

The following story is from the book
The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Three



These stories are lovingly provided to download as a convenience to teachers or communities otherwise unable to acquire the book. Each book in this storybook series also includes an appendix with questions for discussion and reflection, a glossary of words and phrases used in the stories, a bibliography, and an index.

These books may be purchased from the Louhelen Bahá'í School bookstore for \$15.25 each, including shipping in the United States, or \$23.00 to most international locations. Email: Louhelen@usbnc.org for details.

Graphic Design by Pepper Peterson Oldziej

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois 60091-2886
Copyright © 2003 by the National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of the United States of America
All rights reserved
Published 2003
06 05 04 03 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

Illustrations: cover © 2002 David S. Ruhe; pp. 35–36 Courtesy of the Audio Visual Department of the Bahá'í World Center, Haifa, Israel; p. 23 Courtesy of the National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois; pp. 21, 32, 33–38, 55, 62–69, 75, 91, 94 Photographs courtesy of Pepper Oldziej; pp. 163, 166–169 © 2003 Pepper Oldziej; p. 136 © 2003 Autumn-Grace Dougherty; pp. 25–28 © 2002 Ed Phillips; pp. 10–15, 96–101 © 2003 Cam Herth; pp. 4, 56–61 © 2003 Carrie Kneisler; pp. 2, 6–9, 90, 92–93, 122–128 © 2003 Carla Trimble; pp. 1, 5, 44–54 © 2003 Beth Farkas; pp. 71–74, 137–140, 157–162 © 2003 Cindy Pacileo; pp. 70, 156 © 2003 Carl Cordini; pp. 107–112, 129, 141–146, 164–165 © 2003 Winifred Barnum Newman; pp. 113–117, 148–151 © 2003 Barbara Trauger; pp. 147, 152–155 © 2003 Omid Nolley and Majid Nolley; pp. 84–87, 89 © 2003 Leona Hosack, pp. 95, 102–106 © 2003 Jeanine Hunt. The illustrations appearing on pp. 109–110 include images reprinted with permission from *Children's Stories from the Dawn-Breakers* (Wilmette, IL: Bellwood Press, 2000), pp. 77 and 83. All other illustrations © 2003 National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education • Stories
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States


Bahá'í Publishing Trust
Wilmette, Illinois

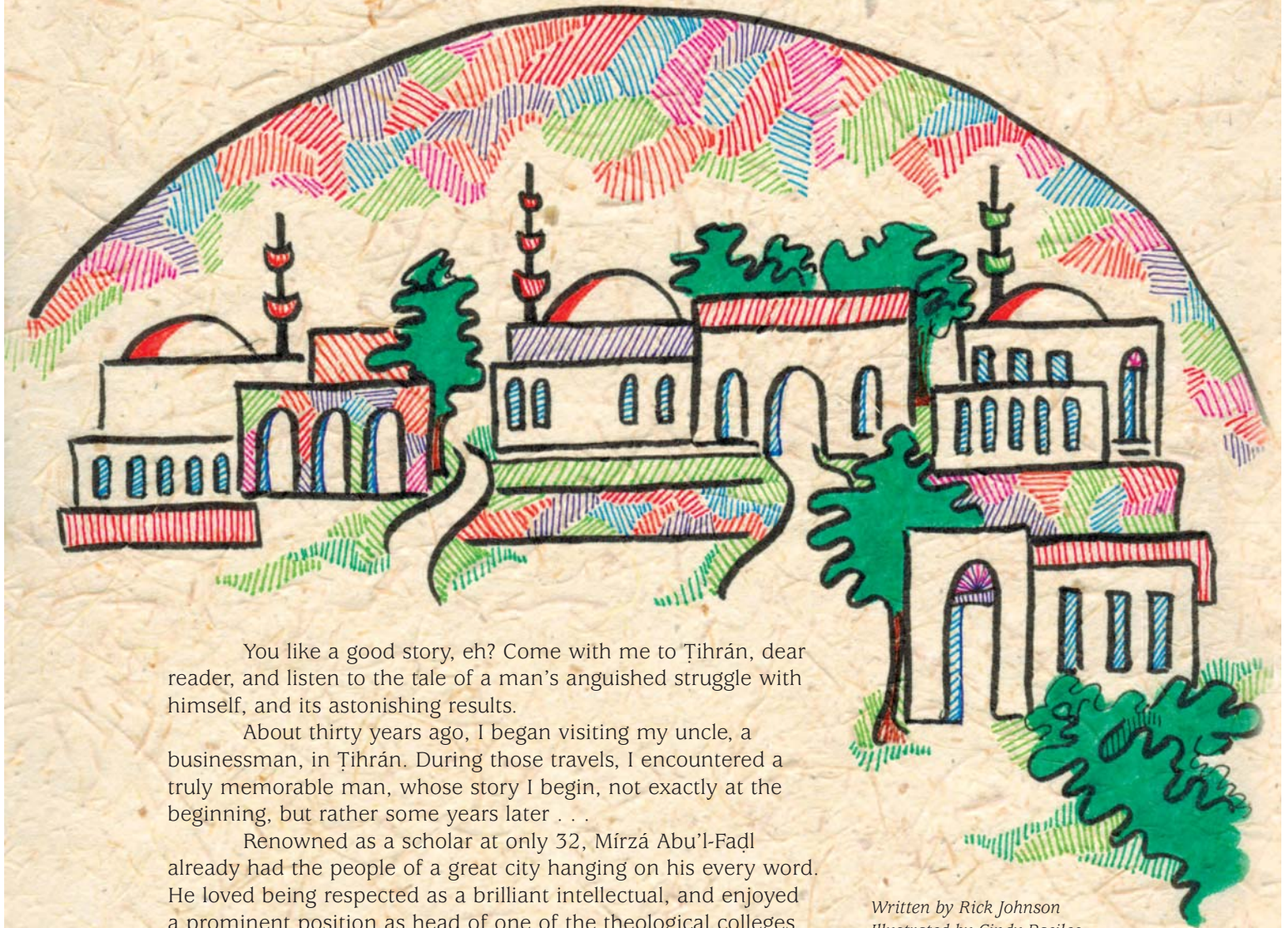


The understanding of His words
and the comprehension
of the utterances
of the Birds of Heaven
are in no wise
dependent upon
human learning.
They depend solely
upon purity of heart,
chastity of soul,
and freedom
of spirit.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 211

Illustrated by Carl Cordini

Am I Not Your Lord?

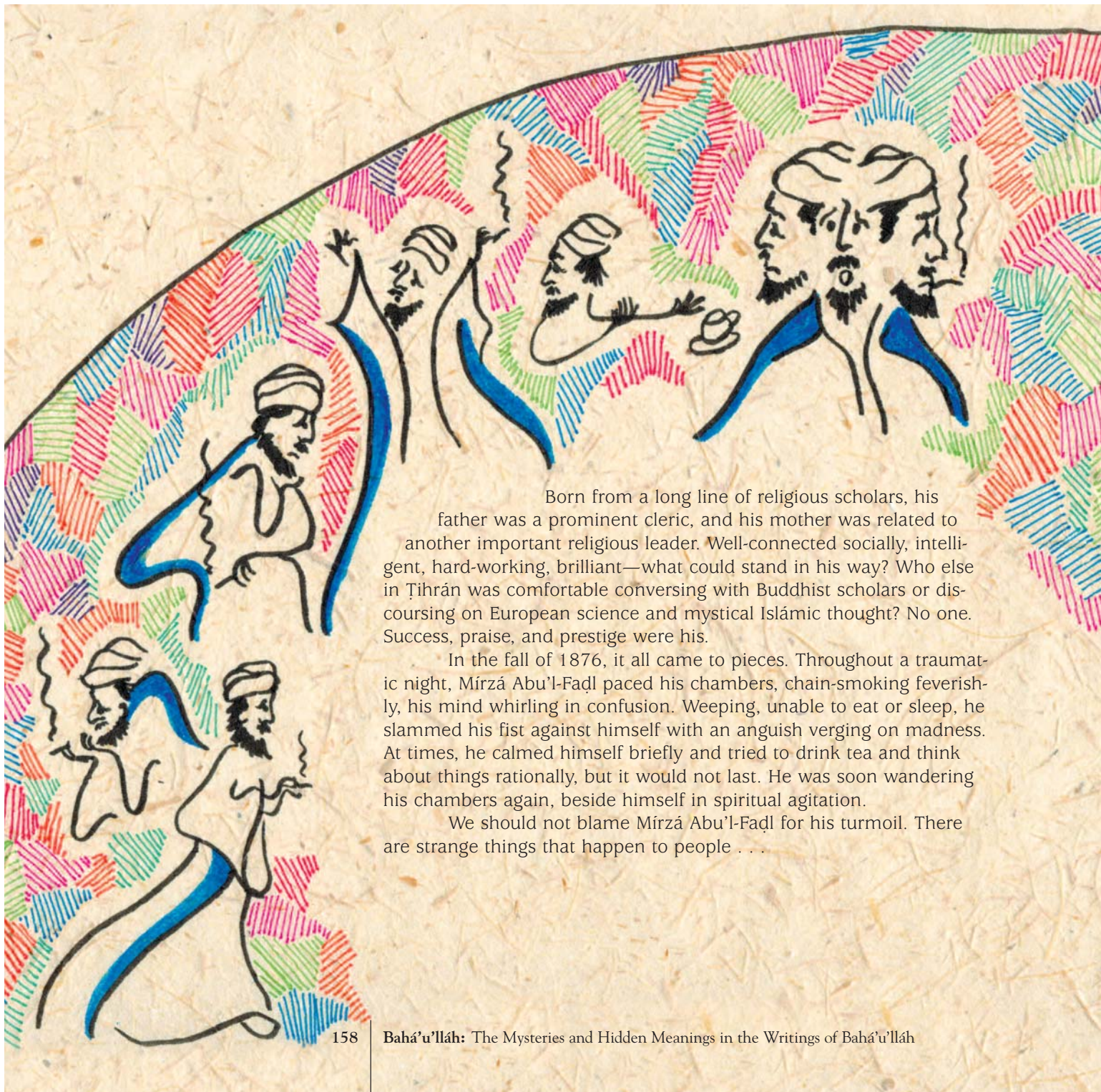


You like a good story, eh? Come with me to Tīhrán, dear reader, and listen to the tale of a man's anguished struggle with himself, and its astonishing results.

About thirty years ago, I began visiting my uncle, a businessman, in Tīhrán. During those travels, I encountered a truly memorable man, whose story I begin, not exactly at the beginning, but rather some years later . . .

Renowned as a scholar at only 32, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl already had the people of a great city hanging on his every word. He loved being respected as a brilliant intellectual, and enjoyed a prominent position as head of one of the theological colleges in the Persian capital.

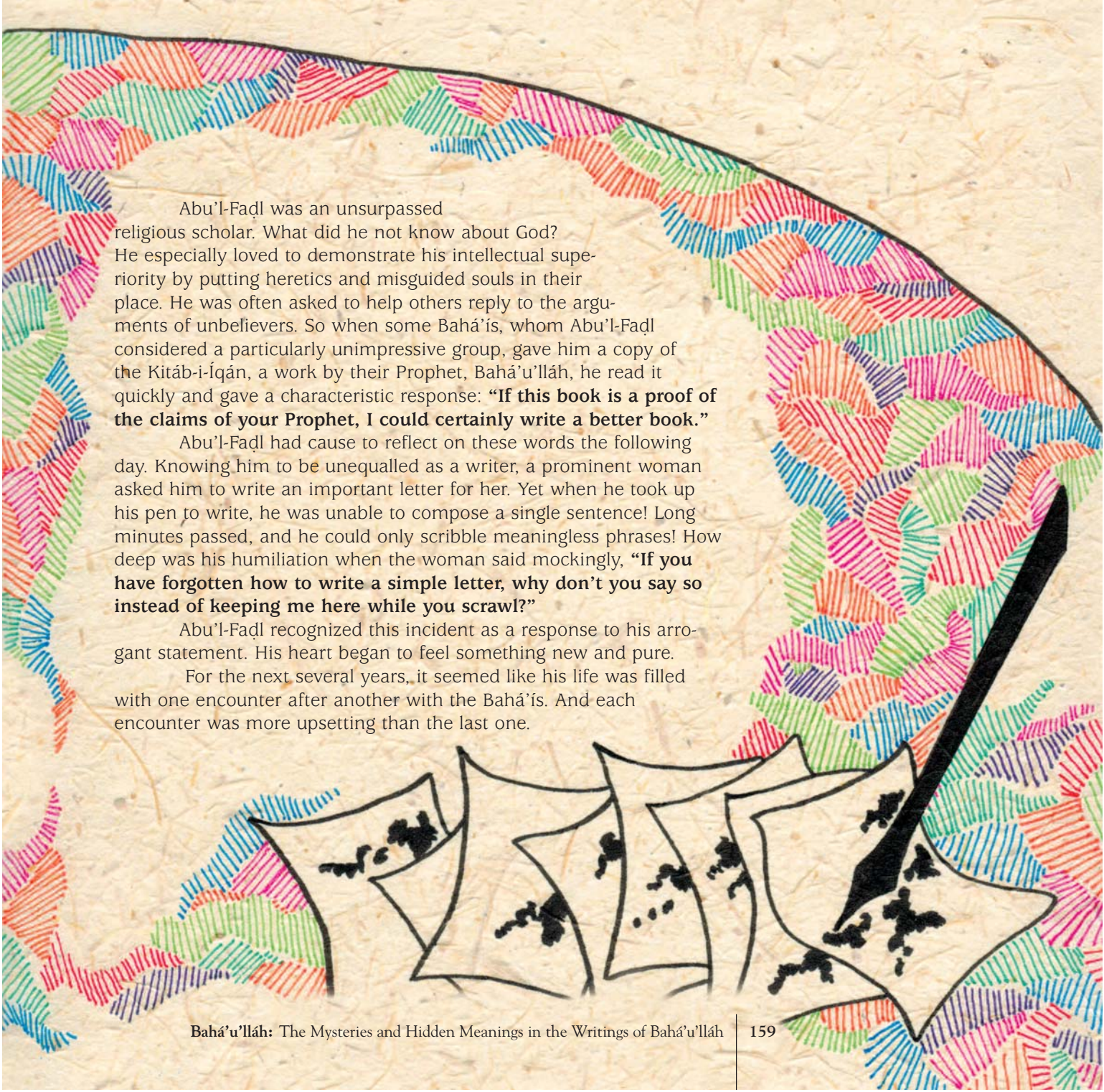
*Written by Rick Johnson
Illustrated by Cindy Pacileo*



Born from a long line of religious scholars, his father was a prominent cleric, and his mother was related to another important religious leader. Well-connected socially, intelligent, hard-working, brilliant—what could stand in his way? Who else in Tīhrán was comfortable conversing with Buddhist scholars or discoursing on European science and mystical Islámic thought? No one. Success, praise, and prestige were his.

In the fall of 1876, it all came to pieces. Throughout a traumatic night, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl paced his chambers, chain-smoking feverishly, his mind whirling in confusion. Weeping, unable to eat or sleep, he slammed his fist against himself with an anguish verging on madness. At times, he calmed himself briefly and tried to drink tea and think about things rationally, but it would not last. He was soon wandering his chambers again, beside himself in spiritual agitation.

We should not blame Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl for his turmoil. There are strange things that happen to people . . .

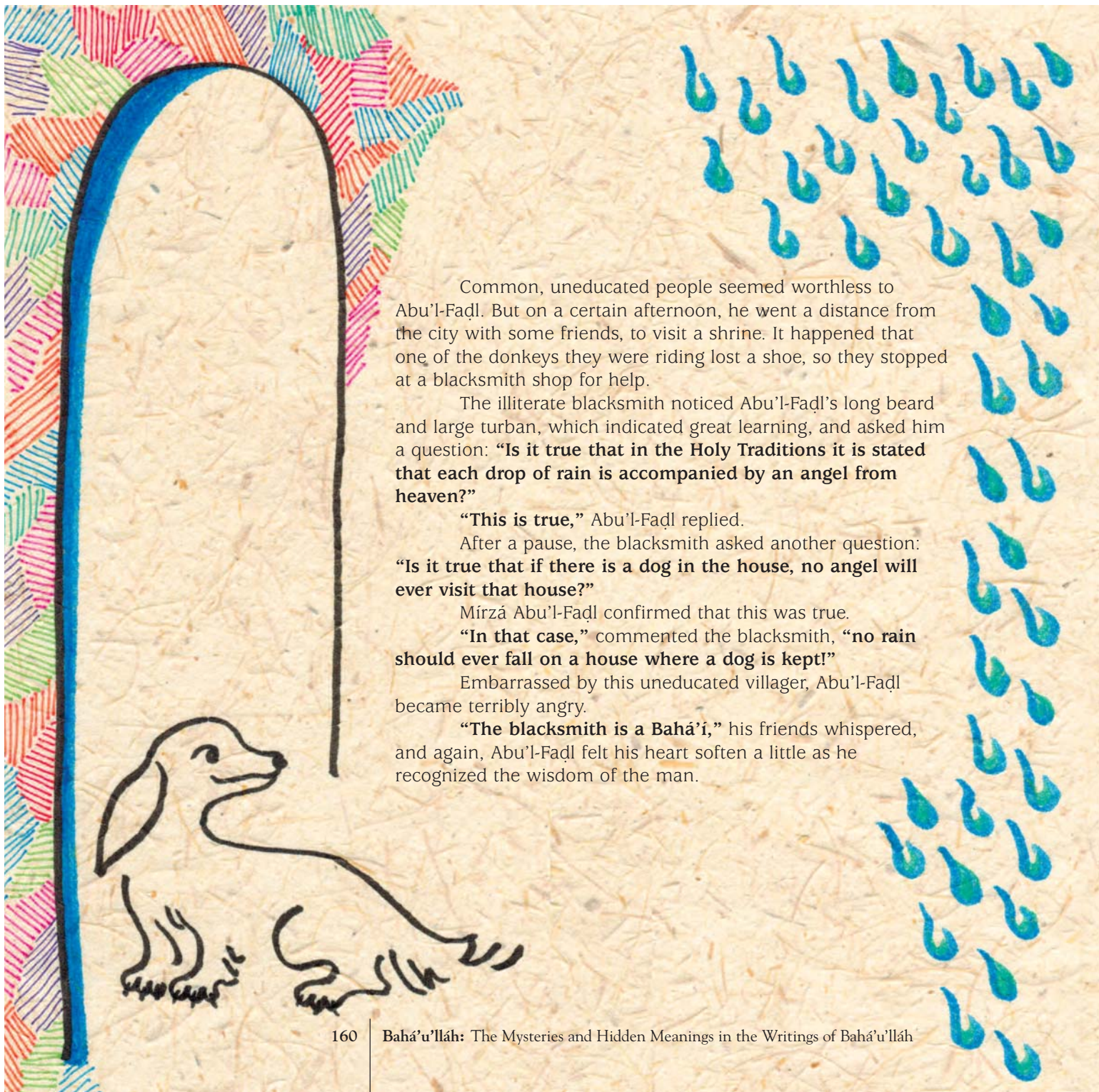


Abu'l-Faql was an unsurpassed religious scholar. What did he not know about God? He especially loved to demonstrate his intellectual superiority by putting heretics and misguided souls in their place. He was often asked to help others reply to the arguments of unbelievers. So when some Bahá'ís, whom Abu'l-Faql considered a particularly unimpressive group, gave him a copy of the Kitáb-i-Íqán, a work by their Prophet, Bahá'u'lláh, he read it quickly and gave a characteristic response: **“If this book is a proof of the claims of your Prophet, I could certainly write a better book.”**

Abu'l-Faql had cause to reflect on these words the following day. Knowing him to be unequalled as a writer, a prominent woman asked him to write an important letter for her. Yet when he took up his pen to write, he was unable to compose a single sentence! Long minutes passed, and he could only scribble meaningless phrases! How deep was his humiliation when the woman said mockingly, **“If you have forgotten how to write a simple letter, why don't you say so instead of keeping me here while you scrawl?”**

Abu'l-Faql recognized this incident as a response to his arrogant statement. His heart began to feel something new and pure.

For the next several years, it seemed like his life was filled with one encounter after another with the Bahá'ís. And each encounter was more upsetting than the last one.



Common, uneducated people seemed worthless to Abu'l-Faḍl. But on a certain afternoon, he went a distance from the city with some friends, to visit a shrine. It happened that one of the donkeys they were riding lost a shoe, so they stopped at a blacksmith shop for help.

The illiterate blacksmith noticed Abu'l-Faḍl's long beard and large turban, which indicated great learning, and asked him a question: **"Is it true that in the Holy Traditions it is stated that each drop of rain is accompanied by an angel from heaven?"**

"This is true," Abu'l-Faḍl replied.

After a pause, the blacksmith asked another question: **"Is it true that if there is a dog in the house, no angel will ever visit that house?"**

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl confirmed that this was true.

"In that case," commented the blacksmith, **"no rain should ever fall on a house where a dog is kept!"**

Embarrassed by this uneducated villager, Abu'l-Faḍl became terribly angry.

"The blacksmith is a Bahá'í," his friends whispered, and again, Abu'l-Faḍl felt his heart soften a little as he recognized the wisdom of the man.

‘Abdu’l-Karim, a Bahá’í friend of Abu’l-Faḍl’s, heard of this incident and saw an opportunity to open Abu’l-Faḍl’s heart further to a new way of thinking. He arranged a meeting in his home, and invited another uneducated but devoted Bahá’í to talk with Abu’l-Faḍl. The Bahá’í gave simple, beautiful answers that Abu’l-Faḍl accepted. Once again, this great scholar could not surpass a simple, uneducated Bahá’í.

In my visits to Ṭihrán, I often saw Abu’l-Faḍl and observed him moving closer and closer to the brink of mental and spiritual turmoil. He could not join the Bahá’ís, but he could not dispute them either. In the small inner places where he fervently spoke to his God, Abu’l-Faḍl was unable to deny the truth of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings, yet he had too much to lose to embrace such a Cause easily.

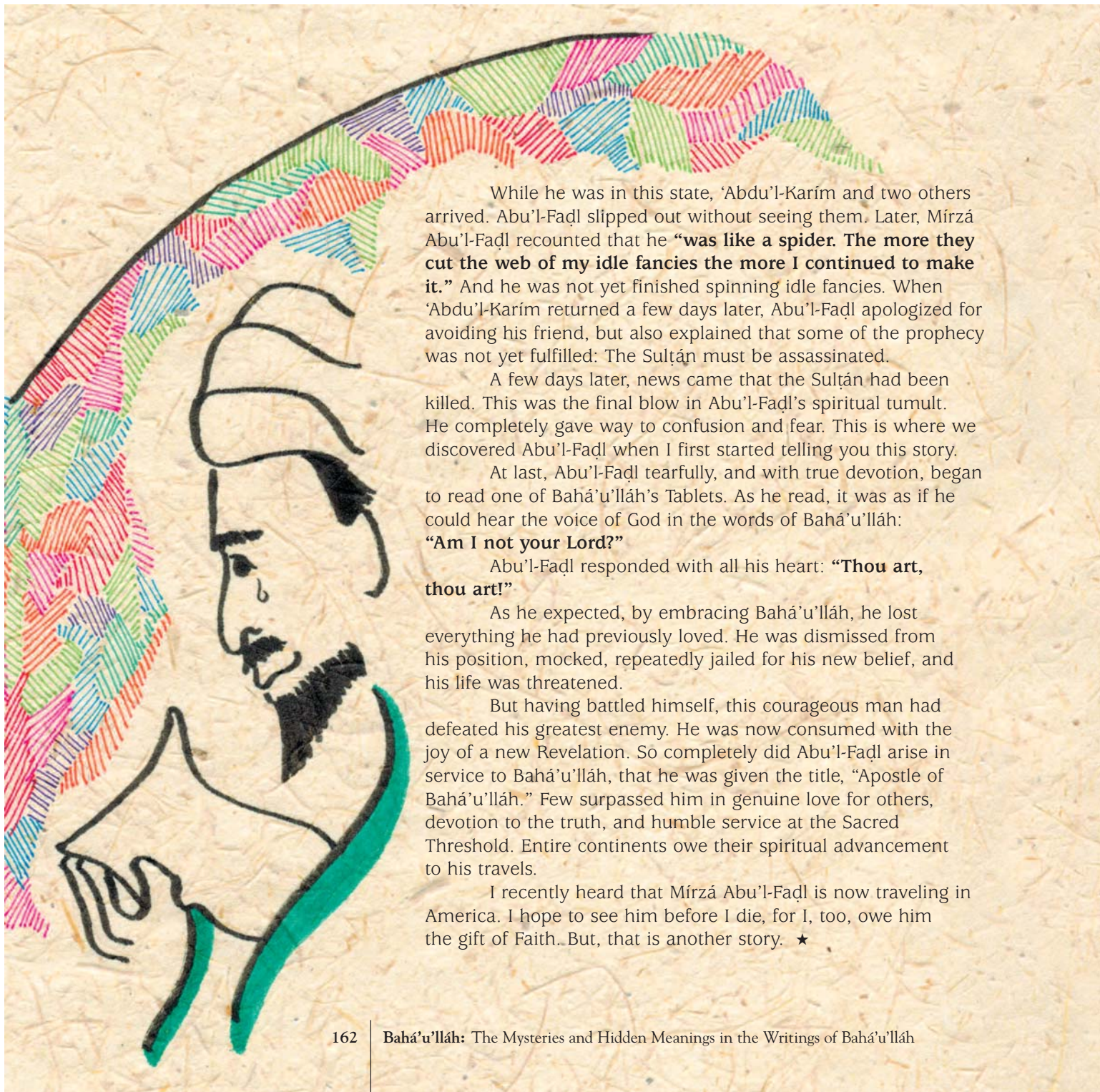
Abu’l-Faḍl at last declared that if certain of Bahá’u’lláh’s prophecies concerning the fall of the Sulṭán of the Ottoman Empire were fulfilled, he would definitely accept Him.

He knew that this was risky, and seeking relief from his torment, he got a promise from the Bahá’ís that they would not talk to him about the Faith any more until those prophecies were fulfilled.

For five or six months, he tried to go about his life normally, but he could not escape this spiritual test. One day when he saw two Bahá’ís approaching, he pulled his cloak over his head and tried to avoid them, but they called to him. Abu’l-Faḍl, having no way to escape, asked what they wanted. They exclaimed: **“Now the proof of the Faith of God has been established for you. A telegram reports that Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz has been dethroned!”**

Suddenly, the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ within Abu’l-Faḍl rushed headlong into each other in a terrible spiritual climax. In turmoil, he walked away without speaking. He returned home and collapsed in uncontrollable tears.





While he was in this state, ‘Abdu’l-Karím and two others arrived. Abu’l-Faḍl slipped out without seeing them. Later, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl recounted that he **“was like a spider. The more they cut the web of my idle fancies the more I continued to make it.”** And he was not yet finished spinning idle fancies. When ‘Abdu’l-Karím returned a few days later, Abu’l-Faḍl apologized for avoiding his friend, but also explained that some of the prophecy was not yet fulfilled: The Sultán must be assassinated.

A few days later, news came that the Sultán had been killed. This was the final blow in Abu’l-Faḍl’s spiritual tumult. He completely gave way to confusion and fear. This is where we discovered Abu’l-Faḍl when I first started telling you this story.

At last, Abu’l-Faḍl tearfully, and with true devotion, began to read one of Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablets. As he read, it was as if he could hear the voice of God in the words of Bahá’u’lláh: **“Am I not your Lord?”**

Abu’l-Faḍl responded with all his heart: **“Thou art, thou art!”**

As he expected, by embracing Bahá’u’lláh, he lost everything he had previously loved. He was dismissed from his position, mocked, repeatedly jailed for his new belief, and his life was threatened.

But having battled himself, this courageous man had defeated his greatest enemy. He was now consumed with the joy of a new Revelation. So completely did Abu’l-Faḍl arise in service to Bahá’u’lláh, that he was given the title, “Apostle of Bahá’u’lláh.” Few surpassed him in genuine love for others, devotion to the truth, and humble service at the Sacred Threshold. Entire continents owe their spiritual advancement to his travels.

I recently heard that Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl is now traveling in America. I hope to see him before I die, for I, too, owe him the gift of Faith. But, that is another story. ★