

It is exactly 35 years ago on this very day, 12 February, that our father departed this life. Some months before, he had asked me whether I could be his literary executor. I said yes, but did not want to give the matter any more thought than that. I believe that he had asked the same question of Dr Moojan Momen, his dearly loved collaborator and research assistant.

It was after his passing that we found amongst his papers two letters in which he expressed his wish that his extensive collection of books and manuscripts be preserved, that they might form the nucleus of a library, to be named the Afnan Library, and so be made available, in his own words, "for the benefit of all who seek knowledge".

Thirty five years during which Moojan, his wife Wendi, successive members of the National Spiritual Assembly and I, have striven to fulfil his vision. Three times we have attempted to set up the library in premises that were not entirely right, and three times, for reasons too complicated to go into now, the collection, all the time growing, has had to be boxed up again and put back into storage.

Until today, when thanks entirely to the overwhelming generosity of Mr Hassan Saadat Yazdi, who for the second time has stepped in to make available funds to the Trust and which have now allowed this dignified building, most appropriately an erstwhile place of worship, to be acquired as a permanent home for the Afnan Library.

Father had a life long love affair with books. He loved the look of them, the feel of them, the smell of them and they were his constant companions. Old books with torn pages or dust jackets he would lovingly repair with butterfly tape, and glue back spines which were working loose.

Reading was his favourite recreation. He read in the bath, in the loo, he read whilst shaving, he read whilst cooking, whilst walking in the street, whilst strap hanging on buses or in the tube, and often when he returned home late in the evening from his work at the B.B.C., long after we had all eaten, he would take his plate of supper into our walk-in larder, put it on a shelf with a book propped next to it so that he might continue reading undisturbed.

He was never happier than when browsing in a book shop or when giving his books a spring clean, taking two or three in each hand, banging them together midst clouds of dust and then lovingly re-arranging them into the various book shelves with which our family homes were always filled. In fact, bookcases were the only items of household furniture that he took any interest in.

He regarded those books in his possession not as being owned by him, rather that they were in his temporary custody. He could not see a book thrown away once read, however lightweight its content might be. I particularly remember an occasion in my early teens when I decided to have a clear out of some of my paperbacks, the trivial, and those once read quickly forgotten, some dozen of which I consigned to the dustbin. The following day I found them stacked in a

neat pile in Daddy's study. When I asked him why he had rescued them, he just smiled and without telling me off explained that they had not been written for me alone to read.

Father's interests and his literary tastes were catholic and far reaching. His first university degree was in chemistry, following which he took a Master's degree in history and later his Ph.D, never completed after his researches were destroyed in the London blitz, was in international relations.

He had a great interest in linguistics and word derivation.
Although raised in his native tongue Farsi, he was ~~as~~ ~~well~~ by the age of four ^{equally} fluent in English and at various times he also learned Arabic, Urdu, French and German. In the Persian Service of the B.B.C. he gave English lessons on air, and was once approached with a commission to translate the entire works of Shakespeare into Farsi, a reflection of the regard in which he was held in that sphere. Although in his experience he held Arabic the most expressively poetic of all languages, he had a great love of English literature, once telling me that Wuthering heights was the supreme novel in the language, but he was no rarified highbrow. He adored 'Whodunits' and probably had read every one of Agatha Christie's 83 published novels. Ngaio Marsh was another favourite author of his. He also had many plays amongst his collection of books and in his bachelor days was a keen theatre goer.

Whenever he came across a sentence that especially pleased him, or something that he found particularly noteworthy and of interest, he was wont to carefully underline such, usually in his trademark green ink. If though he encountered some piece of information that he knew to be incorrect he would not strike it out, but instead he would neatly write a correction in the margin or as a footnote. I fancy that there may be to this day books on the shelves of the London Library bearing these scholarly defacements.

Within our family decisions about Christmas presents were never much of a problem. We had an excellent bookshop in Hampstead, the High Hill Book Shop, as well as three second hand booksellers, and we would all buy each other books. In his autobiography, *The Business of Lunch*, Ian Norrie, the doyen of booksellers, wrote this. 'Later during the war she (our mother) married a Persian born broadcaster Hasan Balyuzi, the most naturally charming of men, who expressed his peaceful Baha'i faith in books which he never pestered me to stock.'

I would like to close these remarks with two brief anecdotes. The first was told to me by father's revered cousin Abu'l Qasim Afnan, who during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was told by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, that of the Afnan family the three most important were the uncle of the Bab, the wife of the Bab and Hasan Balyuzi. He also told how during that pilgrimage an English Baha'i had asked Shoghi Effendi a question about some obscure

matter in the early history of the Faith, and was told that when he returned to England he should put the question to Mr Balyuzi, who was better able than he to provide him with an answer.

The other concerns a letter that Mummy wrote to a bookseller, I think in Hay-on-Wye, from whom he had often purchased books, to inform him of her husband's death and in the same letter ordering a book from the bookseller's catalogue which she thought should be in the collection. She received back a kind letter of condolence, in which he told her how unusual and refreshing it was that she still wanted to purchase books for the collection, whilst lamenting the fact that he was all too used to receiving letters from executors and widows asking whether he wished to purchase back the books of the deceased, books collected over a lifetime.