

# **Eskil Ljungberg**

**1886 - 1985**

**In Faroes 1953 - 1985**



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Commissioned by the 50-year Committee

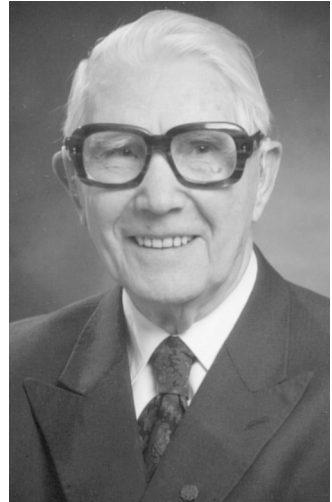
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# Eskil Englebert Joachim Ljungberg

Eskil Englebert Joachim Ljungberg was born on 20 May 1886 in Filipstad, Sweden. Before the outbreak of WWI, Eskil made his way to England and soon found employment with an aristocratic family outside London. Overwhelmed and no doubt abashed by his abrupt encounter with aristocratic mores and customs, he gallantly persisted in learning the ins and outs of English manners and the intricacies of a well-laid table.



Eskil in the early 1970's

According to his letters and unpublished memories, he embraced England with his whole heart and became himself the epitome of the English gentleman, refined in his manners and impeccably courteous. As Eskil himself relates, he “lived an ordinary life, doing the things one does in a big city”. It could not have been that “ordinary”, however, when one considers the times. He began his 30-year career during the opening salvos of WWI and continued to work in London during the upheavals of the great depression and the cataclysmic events of WWII. With characteristic under-statement he notes he lived “in London during a very trying time”.

With the war behind him and an uncertain future ahead, Eskil consulted friends about his next steps. In retrospect, he comments that what occurred next was “the most interesting thing that had ever happened to me...” He was granted permission to study at the British Museum. He said his being able to read at the British Museum was a “great thing” and this opportunity continued to be very meaningful to him over the years. He began to read religious philosophy and history, a keen interest of his, for, as he notes in one of his commentaries, he had “never lost [his] faith in God” over the

years, “for which [he was] very thankful”. He observed that his faith and belief in God had “stuck” to him from his home in Sweden.

Although Eskil states that he might have heard the word, “Bahá’í”, during his long stay in England, it was not until he returned to his native Sweden did he discover the Bahá’í Faith. Out for a walk one early summer day, Eskil met an older Swedish woman who had spent most of her life in the United States. Jennie Otilia Anderson had returned to Sweden specifically to share the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, the founder of the Bahá’í Faith, with her fellow countrymen.

Their first encounter was brief, but throughout his summer holiday in the country, he continued to think about the Faith. Upon his return to Stockholm, Eskil agreed to meet with his newfound American friend to learn more about Bahá’u’lláh and the importance of His mission for all humanity. Eskil sat absorbed for hours as he listened and this time all became “clear”. Eskil “at once” announced his belief in Bahá’u’lláh. It was the fall of 1947; Eskil was 61 years of age.

Eskil began to study the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith with Mrs. Anderson and others. The days and years went by. Eskil served on the newly formed Bahá’í spiritual assemblies of Stockholm and later Gothenburg. The turning point in his life, however, occurred at the International Bahá’í Conference in Stockholm in July 1953. Eskil often told the story of how, when the call came for individuals to journey out to other countries to share the message of Bahá’u’lláh with others, he felt he was literally pushed by invisible hands to volunteer to pioneer to the Faroe Islands.

Within a month of pledging to venture to the Faroe Islands, Eskil succeeded in selling off all his belongings, including his beloved antique furniture. With but a few battered suitcases, Eskil Englebert Joachim Ljungberg would again set sail from Sweden on a ship bound for a foreign land. He arrived in the Faroe Islands in late August 1953. He was 67 years of age.

It must have been quite a shock for someone who had known nothing but cultured surroundings and joyful Bahá’í gatherings to come to what

must have seemed such a desolate spot in the North Atlantic. Eskil arrived in the Faroe Islands on a Thursday morning in the midst of a rainstorm - a weeklong rainstorm, he noted. As all the hotels were full, he found lodging for the night in an ancillary building of the Hotel Hafnium in a “tiny room” as big as a “cupboard”, but “spotlessly clean”, he related. The next day he obtained a regular room at the Hotel Hafnium, which was to remain his home for the first nine months of his some 32 years in the Faroe Islands.

Eventually, Eskil settled in. People came forward and offered to help him locate housing. He found a small apartment and slowly, but surely began to reach out to the people of the Faroe Islands. Eskil tried patiently and prayerfully to sow the seeds of faith among the Faroese. While many Faroese were suspicious of him, others found him intriguing and showed a genuine willingness to talk with him, although perhaps not overtly willing to embrace the new religion he followed.

During these early years in the Faroe Islands, he received a few visitors, but for the most part he spent his time chatting with the old men of Tórshavn, engaging in a most prodigious correspondence with Bahá’ís from around the world and translating some of the Bahá’í Writings into Swedish. At the same time, his daily life revolved around prayer. Rising at 5 a.m. each day, he would recite his prayers, repeating these supplications at noon. He drew on a vast reservoir of spiritual joy, happiness and enthusiasm. One catches glimpses of this profound joy in some of his letters.

By the late 1950s, economic conditions in the Faroe Islands had begun to improve and his landlord now offered Eskil a larger apartment. He had spent five years in a small, quite limited apartment. Eskil gladly accepted and remained in his new apartment for five more years. As Eskil put it, he was in “heaven”, and so it would seem were the neighbourhood children, who persistently flocked under his upper floor windows beseeching candy treats from him like so many small skittish birds. Eskil would lower little bags of candy on bits of string to the happy children below. He took great delight in sharing with the children his little store of candy and enjoyed their company. Among his papers, carefully stored away were two drawings of fishing boats made by a neighbour child in August 1972.

Eskil made several trips to Iceland, the first one during the summer of 1957. He rendered many memorable and outstanding services to the early Icelandic Bahá'í Community. During these visits, he met with all the Icelandic Bahá'ís and conducted meetings to deepen their understanding of this remarkable Faith. He also came in contact with the small German community in Iceland. Some of these early émigrés would later be among the first believers in Iceland. During one of these sojourns to Iceland, Eskil met Kristján Eldjárn, who would later become Iceland's President.

Although undoubtedly at times very lonely in the Faroes, Eskil maintained a deep inner joy and enthusiasm that was not clouded by the initial lack of response by the Faroese to the Message that he so earnestly desired to share with them. Eventually, in 1965, the first Faroese expressed an understanding of the significance of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and began to study with Eskil.

By this time Eskil had moved to Niels Finsensgøta 46 to the ground floor apartment that he would occupy until his death. This was to be the site of many dinners and high teas. His loving nature, his sense of humour, his spiritual strength were magnetic. By now he had become less a stranger and more a trusted and revered, although remote, uncle to many of his Faroese friends. One family even named one of their sons in honour of Eskil.

Other Bahá'ís now began to arrive for short or extended stays and the vestiges of a Bahá'í community began to appear. The depth of his spiritual patience, coupled with his unbridled joy and enthusiasm, was a source of great strength to the fledgling Bahá'í community that was emerging in the Faroe Islands during these early years. Eventually, in April 1973, the first Bahá'í spiritual assembly was formed in Tórshavn. He considered this a crowning event of his life in the Faroe Islands.

Throughout his life in the Faroes, he attended nearly every monthly gathering of the Bahá'í community and practically every Assembly meeting, prayer meeting and study class. In fact, he could be found at most all gatherings, be they public proclamation events or lighthearted picnics. He





Bahá'í conference, Tórshavn, 1974  
Eskil standing in the centre of the back row

remained independent, living alone and looking after himself. Those that had the pleasure of visiting his simple home, treasure the memory of receiving his loving hospitality, each one of them treated as a special guest.

Eskil enjoyed robust health most of his life. Even as he grew weaker at the end of his life, he was able to maintain his stately, almost regal bearing. One day in early 1985, he collapsed in his apartment and was taken to hospital. For two weeks, he lingered. Even as his physical body began at last to fail him, his mind remained alert and focused on bringing continued joy to others. Finally, on 23 February 1985, at the age of 98, the soul of Eskil took wing.

Shortly thereafter, the precious physical remains of Eskil Ljungberg were buried in the rocky soil of the Faroe Islands on the outskirts of Tórshavn. In the early days of 1953, few in the world knew of the Faroe Islands. Today, every Bahá'í knows to which country this distinguished Knight of Bahá'u'lláh ventured. People from near and far come to visit his gravesite.

They look for a white eagle, its wings outstretched, ready to spring into the air and soar above the clouds. On bended knee, they humbly offer their prayers of thankfulness, of gratitude and honour. Looking about them at the emerald-green hills and blue sea, they seek to fathom his patience, his courage, his tenacity, his tolerance, and the depth of his unwavering love for all.

*“I swear by Him Who is the truth! Erelong will God adorn the beginning of the Book of Existence with the mention of His loved ones who have suffered tribulation in His path, and journeyed through the countries in His name and for His praise. Whoso hath attained their presence will glory in their meetings and all that dwell in every land will be illumined by their memory.”*

Bahá'u'lláh



Eskils grave in Tórshavn

“Passing dearly loved steadfast valiant Knight Bahá'u'lláh Eskil Ljungberg brings close exemplary life dedication fortitude singleminded devotion Blessed Beauty. He stayed at his post meeting every opposition with love and patience winning hearts and laying spiritual foundation Cause God Faroe Islands. Offering ardent prayers progress his soul Abhá Kingdom.”

Universal House of Justice Bahá'í World Centre Haifa, Israel



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