nothing else could appease my bestirred spirit. The flight itself seemed uneventful and soon we were in Tel Aviv airport and on our way to Haifa. I was refused credit on my card to hire a car as I had reached my limit paying for the flight tickets so we had to get a taxi. We haggled with a few cabs and settled with the cheapest fare as my foreign cash was limited and we had no means to extend our credit. This journey was being made out of desperation and in our haste we were ill prepared, but I simply had to reach my destination of the shrine on the side of mount Carmel, the mountain of God, at whatever cost. I had had sense enough to gain rushed approval by word of mouth over the phone via the Bahai centre in England with someone in authority in Haifa otherwise we shouldn't have gone. As the taxicab headed out along the main road towards Haifa I started to question what it was I was doing and what my expectations were in all this. I was concerned by the unkept and rough condition of the roads on which we travelled and by the speeding traffic, this seemed to disillusion my visualisation of a land that I considered Holy and sanctified by God's eternal presence. My heart dropped lower as I noticed several dead cats on the roadside and then I saw a large dead dog that had been hit by a car and just left on the road as if it had no worth. A feeling of despair started to overtake me and I anguished at what I thought the world had come to, at the unsightly roads, the speeding / polluting cars and the lorries that just dumped their waste in heaps along the roadside. I

remembered the pollution and unsightly industry I had endured during my walk into Akka previously. With the anger and frustration now welling up inside of me at what man, we, I, had done to pollute and spoil a once beautiful land such as this, became too much for me to bear and I pulled the drivers arm and made him pull over off the road and I got out of the car. I walked a short way into a dirty, muddy wasteland and began to cry out aloud into the air. What had I done, I had come all of this way, spent all of this money, I had dreamt of finding God but all that I had realised was a kind of Hell on earth, that dashed my hopes and brought me down to earth with a thud. My wife and the cab driver must have thought me insane to behave in this manner, but coaxed me back into the car anyway and we continued our journey up into Haifa. We entered the gates of the Bahai gardens on mount Carmel and approached a member of security in a site hut. He made a phone call but we were not making any progress. Some other youthful, uniformed security staff came to us to find out the problem and to help out. But for me this was it, I broke away and walked to a grassy area facing the sea. I was on the side of mount Carmel, the mountain of God, this was the holy land and I was in the middle of it and this would do for me. I kneeled down on the ground raised my hands in supplication and sang out, at the top of my voice, Bahauallah's Healing prayer, the words being thus; " THY NAME IS MY HEALING O MY GOD. AND REMEMBRANCE OF THEE IS MY REMEDY. NEARNESS TO THEE IS MY HOPE. AND LOVE FOR THEE IS MY COMPANION. THY MERCY TO ME IS MY HEALING AND MY SUCCOUR IN BOTH THIS WORLD AND THE WORLD TO COME. THOU VERILY ART THE ALL BOUNTIFUL, THE ALL KNOWING, THE ALL WISE."



The Shrine of the Bab on mount Carmel, Haifa, where I met God.

I sang this prayer aloud because I wanted God Himself to hear it, and indeed to heal me, I had no one else to turn to, this was my last stand and I gave it my best shot. I had noticed that when only a few lines into this prayer that some of the young guards standing behind me were concerned that my loud voice would upset the locals who had houses nearby and they wanted somehow to stop me, but to my relief my friend who was senior among them told them to let me finish, and I continued my prayer unhindered. When this was done we made our way up into the nearby pilgrims house, a meeting place to receive visitors, and I sat down for some time in that room opposite a large and impressive portrait of the eldest son of the Prophet who we know as Abdul Baha, which means the servant of God.

For an hour or two we were attended to and that same youth, whom I had befriended whilst on my pilgrimage two months previously, tried to console me and listened to me as I related all of my concerns to him. I spoke of my many worries including the problem of my daughter's eye being disfigured, as this had caused me anguish over the years. I recalled the first time I met this young man, who was in his early twenties; he was on guard duty in front of the Babs shrine. He told me that he was tired that he had to spend so much time there guarding the shrine, I argued to the fact that how lucky he actually was and how I wished that I could stand guard in that most precious and most holy of sites at the shrine of the Bab, and he then agreed with me. Then an older man came in to see me, a resident psychiatrist whom I was informed would evaluate me and try to help. But within a short time the hand of God took over as the time for my release drew upon us. I stood facing this man and talk became futile, then our voices seemed to speed up like a tape recording and then something like a camera shutter seemed to close over my eyes and momentarily everything went black, as I entered a new dimension. A moment later I was standing still in that room, alone, and all of a sudden this overpowering spirit seemed to flow into me, it seemed I recall to bubble up through the ground into my feet and up through my legs and into my body. I looked at my hands and felt that spiritual presence and then instinctively, uncontrollably, I declared "O God! I am Bahauallah!" and so I was it seemed to all intensive purposes. The doctor besides me must have looked upon this scene in utter disbelief and then declared to my wife that she had lost me, because I had now lost my mind and was now finished. I left that house and as I stood outside in the open air and looked over towards the sky above the trees in the distance, I distinctly recall the feeling of how happy the Christ was to have returned into this world again, to gaze upon that earthly splendour and to breath the air again once more. I can never forget nor can I fully describe exactly how beautiful it felt to be united with the Christ spirit for those wonderful yet brief moments. I was fully aware of that presence and yet those people around me were completely oblivious to what was transpiring. I left my wife and daughter outside the pilgrim's house and indicated to my wife that I wanted to visit the shrine of the Bab, some a hundred and fifty metres away. I made my way up the gravelly pathway towards the shrine, its majestic structure with its distinctive golden dome, clearly visible ahead of me. I remember passing as a visitor to the shrine lined up to take a photograph and I waited behind them, this seemed typical of what I had read of Bahauallah not wanting to be photographed during his earthly life. As I approached the front of the shrine I noticed that youth on guard in front of the shrine talking with someone standing next to him. He seemed pleased to see me up and about again and seemingly well, I presumed. I walked over to him to shake his hand and to thank him for trying to help me. As I took his hand the spirit instantly flowed from my body into his and all of a sudden my newly found joy turned into dread and fear as I found myself

locked into the grip of a being of supernatural power and strength. It was as though the spirit that had only ten minutes earlier flowed into my being had now flowed out through my arm only to become manifest in this now omnipotent and all-powerful being. I likened that moment afterwards to a helpless insect locked in the jaws of a large and fearsome spider having all of its lifeblood sucked out of its body. The eyes that captivated my attention seemed to sparkle and radiate with immense power. He was smiling and pleased to see me but I was helpless and wanted to collapse on the floor and not be there. After those initial fearful moments that phenomenal presence left me to stand by myself and stood a few metres away from me. He was standing facing the sea in front of that temple, looking out over the bay, like a mighty bird of prey, I recall, surveying His territory. I stood to the left of Him also facing the sea, but I could neither look nor speak or do anything at all in that all-powerful presence. I felt so weak and limp that, if not for the grace of God, I would surely be unable to stand at all. For the few moments while it lasted I felt honoured, firstly that I had been allowed to survive that awesome and terrifying experience, and secondly that I had been permitted to enter such a luminous and resplendent spiritual presence as this, the spirit of the one true God Himself. The overwhelming aura of this majestic being was so great that it was rather like standing close to an electricity pylon sparkling and crackling with electric power. He seemed to play with me then, or so it seemed, I was powerless to move but He seemed to want me to look down the mountain at a house at the base that he was pointing to with His finger. Then I felt Him controlling my eyes and head manipulating them in order to look in the direction of and upon that house. I heard the words that “this was my house”, although He was not actually speaking through His mouth, I still received this communication telepathically I suppose. He also said something about taking two years that “it would take two years” but I do not know what this meant even until this day. Then the power seemed to leave and that same youth lead me to the side of the shrine where I sat exhausted and shaken on the ground. He told me that I now had to go back to my house in England and he mentioned the road, which seemed strange to me how he should know this, he now displayed no power as the presence had left us, I regained some composure. I can't remember how I got there, but the next thing I remember was sitting down in a room next to my wife within the pilgrim's house. We were sitting in a room talking with some Bahais who were trying to help us, I was back with my wife and although I was with her, I was very confused and thoroughly bewildered. We were taken by car to the shrine of Bahauallah along the coast in Akka. I felt no spiritual presence at the shrine as I recall, as I was aware that I had just left that great being on mount Carmel back in Haifa, and His shrine here seemed somewhat vacant. I cast an orange that I had kept in my pocket, since my pilgrimage, back into the grounds there as I felt that I no longer needed that lucky charm anymore as it had served its purpose and had brought me back to Israel and into the presence of

my Lord. It had dropped off of a tree next to the shrine of Bahauallah and I took it gratefully, it had become hard and small in my pocket as I had handled it so much. I feared that it had become so precious to me that I would be lost without it, so I cast it back where I thought it belonged, on that holy ground. We were then taken to a hotel somewhere in Haifa, and put in a room, and were booked back onto a flight to England for early the next morning.



A view looking away from Akka, showing the industrial sites along the beach.

What happened over the next three days, however, I was truly not prepared for. On approximately seven different occasions I found myself cast into various realms of Hell. Each experience lasted for only several hours but in reality were timeless seemingly in the realms of eternity. Each successive experience becoming increasingly worse and more unbearable, until I could take no more. By the grace of God I was taken into a hospital and injected with some strong drugs that induced a deep sleep that lasted several days. Upon waking up I felt much better and it felt good to be back to normality, back down to earth. I was kept in hospital for a couple of weeks under observation and on tranquillisers but then I returned home. It took a good deal of time for me to recover fully, also to regain a grip on my life and at least a semblance of reality and normality. As I regained my confidence and as soon as I was able to, however, I embarked upon a journey of search into finding an explanation of what had happened to me and of trying to understand the things I had seen and had experienced. I gathered books from libraries and various other sources on the spiritual experiences of mankind and of the writings of mystics and such, in a compelling and desperate attempt to understand the nature of these experiences and any implications that there might be. I found some comfort in discovering that other people had experiences similar to this regarding the realms of the spirit. Near death experiences, out of body experiences, meetings with spirits, angels, visions, dreams and other such occurrences were seemingly commonplace throughout history. By the end of the year I had returned to work and back to a sense of normality. Thus ends the story of my spiritual experiences that occurred predominantly during the months of January and February in the year 1993. May these experiences be a guide and be inspiration to others on the spiritual path. Regards Michael.

